



# Global Faculty Initiative

**The Faculty Initiative  
seeks to promote the integration  
of Christian faith and academic disciplines  
by bringing theologians into conversation with scholars  
across the spectrum of faculties  
in research universities  
worldwide.**

[www.globalfacultyinitiative.net](http://www.globalfacultyinitiative.net)

Disciplinary Responses to Theology Brief Preview

**DISCIPLINARY RESPONSES TO FLOURISHING PREVIEW**

---

**ARCHITECTURE, URBAN DESIGN**

**Ian Davis**

**Architecture, Visiting Professor at Kyoto, Lund, Oxford Brookes Universities**

*Flourishing Communities Before And After Disasters?*

Volf, Croasman and McAnnally-Linz ask us to consider the essence of a 'flourishing life'. For almost fifty years I have been preoccupied in teaching, research, writing and advocacy with the needs of people engulfed in disasters and how attitudes, policies and appropriate architecture can enable surviving communities to recover with resilience and even flourish.

However, during my entire career I do not recall the word 'flourishing' ever being used in relation to disaster risk or recovery management, and I have certainly never used it to describe recovery intentions. Normally, more utilitarian words are in use, such as 'safety', 'restoration', 'reconstruct' or 'resettlement'. Thus, the theme of this paper raises an important question - whether in the extreme and dire circumstances of a disaster people and communities can flourish with *'life to the full'*, as promised by Christ? (*John's Gospel 10 verse 10*)

My research in relation to disaster response and assistance sent me down a very different route than anything I had previously experienced as an architect in practice or taught in architecture schools. This has been a radical journey discovering en-route the need to challenge, re-think and reverse some deeply entrenched approaches.

Examples may include:

1. **Revising stereotypes** in ways that strengthen local "agency", e.g., *'Leg-Ups'* not *'Hand-Outs'*; *'First Responders'* always being family and neighbours, not the *Emergency Services* who arrive later; *Meeting Survivors Needs* rather than *Donors Needs*; Recognising *'Active Survivors'* of disasters not merely *'Passive Victims'*
2. **Rethinking architecture**, e.g., emphasizing *Local skills, traditions, labour and building materials* rather than *imported industrialised products and universal solutions*; *process rather than product*; *enabling or Facilitating Design* rather

than actually *Designing; creating safe, sustainable dwellings that develop skills and generate livelihoods* rather than just *houses*

3. **Reversing policies:** e.g., *Relief* being all too often the enemy of *Recovery; Attending to the drivers of risk (Causes)* is the essential need rather than *addressing Unsafe Conditions (Symptoms.); 'Trust'* rather than *'Control'; Survivors assessing their own needs* rather than *outsourcing the process to external professionals*
4. **Requiring positive attitudes:** attending to emotion and virtues in interactional aspects of relationships, e.g., *Humility* in order to function effectively; *Enabling and facilitation skills* to build or strengthen the capacities of others; *Creativity* to make much out of little; *Listening* to learn from survivors and local officials; *Empathy* with vulnerable, suffering persons; *Integrity* in personal and corporate relationships; good *Humour*, even within dark situations; *Faith in God* to comfort, guide and direct.

If after a disaster. a community can rise from their trauma of loss and anguish and restore their shelters and settlements that they have assisted in creating, that are safer structures, that have generated much needed livelihoods , that offer greater comfort and dignity to their occupants and enhance their environment, then they will certainly have flourished.

## Philip Bess

### Architecture, Notre Dame University, USA

I am grateful to Miroslav Volf, Matthew Croasmun and Ryan McAnnally-Linz for their Flourishing Preview effort to get the ball rolling on this most important and complex subject, most especially for their recognition of human flourishing as a normative (hence teleological) ideal, and their emphases upon flourishing's *agential* and *circumstantial* components. Human agency – most efficaciously the good habits we call *virtues*, both moral and intellectual – is arguably the feature of human flourishing most common to persons *qua* persons; but the circumstances of our flourishing (in themselves necessary because of the space-time character of human existence) vary greatly, both with respect to the particulars given us throughout our lives *and* as subject matter and project for every person's unique vocation. (My own vocation as a professor of architecture and urban design is clearly oriented to the *circumstances* of human flourishing, the *agential* pursuit of which my character virtues or lack thereof either advance or retard.)

So far, so good. I think however the full and final Theology Brief could usefully address: 1) certain other components of and questions about human flourishing, and 2) its treatment of the emotional dimension of human flourishing; and these are related. Let me speak of issues I would hope to be addressed. There is implied but nevertheless nothing explicit in the Preview about our animal nature, about the necessary relationship between our bodies -- I will say, I hope not controversially, from *conception* – and our personhood; or about vulnerability and disability; or the fact and significance of suffering; or (surprisingly) about work and vocation; or play; or explicitly about either the sacramental / eschatological nature of our perfection, or the sacramental / eschatological perfection of our nature (though I see these as implied in the Preview's final sentence).

The Preview also, as others have noted, tends to be individualistic in its account of human flourishing. What does it mean for *communities* to flourish, and how does communal flourishing relate to individual flourishing either in secular life or in the Church (cf. 1 Corinthians 12)? What does it mean to be flourishing as a fetus, infant, child, adolescent, or in old age – existential conditions in which flourishing is arguably *most* contingent upon circumstance – or as a young adult, spouse, or parent growing into full caring agency for children, elderly parents, one another, and one’s work? I would hope to see as well a treatment of sin, differences of temperament, and the ways in which God’s love for us is manifested in both our pleasure and our suffering.

I see these issues as related to the Preview’s assessment of *feelings*, which after *the triumph of the therapeutic* perhaps should not merit quite so central and objectively important a role in individual and collective human flourishing as *agency* and *circumstance*. Feelings are considered initially in a utilitarian calculus of pain and pleasure, both rightly regarded as insufficient measures of human flourishing. But if, as the Preview suggests, *joy* is the privileged sacramental and eschatological emotion, for those in daily life not temperamentally disposed toward joy – can we imagine, say, Evelyn Waugh, or even St. Jerome, both of whom one hopes were being faithful to their respective vocations, being habitually joyful *prior* to the beatific vision? – it seems an unnecessary burden to designate joy as *the* emotional signifier of quotidian human flourishing. To be sure, pleasure in God’s creation, in human friendship and love, in whatever is true, good, or beautiful – ultimately, pleasure in “the sweet ‘well done’ in judgment hour” – is no small component of human flourishing. But these are all instances of taking pleasure in things that are objectively good. Rather than zeroing in on one or a few specific emotions that Christians should be feeling, would it not be more accurate to say that flourishing requires not a disregard of feeling (including sometimes, for example, feelings of revulsion), but rather *an education in how to feel in ways appropriate* to the objective requirements of human agency (vocation), circumstance, and divine providence? Perhaps also to say that to be flourishing in a present sense is to be *on the road* to an end of more comprehensive knowledge; of personal sanctity in communion with God, neighbor, and a transfigured and sanctified creation [‘a new heaven and a new earth’]; to our fullest recognition of the beauty of both God and creation; and this *in the privileged specificity of our own unique vocation*, whether more pleasurable or less, whether entailing less suffering or more?

