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Preview Response

FLOURISHING / PHYSICAL & BIOLOGICAL SCIENCES

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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.

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