



Truth, Beauty & Goodness: Three Interconnected Aims & Means of “True Education”

A Wilmette Institute webinar
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Outline

- Overview of Truth, Beauty & Goodness (TBG) in Western Philosophy
- TBG in the Baha'i Writings
- “True Education” for Plato & in Baha'i Teachings
- A Proposal for Reconceptualizing & Reintegrating TBG
- Some implications for pedagogy & curriculum design
- Two Specific Methods for Integrating the Pursuits of TBG in Education
 - Cultivating Authentic Relationships & Authentic Dialogue in “Communities of Learning”
 - Using a Problem-posing approach to Inquiry to help learners develop “Capabilities” for Service
- Concluding Remarks

Truth, Beauty & Goodness in Western Philosophy

- TBG in Classical Greek Philosophy
- TBG divorced in the European Enlightenment
- Postmodern objections to all three
- Need for re-conceptualizing & re-integrating TBG - Acknowledging Relativity & Evolution of Understandings, while Avoiding Relativism

TBG in Baha'i Teachings

When we examine Baha'u'llah's Writings, especially His descriptions of the "true seeker" & the purpose of human life, we see Truth, Beauty & Goodness are prominently featured & seen as interconnected & inseparable.

In the Kitab-i-Iqan & the Seven Valleys, the goal of the “true seeker” is described as:

- “the ocean of true understanding” (T)
- “the knowledge of the All-glorious” (T&B)
- “the Friend” (B)
- “the Beloved” (B)
- “a new eye, a new ear, a new heart, and a new mind” (T&B)

Baha’u’llah further describes the purpose of our lives as:

- to “know” & “love” God (T&B)
- “to show love one to another” (G)
- to acquire the “virtues” of “truthfulness & sincerity ... trustworthiness ... forbearance & kindness ... (G)
- “to carry forward an ever-advancing civilization” (G)

Interconnection of Truth & Beauty

Open the **eye of truth**, that thou mayest behold the **veinless Beauty** and exclaim: Hallowed be the Lord, the most excellent of all creators!

- Baha'u'llah, Persian Hidden Word #9

Verily this is that **Most Great Beauty** ... through Whom **truth** shall be distinguished from error and the wisdom of every command shall be tested.

- Baha'u'llah, Tablet of Ahmad

Interconnection of Truth & Goodness

... a true seeker ... must never exalt himself above anyone ... regard backbiting as grievous error ... succor the disposed and never withhold his favor from the destitute ... show kindness to animals, how much more to his fellow-man ...

- Baha'u'llah, *Kitab-i-Iqan*

Truthfulness is the foundation of all human virtues.

- Abdu'l-Baha

True Education for Plato

**The Allegory
of the Cave**

**in
Plato's
*Republic***



Baha'i Teachings on True Education

WHEN WE CONSIDER existence, we observe that the mineral, the vegetable, the animal, and the human realms, each and all, are in need of an educator....

[E]ducation is of **three kinds: material, human & spiritual**. Material education aims at the growth and development of the body, and ... is common to both man and animal.

Human education ... consists in civilization and progress, that is, sound governance, social order, human welfare, commerce and industry, arts and sciences... which are the central features distinguishing man from the animal.

As to divine education, it is the education of the Kingdom and consists in acquiring divine perfections. This is indeed **true education**, for by its virtue man becomes the focal centre of divine blessings and the embodiment of the verse "Let Us make man in Our image, after Our likeness." [Genesis 1:26] This is the ultimate goal of the world of humanity.

- Abdu'l-Baha

True Education (cont.)

“The purpose underlying their [the Divine Manifestations] revelation hath been **to educate** all men, that they may... ascend...with absolute detachment, to the throne of the Most High.”

- Baha'u'llah

“Regard man as a mine rich in gems of inestimable value. **Education** can, alone, cause it to reveal its treasures, and enable mankind to benefit therefrom.”

- Baha'u'llah

“Bend your minds & wills to the **education** of the peoples...of the earth, that haply the dissensions that divide it may...be blotted out...”

- Baha'u'llah

Note: True Education transforms individuals & society.

True Education (cont.)

[T]here are periods and stages in the life of ... humanity, which at one time was passing through its degree of childhood, at another its time of youth but now has entered its long presaged period of maturity

Humanity ... must now become imbued with **new virtues** and **powers, new moralities, new capacities**

- Abdu'l-Bahá

A [**new**] **race of men** ... incomparable in character, shall be raised up which, with the feet of detachment, will tread under all who are in heaven and on earth, and will cast the sleeve of holiness over all that hath been created from water and clay.