Finally, almost a *coda*: I approach the issue of human flourishing as a Christian and as an urbanist, the latter from an Aristotelian presumption that the *telos* of the state – even today, as for Aristotle, at the scale of the city (correctly understood as an agrarian-urban unit) – is the well-being of its citizens over the course of a whole lifetime (as it is for the Church, but over the course of a lifetime and into eternity). Christian theology perfects Aristotelian *eudaimonia* – happiness; blessedness; flourishing – in a variety of particulars, e.g., with a more expansive view of human being; by introducing the idea of *shalom* and its recognition of a necessary transcendent dimension to human flourishing; and by noting the necessity for human flourishing of the infused theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity. But this completion does not negate the essential philosophical structural soundness of the Aristotelian idea succinctly summarized in *Politics VII.1*: “the best life, for both individuals and for states [πόλεις] is the life of virtue [moral and intellectual], when virtue has external goods enough for the performance of good actions.” Such a life necessarily entails living in a variety of communities with others – and for most human beings *in a city*, understood as an agrarian-urban unit which in today’s world can range in scale from a solitary village to a metropolis of towns and city neighborhoods, but always a community of communities the *telos* of which is the flourishing of its members.

What might such an urbanism look / be like in the modern world? In addition to the specific *Chicago 2109* project referenced above [ <https://afterburnham.com/>] I have proposed more generally in chapter XI of *Till We Have Built Jerusalem*, "The Polis and Natural Law," a derived natural law precept about urban environments: *human beings should make walkable mixed-use settlements*. Many things follow from this precept, but one consequence of making land-use positive law – e.g. zoning law, property tax law – in accordance with this natural law precept would be human settlements less like contemporary automobile suburbs, and more like the small town and big city neighborhoods that existed in a variety of locally specific forms virtually everywhere in the world prior to 1950.

But this would require us to become experts in the ends of city-making, with corresponding adjustments in the means by which we make them.

## **Kyle Dugdale**

### **Architecture, Yale**

*Flourishing* is a term not of theological but of vegetable origins: to flourish is, first of all, to bloom, blossom, flower.

Perhaps the earthiness of this etymology can serve to counter the airiness of philosophical and theological abstraction. After all, the necessary precondition for flourishing is, as a rule, that the plant be rooted in place; and the specifics of that place's soil, aspect, climate, and so forth, inform the possibility of flourishing.

Under the conditions of global modernity such rootedness is surely the exception rather than the rule; our modern culture has, on the whole, grown increasingly mobile, both figuratively and literally. Perhaps this is beginning to change; but for now, our buildings and cities reflect this circumstance of rootlessness in every way. The tumbleweeds of the contemporary built environment blow across the horizons of our experience. This mobility brings with it, of course, a certain kind of freedom. But does it also prejudice the likelihood of flourishing?

A theology of flourishing must therefore surely also comprise a theology of place—particular place, not generic space. For this endeavour a good starting-point is perhaps still Oliver O'Donovan's (newly pertinent) essay "The Loss of a Sense of Place," *Irish Theological Quarterly* 55 (1989): 39–58, maybe set against the larger scope of Karsten Harries, *The Ethical Function of Architecture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997), especially "Space and Place," 169–78.

If these are theoretical texts, it is in practical terms perhaps also worth dwelling on the pandemic-era rediscovery by each one of us of the particular places where we are constrained to live, and maybe even to flourish.

---

## **APPLIED, BIOLOGICAL, PHYSICAL SCIENCES.**

### **Andrew Briggs**

#### **Nanomaterials, University of Oxford**

In 2021 Oxford UP will publish *Human Flourishing: Scientific insight and spiritual wisdom in uncertain times*, by Andrew Briggs and Michael J. Reiss. In the book, we identify three dimensions of flourishing as material, relational, and transcendent:

*Material* includes such things as having enough to eat, access to clean water, enough sleep, reasonably good health, somewhere that one considers to be one's home and in which one feels safe, and enough money not be endlessly worried by financial matters.

*Relational* begins with other humans (starting with a baby's mother and father), but extends beyond humans, to animals and some might say robots, and also to God.

*Transcendent* reaches further than both of those; it includes all sorts of things that we value in the human experience even if we cannot pin them down or necessarily measure them, such as nature, music, poetry and the other arts, and also, well, what lies beyond those.

It will be immediately obvious that although these dimensions can be distinguished for the purpose of discussing them, they cannot be separated.

I shall be enthusiastic to explore how these relate to the Preview's three dimensions of life led well, life going well, and life feeling as it should. A mathematician or physicist might think in terms of a rotation of tensor axes; I leave it to colleagues in other disciplines to come up with their own visualisation.

### **Ian Hutchinson**

#### **Nuclear Physics and Engineering, Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), USA**

My spirit was "strangely warmed" by this preview, a result that I confess much formal theology fails to provoke. Thank you. There is deep resonance here for me. One connection to my work in explaining science to a wider public is that I find often among both secular and religious communities an extreme emphasis both on the "circumstantial" aspects of flourishing, focusing on material welfare and economic success, but also on the "scientific" aspects of knowledge, which goes with it. So much so that our society and especially the academy is steeped in an unwitting scientism: over-valuing the methods of the sciences and supposing they are the only route to real knowledge. "Whatever knowledge is attainable, must be attained by scientific methods; and what science cannot discover, mankind cannot know" is how Bertrand Russell

once advocated it. That scientism is unfortunately often accompanied by an ignorance of what natural science has actually discovered about the creation.

A puzzle I found in meditating on your examples is that Utilitarianism did not seem a very auspicious example of emphasizing feeling well. Utilitarianism is usually portrayed as a foundation for Marxist and materialistic views, not an alternative to them. Certainly it is today regarded by many as providing a rationalistic (not emotional) ethical calculus, as if that were sufficient foundation for morality. The Bentham quote about pain and pleasure fits your typography well, but Utilitarianism today does not seem to represent so well your third emphasis.

