

Multiculturalism: The Investigation of Things and Philippians 4:8

by
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Multiculturalism can be much more than the appreciation of another culture's music, art, or food. Synergy between two cultures is the true fruit of multiculturalism. An example of synergy between Eastern and Western cultures is demonstrated by a study of Philippians 4:8, a Christian work, with the "investigation of things," a Confucian method.

The "investigation of things" is an important part of *The Great Learning*. In America we would assume the investigation of things would be a scientific investigation. But *The Great Learning* is a Confucian work, so the investigation of things is an inquiry into moral principles. It is a search for the moral principle, Li, permeating the world. This study of Philippians reveals hidden depths within this Bible verse, proving Confucian methods can benefit Americans.

As a Christian student of Confucianism I have found Confucianism very compatible with Christianity. They are not equivalent, but Confucianism is complementary and synergistic with Christianity.

We can apply the investigation of things to Philippians 4:8 by remembering Li in its roots refers to "pattern" and restructure the verse to look for patterns.

"...whatever is true,
whatever is noble,
whatever is right,
whatever is pure,
whatever is lovely,
whatever is admirable –
if anything is excellent or praiseworthy –
think about such things."

Notice the words: "true, noble, right" align with the three validity claims identified by the philosopher Jurgen Habermas in his *Theory of Communicative Action*: (1) a validity claim to truth, (2) a validity claim to truthfulness, and (3) a validity claim to rightness (appropriateness).

A validity claim to truth means the speaker postulates some statement to be objectively true. A validity claim to truthfulness postulates the speaker is trustworthy, that he is not intending to deceive. A validity claim to rightness means the statement will lead to something practicable, something appropriate, something acceptable, or something that feels right. These three validity claims of Habermas align well with the three modes of persuasion named by Aristotle in his work *On Rhetoric*: logos, ethos, and pathos.

There seems to be symmetry between the three validity claims and the three assessments of beauty in Philippians 4:8. Finding something pure is like an objective assessment of truth. Finding something lovely is an assessment of the character of the object of beauty by the beholder, similar to finding a person trustworthy. Finding something admirable is an emotional or personal assessment of the beautiful object, similar to finding a statement acceptable or appropriate.

Here is a table showing the relationships we are discussing. Notice the alignment of truth and beauty.

Paul on truth	Habermas	Aristotle	Paul on beauty
true	truth	logos	pure
noble	truthfulness	ethos	lovely
right	rightness	pathos	admirable

The relationship between truth and beauty brings to mind this line from the poem *Ode on a Grecian Urn* by John Keats: “*Beauty is truth, truth beauty*” – *that is all ye know on earth and all ye need to know.*” At first we think we have six separate measures: true, noble, right, pure, lovely, and admirable. Now we realize one thing can meet all six criteria simultaneously and thus be both true and beautiful

Matthew Arnold comes to mind when thinking next about the expression, “*if anything is excellent or praiseworthy — think about such things.*” Matthew Arnold, in *Culture and Anarchy*, said culture is getting to know “*the best that has been said and thought in the world.*” Culture is excellent or praiseworthy, so pursuing culture should help us think about what is excellent or praiseworthy. We can surmise from this that Christians should pursue culture as part of walking the Christian path.

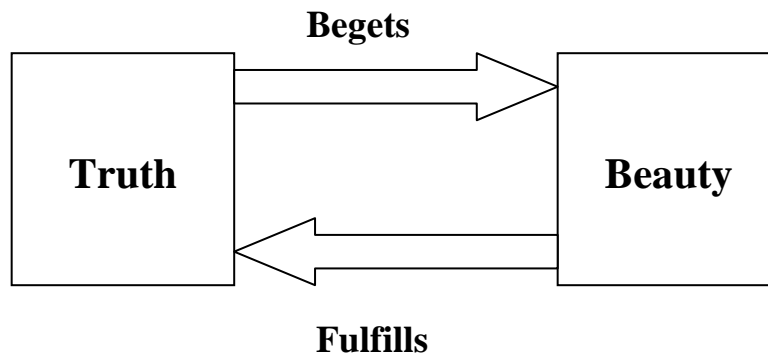
Resting in perfect goodness is an important part of *The Great Learning*. I have often sought a secular explanation of how one could dwell or rest in perfect goodness. Now I think one explanation of how one can dwell in perfect goodness is to make one’s mind dwell in truth and beauty. Culture is an aid to resting in perfect goodness when it helps us dwell in truth and beauty. Matthew Arnold also said, “*Culture is ... the love of perfection; it is a study of perfection.*” Culture, at its best, works to perfect our humanity.

Looking at Philippians 4:8 with Confucian eyes I saw the unity of truth and beauty. I saw culture is more than a form of recreation; it can aid in perfecting our humanity. Ask a Christian how to rest in perfect goodness and he will point towards God. Now we can see an answer for a secular society: one can rest in perfect goodness by resting in truth and beauty.

We could stop our study now, but let us consider whether discovering the unity of truth and beauty is discovering a moral principle. Keats already made this observation, so let us delve deeper by considering how the Confucian scholar Wang Yangming expressed the unity of knowledge and action: “*Knowledge is the beginning of action, and action is the completion of knowledge.*” This expression advances an equivalency relation to a process.

To choose a starting point between truth and beauty in defining a moral process, consider how Plato said in Book VI of *The Republic* that the mind, and its products, is the child of the good. The good is the highest ideal, or form. Plato presented this analogy: as the sun is to light, so the good is to truth. It is through truth we perceive. As Plato put it, “*the form of the good provides truth to what is known.*”

Because we must perceive something through truth before we can appreciate its beauty, we can conjecture that truth takes precedence over beauty. We can restate the unity of truth and beauty as a process after the fashion of Wang Yangming: “*Truth is the beginning of beauty, and beauty is the fulfillment of truth.*” Now we have gone a step beyond Keats.



The unity principle of truth and beauty: “Truth begets beauty; beauty fulfills truth.”

A principle must have utility. As an example, we will apply the unity of truth and beauty to test an assertion. We will test the truthfulness of an assertion by looking at its results and deciding if they are beautiful.

Here is an assertion to examine for truthfulness: *“This is my commandment, that ye love one another, as I have loved you. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.”* (John 15:12-13) Ask yourself: can this lesson lead to a beautiful life? We can use Galatians 5:22-23 for the attributes of this kind of life: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. If these nine attributes from Galatians 5 described an ugly life, then the words of John 15 would be false, according to the unity principle of truth and beauty. If we find these nine attributes describing a beautiful life, then we can conclude the assertion of Jesus in John 15 is true: self sacrifice is an expression of the greatest love.

I believe this study shows the Confucian investigation of things is a powerful tool that can benefit Americans. Philippians 4:8 is valuable for Christians and non-Christians wishing to nurture and grow the better parts of their humanity. The investigation of things reveals Philippians 4:8 saying culture perfects our humanity. Confucians find they can rest in perfect goodness by resting in truth and beauty. We developed a new moral principle, the unity of truth and beauty, by using the investigation of things. We can use this new principle to assess truth. The genesis of a new moral principle from interaction between Christianity and Confucianism is an example of the synergy that is the highest expression of multiculturalism.

If we can glean so many additional ideas from one well understood Bible verse through the investigation of things, imagine how much we might learn if we applied the Confucian search for moral principle to entire works, such as *“On Duties”* by Cicero. Applying Confucian theories and methods to great works of our culture will surely renew Western culture.