- Bahá'u'lláh

True Education fosters True Understanding & Keeness of Vision

The ultimate goal of human existence ... is the station of **true understanding** and nobility.

- Baha'u'llah, *Tablets of Baha'u'llah*, in the Lawḥ-i-Maqṣúd

The straight path is the one which guideth man to the dayspring of **perception** and to the dawning-place of **true understanding** In this Day whatsoever serveth to reduce blindness and to increase **vision** is worthy of consideration. This **vision** acteth as the agent and guide for **true knowledge**. Indeed in the estimation of men of wisdom **keenness of understanding is due to keenness of vision.**

- Baha'u'llah, *Tablets of Baha'u'llah*, in the Ṭarázát

The “Essence” of Baha’u’llah’s Revelation

The essence of all that We have revealed for thee is Justice, is for man to free himself from idle fancy and imitation, discern with the eye of oneness His glorious handiwork, and look into all things with a searching eye.

- Baha’u’llah, *Words of Wisdom*

What is TRUTH?

TRUTH = EXPLANATIONS that prove USEFUL in explaining experience & that engender & guide choices & actions that promote WELL-BEING, GROWTH & UNITY.

An explanation's "usefulness" lies in its **ability to RESOLVE CONTRADICTIONS/DISSONANCE** in human experience that **inhibit growth.**

To discover TRUTH = To move from CONTRADICTION > RESOLUTION

What is BEAUTY?

BEAUTY = perception of MEANINGFUL PATTERNS

- *When experiencing beauty, we sense every part of the beautiful whole is perfectly where & as it “should be.”*
- **Experiencing BEAUTY = Experiencing MEANINGFULNESS, i.e. Disorder > Order, Dissonance > Harmony**
- **Experiencing BEAUTY = Experiencing MINDFULNESS**
- **Creating BEAUTY depends on NOVELTY**

Relationship of Truth & Beauty

The Capacities to Perceive BEAUTY & Discover TRUTH BOTH imply change in perception from CHAOS to ORDER, i.e. a Capacity for MEANING-MAKING.

Perceiving BEAUTY = Making Sense of Experience

**Discovering/Constructing TRUTH
= Making Sense of Experience**

"Beauty is truth, truth beauty"

(Keats, Ode to a Grecian Urn)

What is GOODNESS?

GOODNESS describes intentions & actions that promote ever-greater degrees of harmony, integration & synergy in human relationships

- To develop GOODNESS = to relate to others in such ways change DISCHORD, CONFLICT & ESTRANGMENT into HARMONY, INTEGRATION & UNITY
- Goodness = Beauty in ACTION & in RELATIONSHIP
- Goodness derives from our innate & intuitive senses of the INHERENT VALUE of, & our INHERENT CONNECTION or ONENESS with, the other.

The INTERCONNECTION of TRUTH, BEAUTY & GOODNESS

The Concepts of Truth, Beauty & Goodness (TBG) all suggest movement towards increasingly inclusive & expansive

- **INTEGRATION/WHOLENESS/ONENESS**
- **RESOLUTION & RECONCILIATION**
- **MEANINGFUL CONNECTIONS/
PATTERNS**

Some Initial Considerations Related to Pedagogy

What is “**keenness of vision**” & how is it fostered?

Perhaps “keenness of vision” can be usefully characterized as a spiritual power that develops in one for whom pursuits of TBG have become fully integrated & the dominating passion of that person’s life, i.e. in a “true seeker.”

Consistent with Mustakova-Possardt’s account of “critical moral consciousness,” Palmer’s distinction between two “ways of knowing,” & the importance holistic educators give to educating “head, heart & hand,” i.e. “the whole person”.

Some Initial Considerations Related to Pedagogy

Education needs to help learners develop the qualities of a “True Seeker”, i.e.:

- Passionate search for an ultimate “Beloved”
- Detachment from one’s “lower” nature, i.e. “the prison of self” or ego
- Ability to identify & transcend one’s prejudices
- Truthfulness – commitment to seeking truth
- Patient determination & unceasing effort
- Desire & commitment 1st) to not harm, & 2nd) to serve one’s fellow creatures

Intrinsic Motivation for Learning & the Pursuits of TBG

- The human soul naturally thirsts for TBG.
- Any experienced teacher knows that when a learner's innate thirst for Truth or Beauty or Goodness is awakened, he/she becomes intrinsically motivated to learn.
- **The question for educators then is:**
How can we stimulate learners' innate thirst for TBG?

Pedagogical Principles for Stimulating the Pursuit of TRUTH

- The teacher should help learners see the relevance of learning to solving real-life problems they & their society community/society face.
- Learners should be guided to engage in authentic scientific inquiry to solve real problems.
- Such inquiry should involve authentic dialogue.
- Learners should develop a habit of questioning assumptions & understand how to use certain criteria to determine validity/usefulness of ideas.