## **Tom Chacko**

### **Geology, Earth and Atmospheric Sciences, University of Alberta, Canada**

I enjoyed reading Volf et al.'s thought-provoking brief. I must confess though that my initial reaction came with some reservations. I resonate with the Stoics' idea of flourishing - virtuous living - but am (or was) inclined to be suspicious of tying flourishing too closely to circumstances (sounds a bit like the prosperity gospel) or emotions (too unpredictable for my taste). On reflection, however, the Christian framing of this three-pronged view of flourishing provided in the last two paragraphs of the brief is quite compelling. There is an appropriate emphasis on right living (e.g., Micah 6:8) as there should be but that is combined in good measure with 'shalom' - "a comprehensive order of material and relational well-being" (thy kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven) and with joy, which transcends the vicissitudes of circumstance. I see now that this three-pronged perspective on flourishing is more fulsome - more holistic - than the Stoics emphasis solely on right living.

Finally, I may be reading too much into this but in the eloquent final paragraph of their brief, where Volf et al. refer to the interplay between the three dimensions of flourishing, I see echoes of the Trinity ("...but each (dimension) at the same time contains the others so that each dimension, though distinct, can serve as a window into the whole of the flourishing life"). If that analogy was in fact Volf et al.'s intent, it is a beautiful image indeed.

I need to think through this further but I wonder whether there might be applications of this tripartite concept of flourishing in my teaching. Teaching in the physical sciences as I do, I place an emphasis on students gaining a 'right' understanding of facts and concepts. That is appropriate but perhaps too one dimensional in terms of the true flourishing of the student. How can I modify my teaching so that a right understanding of facts/concepts is combined with shalom and joy? It occurs to me that some of my best teaching experiences have been when I have been able to convey and, in fact, transfer some of the joy that I feel about the subject material to the student.

## **Daniel Hastings**

### **Aeronautics and Aerospace, Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), USA**

My scholarship is on changes in the space enterprise and how to make it more broadly accessible and cost effective. It would primarily affect “life going well” in that when the space enterprise changes many more people overall at the world will be able to innovate in the new space enterprise. Like making GPS broadly available at low cost on people’s smartphones, innovation will make whole new capabilities to us. This work illustrates that this dimension is insufficient to understand human flourishing. “It also requires attention to “life led well” (agency) and “life feeling as it should” (emotions).” This is both appropriate and necessary. Human flourishing has many dimensions.

## **Krzysztof Wojciechowski**

### **Materials Science, AGH University of Science and Technology, Kraków, Poland**

The short article by Volf, Croasmun and McAnnally-Linz, Preview on Flourishing, reminded me of Psalm 1:1-3:

*Blessed is the one*

*who does not walk in step with the wicked  
or stand in the way that sinners take  
or sit in the company of mockers,  
but whose delight is in the law of the Lord,  
and who meditates on his law day and night.  
That person is like a tree planted by streams of water,  
which yields its fruit in season  
and whose leaf does not wither—  
whatever they do prospers.*

Beyond the material and emotional aspects of flourishing mentioned in the Preview, the idea of flourishing is inherently related to a person's need for internally consistent moral norms.

In our work in academia professional success can be defined separately in two areas: the job of the academic teacher and the job of the researcher.

As academic teachers, we are obliged to provide a fair assessment of the work of our students. We are also often given the responsible and difficult task of ranking the scientific achievements of our colleagues in the course of their professional advancement.

On the other hand, as researchers, we aim to thoroughly examine the nature of the world around us, to get to the core of its governing laws.

These are both difficult tasks and we often fail and experience feelings of frustration, anxiety and self-discontent.

That's why the ability to consult external moral norms - truth, goodness, justice, fairness, etc. are exceptionally important in our work at universities.



Psalm 1:3 places the source of personal success and flourishing in the knowledge of the laws of God.

The Creator as an omniscient and omnipotent being defines the universal moral laws, which can serve as a compass on a person's quest to a life of happiness and flourishing.

## **DIVINITY / THEOLOGY**

### **Oliver O'Donovan**

#### **Theology, Edinburgh and St. Andrews**

The concern to identify a normative concept of flourishing is admirable. There could be more connection made between "flourishing" and the traditional theological discussions of *beatitudo*, usually rendered "happiness", sometimes "blessedness". Such a connection could have the effect of widening the basis of discussion in Scripture, since blessing is a major theme in the Psalms and the wisdom books. Though the discussion could pick up major works almost anywhere in the tradition, one very formative one was Augustine's *City of God* 19, which tackled the relation between Christian and pagan concepts of happiness and raised the question of whether there were immanent grounds of happiness in worldly existence or whether the concept must be a transcendental one.

### **Christopher Hays**

#### **Theology, Fundación Universitaria Seminario Bíblico de Colombia**

In my work with victims of forced displacement due to violence in Colombia, the concept of "holistic human flourishing" serves as a key organizing principle. Our holistic focus has broken down the facets of human flourishing in spiritual, economic, social, political, pedagogical, and psychological terms, not necessarily because these exhaust the different aspects of what it means to be human, but because these are the areas most damaged by the displacement experience and therefore requiring the most direct intervention.

For victims of displacement, the "circumstantial" dimension of their flourishing has typically been severely compromised by their trauma, impoverishment, and loss. Therefore, we seek to support the "agential" dimension of their lives, helping people recover economic, social, political (etc.) flourishing in spite of the many circumstantial obstacles they confront. In each of our areas of labor, we combine insights of Christian theology with those of the human and social sciences, believing that spiritual health and the accompaniment of the Holy Spirit are vital components of the recuperation of flourishing in other areas of life. Those resources specifically from the Christian faith are what make the "agential"

dimension of our work more than the mere exercise of agency; it is what ensures that the way people go about recovering their economic, social, and political well-being is in fact an expression of *righteousness*. So also, we believe that the “emotional” dimension is inseparable from the agential dimension, such that we give specific attention to mental health alongside more explicitly “agential” aspects of flourishing.

At all levels of our work, we foster relations between victims and non-victim Christian communities, mobilizing believers as mentors, allies, and co-laborers with the displaced community. This strategy is rooted in our vision of Christian mission, but also reflects that, however much displaced people are circumstantially disadvantaged, one circumstantial advantage they enjoy is that Christ and his Body are on their side.

