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PREVIEW RESPONSE

Confucian Ethics and Pauline Theology Can Speak to Each Other



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Virtues · Theology · 1 min read

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I appreciate Prof. Herdt's theoretical and practical considerations on the life of virtues. Her inspiring work regarding the pagan-Christian sources in western classical traditions on virtue ethics encourages me to explore the interplay of philosophical and religious virtue traditions in other parts of the world. Following the logic of Herdt's work on engagement of New Testament writers with Greek thinkers, I believe there is a similar logic and method confronting biblical virtue ethics in many cross-cultural contexts, not least two radically divergent traditions in ancient histories.

1) The Old Testament intertextual world reveals that the Yahwistic theological ethicists were in conversation with Ancient Near Eastern wisdom literature, raising the questions: (a) why and how can a monotheistic faith anchor its ethical discourse on virtuous life in relation to writings in its surrounding Mesopotamian polytheistic traditions; and (b) why and how are polytheistic sources on virtues used by biblical ethicists as mediums of God's revelation?

2) This method and content extends to Chinese and global Christians as they undertake cross-disciplinary work that links Pauline theology to Confucian ethics on the virtues. The classical Confucian canon is extra-biblical and pre-biblical (canonically), yet in Chinese translations of the Bible both canons encounter and intertwine with each other. Confucian ethical semantics are used in Chinese Bibles to express and understand biblical thought, including ways to re-interpret Confucian virtues in light of the God/Christ/Spirit story even though the concepts of Tian or Heaven in Confucianism are largely impersonal although not anti-theist. This opens up the possibility of a systematic comparison between Christian virtues and the Confucian "four cardinal principles and eight virtues"—Li (propriety, rites), Yi (righteousness, justice), Lian (integrity), Chi (shame); Zhong (loyalty), Xiao (filial piety), Ren (humanity, benevolence), Ai (love), Xin (trustworthiness). Despite what may appear to be a mismatch between two virtue traditions, I consider there is a mutually enriching and fruitful way of bringing these into conversation, for example, between Li and Law, Ren and Spirit, Shame and the Cross.

My hope is that this may stimulate other disciplines to discern various robust methods of engagement between theology and our the diverse fields of study exemplified by the scholars within GFI.

ABOUT THIS DOCUMENT

Document type	Preview Response
Dialogue	Virtues
Discipline	Theology
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Read online	facultyinitiative.net/article/confucian-ethics-and-pauline-theology-can-speak-to-each-other



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