



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.**

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Preview Response

FLOURISHING / SOCIAL SCIENCES & LAW

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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?

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