## **KK Yeo**

### **Theology, Garrett & Northwestern University, USA**

My first impression of the Flourishing preview is one of awe as to its density and clarity. It provokes me to raise two cross-cultural hermeneutical questions about framing its thesis by using the specific language/text in the brief (theological, philosophical, and that of Marcus, Marx, Mond). Firstly, I find the language of Marcus, Marx, and Mond “foreign” with respect to biblical exegesis. I wonder if, or to what extent, Paul meant righteousness as agency, peace as circumstances, and joy as emotions in Romans. Have the authors of the brief already done a “cross-cultural interpretation” on this Romans 14:17 text? Secondly, using the intertextual (one of the cross-cultural readings) method of Confucianist moral language and biblical text on fruit(s) of the Spirit, similar conclusions about what is called a “A Christian Vision” in the preview could also be derived (see my *Musing with Confucius and Paul*) from early Confucian thought. Yet, I wonder then if Marcus, Marx, and Mond make sense to those *outside* the Euro-American academic traditions? Since I’m committed to the *cross-disciplinary* and *global* conversation of this Initiative, I hope to find ways to bridge the gaps toward meaningfulness, say between Marcus and Mencius, Marx and Confucius, Mond and Zhuangzi via the biblical texts.

## **Jonathan Brant**

### **Theology, University of Oxford**

This is an extremely clear and helpful approach to conceptualising flourishing as threefold – agential, circumstantial, emotional. For some years now the relationship between freedom and flourishing has been a particular research interest of mine and my thinking can be mapped onto this conceptualisation.

As a chaplain to postgraduate students at a major research university, I’m aware that this cohort experiences a degree and kind of freedom (pandemic notwithstanding) unknown to almost any other population in human history. Their freedom is most apparent in the breadth of choices available to them, with respect to where in the world they will live, what career they will pursue, which relationships they will nurture, and, to a great extent, who they will be.

Of course, unprecedented freedom, expressed in unprecedented range of choice (circumstantial), does not automatically lead to fulfilment and happiness (emotional). It can lead to anxiety and inertia. Many medical studies of the wellbeing and mental health of this global community of high-achieving students identify these negative effects. Beyond medicine, the dangers of failing to cope well with an excess of freedom have been explored in recent works of fiction, written and directed not by contrarians or conservatives but by those with impeccable liberal credentials. Jonathan Franzen's novel *Freedom* is a forensic analysis of the incommensurability of the freedoms we demand. Other novels highlight the limits of our capacity for self-creation, whether in a particular endeavour – *The Art of Fielding* by Chad Harbach or across a whole life – *4, 3, 2, 1* by Paul Auster. The double-edged impact of technology is addressed in that most technological of artforms, film, e.g. *Up in the Air* written and directed by Jason Reitman.

To flourish humans must connect their freedom to relational and transcendent dimensions of life. It is human excellences or virtues [Gr. arete] which enable this connection (agency). Recent research suggests it is possible to intentionally cultivate these excellences and this is a project that greatly interests me.

## **Murray Rae**

### **Theology, University of Otago, New Zealand**

I welcome the clarification of the three dimensions of flourishing provided in the preview. Each is clearly important, not in isolation, as the preview makes clear, but in combination. The preview suggests all kinds of connections with wider biblical/theological themes. As suggested, for instance, by Oliver O'Donovan, the notion of flourishing can be linked to the beatitudes. Of particular interest here is the way in which the beatitudes challenge and overturn common notions of what flourishing/blessedness consists in. Who would have thought that meekness, or mourning can be indications of a flourishing life, or persecution? But Jesus seems to be suggesting that those who are meek (who are not arrogant or proud), those who mourn (who are not heartless or indifferent), and those who are persecuted for his sake and the gospel are living lives in alignment with God's love and purposes for the world. Jonathan Pennington helpfully explores the relation between the beatitudes and human flourishing in his book, *The Sermon on the Mount and Human Flourishing* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2017). The notion of shalom is another biblical idea that comes readily to mind in connection with the concept of flourishing and offers a further avenue of exploration. What impresses me most about shalom, and the same applies to flourishing in my view, is that it is best conceived in relational terms. The flourishing of the individual is irreducibly bound up with the flourishing of the community as a whole, including especially the vulnerable, archetypically identified in Scripture as the widow, the orphan and the stranger.

## **HUMANITIES**

**Nicholas Wolterstorff****Emeritus, Philosophy, Yale**

I think the *Flourishing* preview is superb. I am surprised that, when I wrote *Justice: Rights and Wrongs*, I did not see that, in addition to the agential and circumstantial dimensions of flourishing, which I took note of, there is the emotional dimension. It now seems to me blindingly obvious.

Incidentally, these three dimensions get expressed, in highly colloquial English, in three questions:

How're ya doin'?

How's it goin'?

How ya feelin'?

**Christopher Watkin****French Studies, Monash University, Melbourne, Australia**

On flourishing in relation to topics I work on:

1. How does the social contract, as metaphor and narrative, help to make visible and clarify the agential and circumstantial prerequisites of flourishing? How can it obscure those same prerequisites? (Christopher Watkin, *French Philosophy Today: New Figures of the Human in Badiou, Meillassoux, Malabou, Serres and Latour*, Edinburgh UP, 2016).
2. How does the social contract idea indoctrinate a set of assumptions about what flourishing must be, such that it does not merely passively describe societies but catechises them into certain dispositions toward the good? (Christopher Watkin, *Michel Serres: Figures of Thought*, Edinburgh UP, 2020).
3. How does the contract metaphor shape our sense of ourselves and the challenges that face us as a society (Christopher Watkin, *French Philosophy Today: New Figures of the Human in Badiou, Meillassoux, Malabou, Serres and Latour*, Edinburgh UP, 2016).

**Dorothy Oluwagbemi-Jacob**

---

**Philosophy, University of Calabar, Nigeria.**

“Life is made up of ideas and ideas have consequences.”

Harnessing and managing the resources that promote flourishing cannot be totally separated from people’s ideas and worldviews. In this respect, how can cultivation of critical thinking address the socioeconomic disabilities that undermine the promotion of flourishing life in the global south?

**Carlos Miguel Gómez****Human Sciences, Universidad del Rosario, Bogotá, Colombia**

## Flourishing in suffering

I read the Theology brief on human flourishing after visiting a family of indigenous healers in my country, Colombia – a family that has become my own. The Taita’s (shaman) grandchildren, 7 and 4 years old, were mourning the absence of their mother, who had to go away for a treatment. Instead of grief, they seemed only capable of love and joy. Love and joy sprang so spontaneously from them, as life itself nursing and nourishing each tree and animal around their home. The three dimensions of a flourishing life proposed by the authors of the brief (agential, circumstantial and emotional) were not only integrated in them, but their borders dissolved in those children’s spontaneity. Certainly, they will have to grow up physically, psychologically and spiritually, and growth requires the conscious effort necessary for educating oneself in a right way of thinking and acting. But at that very moment there was no dichotomy between an active and a passive dimension of a fully human life, which, just as Angelus Silesius’s rose, “is without why, it blooms because it blooms”.