Pedagogical Principles for Stimulating the Pursuit of BEAUTY

Beauty as Meaningfulness:

- Help learners appreciate the “beauty” of whatever subject matter they are encountering.
- Help learners develop the habit of profoundly reflecting on transcendent values & meaning, i.e. reflecting on the BIG QUESTIONS of life.
- In relation to course content, expressions of spiritual truths found in the world’s religions & in world literature & in some works of art, should be accepted & incorporated into curriculum as knowledge of equal validity & importance to scientific findings.

Pedagogical Principles for Stimulating the Pursuit of BEAUTY

- **Beauty as Aesthetic Experience or Mindfulness:**

Learning itself should be an aesthetic experience, i.e. an experience of being fully present with others & in the experience of learning, i.e. of being fully alive. Thus, learning activities should be designed to encourage mindfulness, “flow”, & the concentration of all one’s awareness on an engaging task.

- **Beauty as requiring Novelty:**

Learners should be able to restate a concept in their own words, to express it in one’s own unique way.

Pedagogical Principles for Promoting GOODNESS

- Potential “truths” arrived at through inquiry need to be tested in actions that aim to help solve problems. Ultimately, these actions should conduce to the positive transformation of the individual & society.
- This implies that the curriculum should be imbued with opportunities to serve others (within & beyond the classroom).

Two Specific Methods for Integrating the Pursuits of TBG in Education

- 1. Cultivating Authentic Relationships & Authentic Dialogue in “Communities for Learning”**
- 2. Using a Problem-posing approach to Inquiry to help learners develop “Capabilities” for Service**

Authentic Relationship & Dialogue at the Heart of True Education

- Authentic Relationships are, in the words of the philosopher Martin Buber, I-Thou relationships, rather than I-it relationships.
- They can also be characterized as a way of relating whose goal is the realization of TBG, rather than perceived self-interest.

Authentic Relationship & Dialogue at the Heart of True Education

- Authentic Dialogue = communication for the purpose of seeking TBG with others
- Truth & Beauty are sought through sharing ideas, perspectives & information that expand & deepen participants' understanding.
- Goodness is realized as dialogue strengthens unity among participants & as participants apply new “truths” arrived at to solve real-life dilemmas/problems.

Authentic Dialogue & Relationship (cont.)

In authentic dialogue, the quality of our relationships with others is as important as the idea(s) being discussed.

“...it is incumbent on you to be even as one soul, to walk with the same feet, eat with the same mouth & dwell in the same land, that...the signs of oneness ... may be made manifest” (Baha’u’llah, *Hidden Words*)

We are fully “present” with the other, i.e. the experience of mindfulness (i.e. beauty).

Authentic Dialogue & Relationship (cont.)

Authentic Relationship & Dialogue are fostered when:

- Teachers RELATE AUTHENTICALLY to learners & take every opportunity to stimulate their innate thirst for TBG.
- Learning happens in COMMUNITIES that value & encourage the pursuits of TBG.

Such communities can be created in classrooms, in schools & in wider communities.

Authentic Dialogue & Relationship (cont.)

“our dominant images of teaching and learning are individualistic and competitive rather than communal....But what scholars now say – and what good teachers have always known – is that real learning does not happen until **students** are brought **INTO RELATIONSHIP** with the **teacher**, with **each other**, and with the **subject**. We cannot learn deeply and well until a **COMMUNITY OF LEARNING** is created in the classroom.”

- Palmer, *To Know As We Are Known*

Inquiry-based, Problem-posing Ed.

The pursuits of TBG can be integrated when

- learning is connected to “real-life” experiences
- that give rise to compelling issues/questions,
- which learners inquire into using appropriate forms of research & in dialogue with each other,
- & when learners can test the resulting knowledge by applying it in action to solve problems.
- These attempts, in turn, provide new experiences which raise new questions & lead to new research, dialogue, reflection & knowledge etc.

Problem-posing Education

“Students ... posed with problems relating to themselves in the world and with the world, will feel increasingly challenged and obliged to respond to that challenge.”

“In problem-posing education, people develop their power to perceive critically the way they exist in the world ... they come to see the world not as a static reality but as a reality in process, in transformation.”

As learners “amplify their power to perceive and respond to ... questions arising from their context, and increase their capacity to enter into **dialogue** not only with other men, but with their world,” they develop “critical consciousness.”

- Paulo Freire

FUNDAEC's Capabilities

Education pursuing Truth, Beauty & especially GOODNESS is necessarily concerned not only with what learners know, but what they are CAPABLE of.

