



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

Preview Response

FLOURISHING / THEOLOGY

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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.

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