Maybe only in deep suffering are we able to experience such a degree of surrender and emptiness as to rediscover that, as the authors of the brief say, a flourishing life is not a possession or an achievement of an independent self (of the modern, autonomous, buffered self, to use Charles Taylor’s designation), but rather the gift of a life spent in relationship to the Divine. Through everything that we can and cannot do (agency), in everything that happens to us (circumstances), and within all our feelings and dispositions (emotional), it is God who makes us flourish. Children normally do not hinder His doings.

I believe that to recover that spontaneity is one of the greatest aims and invitations for a genuinely flourishing human life.

**LAW**

---

**Anna High****Law, University of Otago, New Zealand**

The Flourishing Preview connects with my research on sexual dignity. Framing sexual violence as an assault on dignity allows for exploration of all three dimensions of flourishing as impacted by rape – for example, agency is overruled by the aggressor's disregard for consent; this moral wrong can result in various physical harms; and there are attendant, diverse impacts on emotion. The "flourishing life" as the normative ideal of personhood - true personhood as people created *imago Dei*, in the kingdom of God - is more than freedom from incursions, just as sexual dignity is more than protection of physical integrity. Personhood is at stake. Perhaps then a dignity approach to sexual violence is a usefully capacious way to explore and express the multiplicity of rape's harms and wrongs.

**Karen Man Yee LEE****Law and Social Sciences, Education University of Hong Kong**

I like the connection between "righteousness" and a flourishing life. The idea of "righteousness" has permeated my research on Hong Kong, from the inquiries of universal human rights, the motivations behind lawyers' political activism, and the basis of public trust in courts. It takes on particular significance in transitional societies, where political suppression as a result of a regime change often sees the rise of political activism prompted by a sense of righteousness. While that may bring adverse consequences to the activists, to some, suffering may only harden their resolve and bring about the "emotional" dimension of the flourishing life.

**Dinesha Samararatne****Law, University of Colombo, Sri Lanka**

This is a provocative brief and I thank the authors for it. In particular, I appreciate the recognition of the dimension of the emotional plane. I note my reactions briefly below.

1. In teaching public law subjects to undergraduates (law is an undergraduate degree in Sri Lanka) I regularly refer to the idea of 'flourishing.' How can regulation of society contribute to 'human flourishing'? I often put this question to students. I have noticed that often the first responses of the students include incredulity. Of what relevance is the idea of 'flourishing' relevant in the Sri Lankan context? I have come to realise that these reactions of disbelief stem from the difficult day to day realities (and challenges) of life in Sri Lanka. Of what use is it then to consider the abstract idea of 'flourishing'? This seems to be the immediate reaction of students. Therefore, I find the idea of 'human flourishing' to be a powerful concept. One that can challenge existing assumptions of what life is and what it ought to be. I have had former students come back to with reflections on the idea of human flourishing, often

with better understandings of its relevance and significance in the Sri Lankan context.

2. I appreciate and value the normative emphasis in this Brief. As a reader who is looking to translate this normative work to my own context, I have a specific challenge. That challenge is to understand the ways in which I can work out these normative ideas within my own context. That is a rather difficult task. If I were to generalise, it is easier to understand human flourishing in the ideal form. It is much harder to understand human flourishing in a system where the rule of law is weak, constitutional texts are disregarded, laws delays are excessive, and corruption is rampant. The list continues and includes material and intellectual poverty, human congestion and a floundering economy. If I may add, it is perhaps also difficult to understand what human flourishing means in systems where material wellbeing is very high, and systems work very well.
3. As a Christian, I find that hope is a critical factor. The Christian notion of consummation permits Christians to maintain a posture of hopefulness. This posture allows us to imagine the prospects for human flourishing through law, even where the law is a tool at the hands of those who seek to abuse power.

## **MEDICINE, PUBLIC HEALTH**

### **John Peteet**

#### **Psychiatry, Harvard**

I found the Flourishing preview helpful, and would like to ask, as a psychiatrist interested in the relief of emotional and existential distress, where would the authors locate a sense of meaning and purpose (an element in Tyler VanderWeele's Flourishing Measure)? While clearly related to emotions, it also seems integrally connected to one's sense of what is ideal and right, and to one's identity. How does the Volf et al. formulation capture one's sense of identity and purpose, which seem to be essential elements of human flourishing?

### **Lydia Dugdale**

#### **Medicine, Columbia University, USA**

This brief describes well how medicine has gone astray: "experts in means but amateurs in ends." We doctors have come to focus far too much on patients *feeling* well, while ignoring both society's responsibility in ameliorating adverse circumstances (see Bradley & Taylor's *The American Health Care Paradox*) and patients' agency in caring for themselves.

No wonder patients don't flourish.

Having said this, there's still part of me inclined toward a Stoic sense of eudaimonia that holds that one can flourish through the cultivation of a life of virtue despite feelings and circumstances. I'm partial toward this view because I have experienced flourishing (of self and others) in the face of great adversity. Perhaps it constitutes a second-rate, heavily qualified form of flourishing. But to say that flourishing is impossible when, for example, a patient is sick or dying, is to settle for too narrow a view of human flourishing.

## **Tyler VanderWeele**

### **Public Health, Harvard University, USA**

(1) While I would wholeheartedly agree with the statement that "setting the definition of flourishing cannot be a task for the empirical sciences", I think this also potentially misses the important role of the empirical sciences not only in understanding the means to flourishing, but also the actual content of the definition itself. With regard to the means, questions such as, "How can we effectively promote forgiveness in practice?" or "What shapes and promotes the experience of love in childhood?" seem of tremendous relevance to the Christian faith, and are amenable to, and have been subject to, considerable insightful empirical investigation (VanderWeele, 2018; Chen and VanderWeele, 2019).

However, I think a more profound and far more difficult question is how the empirical sciences can and should contribute to our understanding of what constitutes flourishing. I agree that the empirical sciences are not to set the definition, but I do think they have a role in understanding the content of that definition. One might, for example, include physical health within a conception of flourishing (the "circumstantial" dimension), but the question of what constitutes bodily health is a matter not only of conceptual specification but of understanding anatomy and physiology. Similarly, good social relationships are also a part of human flourishing, but it is difficult to describe what constitutes such good social relationships without having an (empirical) understanding of how human life is actually lived in its embodied and culturally specific forms.

