



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

VIRTUES CAN ENABLE FLOURISHING IN THE ACADEMIC LIFE

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I have two responses to Jennifer Herdt's stimulating Preview on the virtues. One speaks to the academic life, the other to my discipline of economics.

In discussing "intellectual virtues," Herdt encourages us to be attentive to how our scholarship can contribute to human flourishing. Economic research has often done this in surprising ways. For example, economists have shown that actions done out of self-interest can promote widespread access to material goods through mutual exchange. They've also shown that competition can promote better use of scarce resources, so that goods are better quality and more affordable for the broad population. Interestingly, even in its terminology, economics recognizes the importance of pursuing "goods," mitigating "bads" (e.g. pollution), and having practical wisdom in stewarding our world's scarce resources. As Adam Smith so poignantly stated it long ago, "no society can surely be flourishing and happy of which the far greater part of the members are poor and miserable."

With respect to academic life, virtues do indeed enable flourishing! Perhaps it is not unique to my field of economics, but early on I noticed two virtues conspicuous by their absence in many academic and professional contexts—humility and selflessness. Self-promotion was applauded and seemed to advance people in their careers. Young scholars were pressured to view their academic work as the sole purpose of their lives. The results were often derision of colleagues, loss of self-worth, illness, and no time for the needs of others. How can we help cultivate the virtues and replace toxicity with flourishing?

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