



# 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

## **AN UNWITTING SCIENTISM IS KILLING FLOURISHING**

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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.

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