From a Christian standpoint one would point to loving relationships and all that that entails (1 Corinthians 13:4-7) but what this means within a marriage, or while parenting, or within friendship, cannot be fully understood or appreciated without an experiential and empirical knowledge of how these types of relationships play out and what is required of each. The empirical sciences thus do seem to have some role, perhaps not in the definition of flourishing, but in our understanding of the actual content of that definition, i.e. the definition as it pertains to actual human life. The empirical sciences might not at present be particularly well constituted to provide this important service to theology, but it seems that some of the work of trying to redeem our academic structures and disciplines is to try to shape them so that they are better able to fulfill that role.

(2) There is of course an important role for theology in trying to as fully and adequately as possible specify and describe how human flourishing ought to be understood within the Church. However, it would seem that another important task is to try to find consensus with those from other religious, philosophical and cultural traditions that is as broad as possible (in extent) and as expansive as possible (in content) and that is consistent with and arises out of a Christian vision so as



to resist reductionist impulses to restrict notions of well-being to only economic and health-related states, as is the case in most discussion of this topic, at least in the contemporary west. Such more expansive but consensus-based understanding and resistance of reductionist approaches is part of the vision within Maritain's *Integral Humanism*. It is some of what has motivated our work and approach to flourishing assessment, study, and promotion at the Human Flourishing Program at Harvard (VanderWeele, 2017).

(3) I was somewhat surprised at the characterization that the "circumstantial" dimension (life going well) was considered "passive" and that the "emotional" dimension (life feeling right) was considered "both passive and active". I would have thought that the emotional dimension was in fact the most passive (the "passions" being a response to the perception of circumstances and actions), and that the "circumstantial" was both active and passive. It seems odd to place relationships, or health (or, presumably, knowledge also fits in the circumstantial dimension) as being entirely passive. This may merit some reconsideration, though one could I think also argue that all three of the proposed dimensions have active and passive components, including "righteousness", as per the Scripture reference concerning Romans 14:17 in the brief.

#### References:

VanderWeele, T.J. (2017). On the promotion of human flourishing. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, 31:8148-8156.

VanderWeele, T.J. (2018). Is forgiveness a public health issue? *American Journal of Public Health*, 108:189-190.

Chen, Y. Kubzansky, L., and VanderWeele, T.J. (2019). Parental warmth and flourishing in mid-life. *Social Science and Medicine*, 220:65-72.

## **Priscilla Chiu**

### **Medicine, University of Toronto**

I am a pediatric surgeon and a researcher. As a surgeon-scientist, I have not been thinking so much about "flourishing" as we live in our new pandemic reality. I am mostly focused on the treatment of and research into congenital disorders that impair breathing in newborns. In the process, I provide support to parents facing the stress and uncertainty of their babies' health. Not all of these critically ill infants survive despite our best efforts. There is heartbreak. The days and nights spent in the ICU with a sick or dying newborn is anything but a flourishing experience- for us and for the families. Lives are shattered. The pain we witness meshes into our own sense of loss and failure as care-givers. On top of this, the challenges of academia, funding prospects and increasingly scarce "protected time" do little to ease the burdens of the academic surgeon.

What does it mean to "flourish" in academic surgery? In much of the recent literature published on "physician burn out", the term "resilience" has been used in lieu of "flourish" as a response to the endless demands of academic surgery. "Resilience" is used perhaps to recognize that resistance to occupational exhaustion and injury, moral or otherwise, is the key to longevity in a surgical career, especially for women. In emphasizing "resilience", there is an admission that patient

gratitude, accolades and financial reward are not enough to attract talented medical school graduates to a “grinding” career in academic surgery, nor retain the frazzled, over-worked middle-career university surgeons from leaving their posts to assume administrative positions. In promoting “resilience”, there is a further admission that much of what we do in academic medicine is soul-draining.

“Resilience” infers the presence of resources to withstand the negative “circumstances” or “emotions” one encounters—you can bend but you won’t break. To “flourish”, on the other hand, is to be more than that- it infers life, growth and vibrancy, not just endurance. It is a fullness of heart that inspires and is hopeful. These are not “summoned” from within but are given- the call to use the gifts of the Holy Spirit to the fullest extent from a right relationship with God.

## **SOCIAL SCIENCES, PUBLIC POLICY**

### **Donald Hay**

#### **Economics, University of Oxford**

The three-part conception of flourishing (agential, circumstantial and emotional) is very helpful in reflecting on the approaches to human flourishing that are part of an ongoing discussion in economics and related disciplines. More specifically, the issue of ‘flourishing’ or ‘welfare’ has a long history in economics, and has generated a considerable recent literature, arising from dissatisfaction with the standard approach of welfare economics with its roots in utilitarianism (a version of *life feeling as it should be*), and the reliance on GDP and household incomes as indicators of human flourishing:

1. *Life led well – agential*. The capabilities approach pioneered by Amartya Sen [(1999) *Commodities and Capabilities*], and developed philosophically by Martha Nussbaum [among many publications (2011) *Creating capabilities: the human development approach*]. Sabina Alkire has used this approach to develop an operational index of poverty and deprivation for use in development round the globe. [(2002), *Valuing freedoms: Sen’s capability approach and poverty reduction*]; programme - *Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative* (OPHI), [www.ophi.org.uk](http://www.ophi.org.uk).
2. *Life going well – circumstantial*. At first glance this conception of flourishing is not much canvassed in economics, except for the tiny minority of academics who continue to work with Marxist economics. However, there is an ongoing discussion of what elements are conducive to a flourishing *social/economic order*: these discussions include neoliberalism (the vision of a free-market economy and society), environmentalism (see for a popular example, Kate Raworth (2018) *Doughnut Economics*), and (in Europe at least) democratic socialism. The discussions are more focussed on the appropriate institutions and the role of government, than on the flourishing of individuals. [Let me digress briefly here, to suggest that the Biblical concept of the ‘people of God’- see Deuteronomy in the OT and Jesus’ preaching about the kingdom of God – should be part of this discussion. This

concept clearly deals with social/ economic structures.]

3. *Life feeling as it should be – the emotional dimension.* The 'happiness' literature in economics has focussed on the multiple 'determinants' of reported happiness. Major contributors to this literature include Richard Layard in the UK [*Happiness: lessons from a new science*, 2006, a popular exposition of the findings of a research programme at the LSE], and John Helliwell in North America [*Globalization and Wellbeing* 2002, editor of the *World Happiness Report*, program on 'Social interactions, identity and wellbeing' at the Vancouver School of Economics]. The economics literature is now extensive. A similar literature but with a focus that is sociological and health oriented has been developed by Tyler VanderWeele, Director of the Human Flourishing Program at Harvard. This program is notable for its comprehensive data collection and the sophistication of the statistical analysis.