CAPABILITY = “well-developed capacity to think and to act in a well-defined sphere of activity according to a well-defined purpose” in service to personal & social transformation. [FUNDAEC]

Developing “capabilities” involves not only understanding relevant information & concepts, but also developing requisite skills & spiritual qualities.

Being, Knowing & Doing

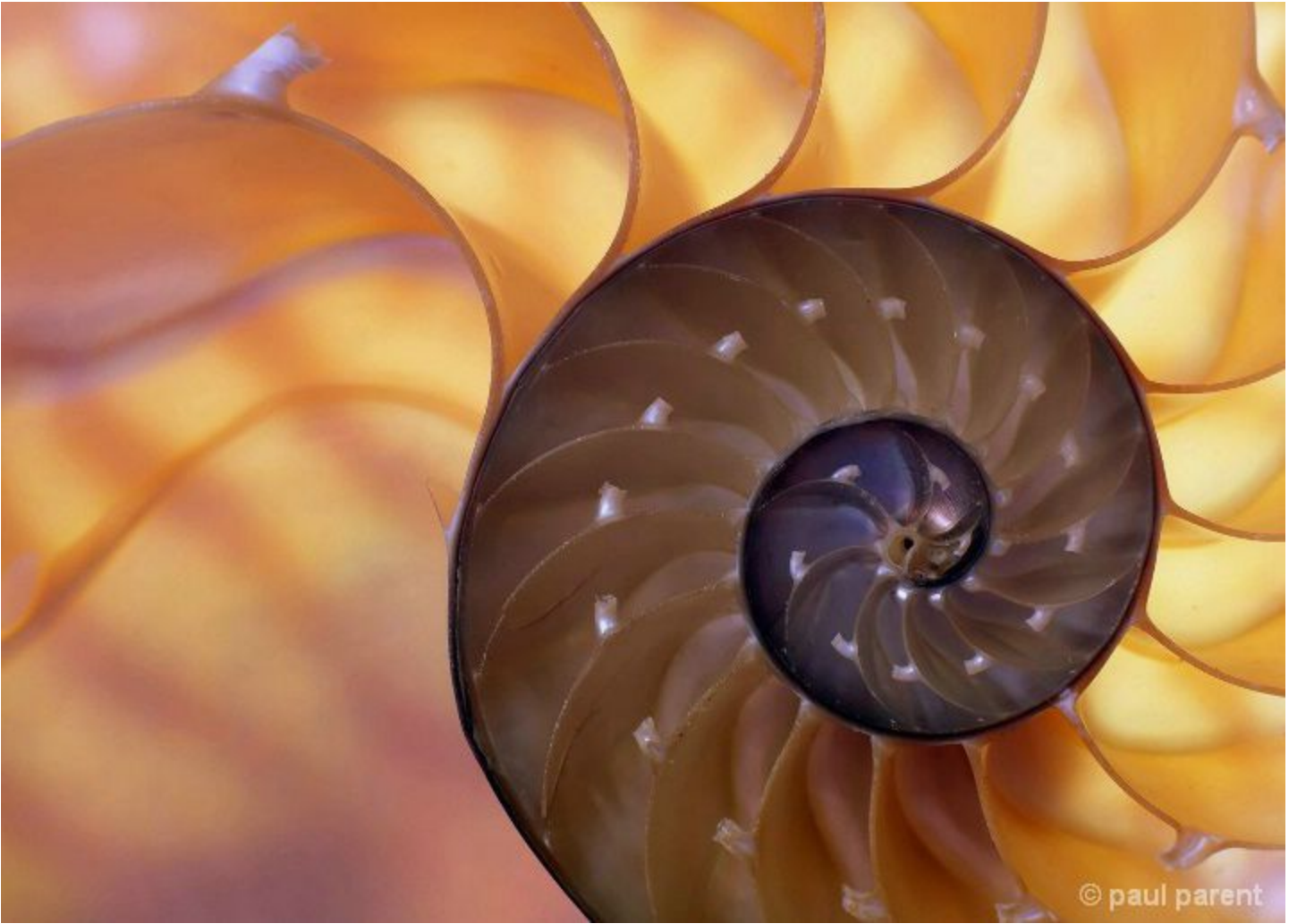
- Recently, Dr. Farid-Arbab, has written about how the human states of *being*, *knowing* and *doing* are **coherently addressed** when curricula are designed to help students develop CAPABILITIES.
- These 3 “states” seem to coincide with & point to the 3 aims of Beauty, Truth and Goodness.
- Being > BEAUTY
- Knowing > TRUTH
- Doing > GOODNESS



Concluding Remarks

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Q&A



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