I do not of course want to suggest that the Theology Brief should engage with all these literatures directly, but it should show at least an awareness of them. What would be helpful for a Christian economist is an indication of what we should be looking for as positives, and from what we need to register our dissent, in respect of human flourishing, when we evaluate the literatures.

Here are some other queries relating to content of the Preview: they may just reflect my misunderstanding. First, given the natural law tradition originating with Aristotle, and fundamental to Roman Catholic social teaching, could reference be made to that literature? Second, while the preview makes a nod in the direction of social institutions, should it not detail such institutions: e.g. marriage, family, health services (both physical and psychological), good governance, work, leisure, education? Third, there is not yet direct reference to freedoms of various kinds which might be seen to be fundamental to the 'agential' dimension. Fourth, the list of exemplars puzzles me: why Marcus Aurelius rather than Aristotle or Aquinas, why Mond rather than Bentham and utilitarian economists, and why Marx rather than many political philosophers who have focused on 'life going well' since Adam Smith? Fifth, given that sin is by definition destructive of human flourishing how does it relate to the three dimensions? Sixth, the Christian vision outlined is largely focused on individuals in relation to God – shouldn't it also incorporate the flourishing of the people of God as explored, for example, in Deuteronomy?

## **Gordon Menzies**

### **Economics, University of Technology Sydney, Australia**

Thank you for this thoughtful piece.

The schema would be recognizable by my economics colleagues as they reflect on their own experience, but it is not easily formalizable in one of their models. This is a criticism of economic models, rather than the framework.

I have worked (with Donald Hay) on bringing economic models closer to a Christian vision of life, and have used generalizations about persons in Pauline theology as a resource. Economics has an explicit representative agent, and I am attracted to the Apostle Paul's representative agents - the 'in Adam' and 'in Christ' persons.

Following this line of thought, a Christian picture of humanity not only involves a picture of 'flourishing' but also a picture

of sin.

If one is after a picture of flourishing on its own, as a normative ideal and setting aside sin, then might we begin with the example of Jesus himself?

## **Jane Green**

### **Politics, University of Oxford**

1. On politics and flourishing: I think the nearest general social surveys get to flourishing is 'life satisfaction', which is measured in social surveys, but not in political surveys. In the latter, we ask about satisfaction with democracy, but the measurement of all this is highly complex. We don't always measure what we think we are, even at the best of times, and with concepts that are very precisely defined (which definitely cannot always be said to be true of "flourishing"!)

And as for what kind of electoral system might be seen as "circumstantial flourishing" in politics, there's a lot of argument about proportional systems leading to 'better' outcomes, like satisfaction with democracy, greater representation of ideological positions, more consensus etc. But those goals are, of course, normative and somewhat contested.

I would say that low turnout is considered unhealthy, as a rule, but high turnout via compulsory voting doesn't make a system healthy, and higher turnout can arise due to higher polarisation (when there's more at stake), which I think is also rightly seen as unhealthy (particularly when it is combined with polarisation of factual understanding, as we have now).

2. If I think about 'righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit', the last part seems to be central to the first three, and neither of the three can be achieved without the other. As such, they're not distinct, but conjunctively causal. And the paper presents themselves as being distinct. Maybe, then, a Christian worldview speaks of causation in ways the others can't.

## **Chris Marshall**

### **Government, Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand**

Theological Reflections on Flourishing.

Thank you to the authors for this brilliantly clear analysis of a Christian approach to human flourishing, which is surely the most fundamental question underlying everything we aspire to do in life, both personally and politically. There is little to disagree with in the analysis – that flourishing involves the combination of moral agency, circumstantial well-being and affective contentment – and I look forward to the fuller explanation of each component in due course. Just two observations came quickly to mind, for what they are worth.

The first relates to the tripartite formulae in Romans 14:17. I too have often used this verse to capture the distinctive

features of God's redemptive concerns in the world ("the kingdom of God is...") in terms of justice (or righteousness), peace and spiritual fulfilment. I sometimes wonder whether Paul had in mind the famous verse from Micah 6:8 ("He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God"), or perhaps Jesus' saying recorded in Matt 23: ("For you tithe mint, dill, and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith"), strikingly similar tripartite formulae could equally serve as summaries of the key ingredients of flourishing.

The other observation is a slight query around the use of the word "passive" to describe the circumstantial dimension of flourishing and linking that notion to the word "peace" in Rom 14:17. There is nothing passive about biblical shalom. Indeed, in Rom 14, having mentioned righteousness, peace and joy, Paul goes on to conclude, "so then let us *pursue what makes for peace* and for mutual upbuilding" – which sounds rather "agential"! This perhaps sounds like hair splitting, and does nothing to detract from the excellent framework the authors propose, but I offer it as a small contribution.

## **Joerg Friedrichs**

### **Politics, University of Oxford**

Many people, like myself, "get" things from metaphors and images. Flourishing bears the image of flower. The Bible sometimes talks of ripe corn and bearing fruit, but it oftentimes also talks about flourishing, regardless of fruit, from the flowers on the field that bloom today and tomorrow are gone to lilies more beautiful than Solomon's robes. Flourishing and bearing fruit is connected, in that the former is a necessary condition for the latter, but the Bible is clear that the former has its value in and of itself, whereas the latter is an important purpose, but neither is reducible to the other. Branches that don't bear fruit when they should are thrown into the fire, but bearing fruit is not always the point. This is something an instrumental view of life (even of life as service) loses sight of.

## **Allan Bell**

### **Communications, Auckland Institute of Technology & Laidlaw College, New Zealand**

Thanks to these authors for addressing such a core question of human life, and therefore also a central issue for Christian reflection. 'What should life ideally be like?' is a pivotal matter for consideration by all of us. I offer several thoughts in response:

1. The provocative points in this preview set me thinking: how does Jesus' life line up with these characteristics of flourishing? The Jesus of at least the Synoptic Gospels clearly lived well according to dimension #1, the agential: righteous living, the good conduct of life. But on the other two dimensions, he did not obviously measure up. The circumstances of his life (#2) arguably did not go well – no fixed abode, continuous external opposition, incomprehension and eventually desertion by his closest friends, a criminal's death. We may believe that he

triumphed over those circumstances, particularly through his Resurrection, but as they were lived, they were nevertheless often the opposite of anything like life going well. And #3, the emotional dimension of life feeling as it should: there are of course moments of high joy recorded in Jesus' life, but there was a strong quotient of distress, loneliness and questioning.

2. This leads me to reflect that to flourish in life may be to pursue righteousness (1) and experience joy (3) despite whatever adverse circumstance may come our way (2), most obviously for that large proportion of humankind whose life is taken up with day-to-day survival. Circumstances can place real limits on a person's capacity to flourish. Many people's ability to have agency is heavily circumscribed by the structure in which they live, for example by birth (the traditional sociological structure/agency dilemma). As C S Lewis observed after his wife's death - whose effect he compared to losing a leg - he might learn to walk with one leg, but he would never be a biped again.
3. The current Covid pandemic has placed such great limitations on the lives of so much of humankind that we almost need a new conception of what it is to flourish in order to deal with it. In this vein, I find the term 'fulfilment' perhaps preferable, as it seems less tied to untrammelled agency for its outworking.
4. I also wonder where the community and communal life fits here. If the life of my neighbour or a fellow-believer isn't flourishing, how does that affect or dent the flourishing of my own life? Especially if I may myself bear some responsibility for limiting that person, or at least for not helping lessen some of their limits.
5. In relation to my own field of language and communication, I would link a theology of flourishing to the concept of Voice. Is my voice being heard? Am I listening to others' voices? Whose voices are being stifled in society? How can I be part of enabling disadvantaged voices to receive an audience? The founding sociolinguist, Dell Hymes, wrote that one way of thinking about the society one might like to live in is to imagine the kinds of voices it would contain. That sounds like a fulfilment worth striving for.

## **Judy Dean**

### **International Economics, Brandeis University, USA**

This is an excellent and very helpful perspective on flourishing. Stating that the empirical sciences cannot take on the task of defining flourishing is crucial. Broadly speaking, economics allows that concept to be defined by the individual. However, economics can contribute to understanding the authors' components of flourishing. For example, economics sheds light on agency, identifying choices that can impede or encourage one's own well-being or the well-being of others. It also contributes to the circumstantial dimension, providing measures of material well-being that can help us identify deprivation/need, and risk. Considering the Biblical emphasis on our responsibility to the poor and vulnerable among us, I see a role for empirical economics to help promote right agency and right circumstances.

**Cecilia Jacob****International Relations, The Australian National University, Canberra, Australia**

My disciplinary area is armed conflict and largescale political violence, with a focus on prevention and protection of civilian populations. Flourishing is a concept that does not feature in this area of study, despite efforts among scholars in this field to advance global cooperation and standards to protect vulnerable populations from egregious forms of systematic and largescale violence. With an investigation into the more ominous side of human behaviour through the conduct of armed conflict, there is an overarching resignation to the fact that human propensity to wage violence is so pervasive that our best efforts will only ever manage to mitigate or alleviate human suffering. Efforts to pursue 'justice' likewise is increasingly conservative in reaching only the most serious offenders that are within arms-reach of international justice mechanisms as opposed to a more holistic, restorative notion of justice, peace and hence 'flourishing' within conflict-affected communities.

This preview points to three areas that align with practical efforts that do exist in the field to build or restore the capacity of societies to 'flourish' in the wake of violence (although not framed as such) to enable their agential capacity, restore the circumstantial context which they inhabit and to respond to the spiritual, psychological and social healing associated with one's state of mind (peace, joy and contentment). These include through investing in restorative modes of justice, protecting human rights, and promoting governance outcomes that are representative of the weak or marginalised in societies.

A Christian reading alerts us to the limitations of fulfilling human flourishing through engineered social policies and interventions; human-led endeavours will always fall short of the completeness of 'life, in all its fullness' promised through Christ (John 10:10). Yet it holds out a normative ideal, as Volf, Croasmun and McAnnally-Linz propose, informed by Christian foundations to orient scholarship and practice towards a vision of flourishing for those populations most oppressed and vulnerable in our global community. To this end, this conception provides a valuable resource for thinking theologically about the human institutions of war, governance and social justice.

**Terry Halliday****Sociology, American Bar Foundation and Australian National University**

I find most evocative the three-dimensional unpacking of "flourishing" in the sense of (1) its value for a more systematic theological and ethical approach to the scholarly frontiers on which I seek to work, and (2) for understanding aspects of the academic life, the academic practices and institutions in which we participate. The concept also has the great merit of providing a common ground of discourse with all other religious or non-religious persons in academic institutions.

I have three comments or questions I hope we will elaborate in our ongoing discussions.

1. How can we bring the *normative* ideal of flourishing into close engagement with *empirical* research and theory on behavior? While “setting the definition of flourishing cannot be a task for the empirical sciences,” surely the empirical sciences, together with the applied professions, must be integral to judgments about whether or not individuals, institutions and societies are in fact experiencing more or less flourishing.
2. Relatedly, how do we get from high-level theological ideals to something that we can recognize when we see it or not? Does a theological ethics of flourishing need something like middle axioms or some other kinds of mid-level theological terms that the empirical social scientists amongst us can operationalize? This would require a level of specification that will enable social scientists and professions to know: (a) who are *agents* (individuals, institutions, societies, international organizations?) and what kinds of agency can they exercise? (b) do *circumstances* embrace all kinds of processes and structures and forms of social life from dyads (like a mother and child) to groups (families, friendship circles, churches) to institutions (politics, economies, civil society) to global structures of power? (c) what kinds of *emotions* facilitate short or long term flourishing, a question that might bring the fine arts and literature into conversation with positive psychology or psychotherapy.
3. The flourishing preview opens up new dimensions for both my lines of work.
  - 3a. On globalization of law and markets it presses me to ask more systematically: who are principal agents who craft the international political economy, who is missing, and what consequences do these have for flourishing in rich and poor countries alike? What kinds of circumstances, or institutional structures, are conducive for the flourishing of states, companies, work, the marginal and invisible? And where does feeling play in the heights of global governance? Is it salient?
  - 3b. On globalization of law and politics: who are the “norm entrepreneurs” who create and defend the ideals of international law and governance and what role do carriers of the flourishing ideals play in their activities? Do the structures of international civil society and global governance adequately provide the circumstances that will champion the realization of ideals like rule of law or the defense of basic legal freedoms in all states? How do emotions and feeling make abusive rulers and governments accountable to international institutions and civil society and they flourishing ideals they champion?



**For more information**

**[www.globalfacultyinitiative.net](http://www.globalfacultyinitiative.net)**