

The Science of Human Flourishing TWCF0103/AB68 White

Concluding Summary

This project on 'The Science of Human Flourishing' was a bold and ambitious attempt employing science, technology, sociology and theology to examine some of the elements that contribute to human flourishing, and how they interact. This research spanned a number of disciplines and each of the sub-projects examined aspects of human flourishing across a range of disciplines, from the structure of the physical world in which we live, to the impact of technological advances on understanding of human nature and identity, to the use of neuroscience to understand mystical experience and how character virtues are formed in adversity. Taken together, the sub-projects addressed a number of the Big Questions concerning the nature of reality, the human life and mind, generosity and thanksgiving, and the relationship between scientific and religious understanding.

These combined studies have led us to a scientific understanding of some of the factors that promote Human Flourishing, as well as some things that hinder its progress.

Things that destroy can also lead to enhanced resilience and deeper faith. Whether natural disasters, disease or the perceived threat from artificial intelligence this research has demonstrated the importance of human relationships and genuine empathy. For some this is a religious relationship with God, while for others it is a sense of inner fulfilment, or community relationships. These things transcend external circumstances, even when in the face of tragedies, or personal troubles. We find that the things that help human flourishing go well beyond our material needs. Uncertainty and unpredictability are an inevitable part of life and we need to learn to negotiate these, whether through the application of new technologies, or through religious belief. High material and economic success accompanied by good health are not alone sufficient to produce an environment in which humans flourish. Even brain states that lead to inexplicable but profound mystical experiences can be valued, although they come at a cost. These observations challenge our perceptions of what is a 'normal life'.

Many of these issues relate to questions of what it means to be human. Artificial Intelligence may be capable of mimicking many human responses, but it lacks creativity and personhood. Our ability to talk about things and to imagine immaterial things is essential for flourishing as individuals and as communities. A holistic view of science and religion leads to genuine human flourishing, as seen in the way that religious scientists integrate their interpretation of holy scriptures with contemporary scientific understanding.

A full understanding of Physics gives insights into our place in the physical universe and the wonder of why science itself is possible. In Biology a sense of awe and wonder, that emphasises the role of cooperation in biology, rather than focussing on the struggle for existence, is an important aspect of our humanity. Human flourishing requires a holistic view of life; one that is based on harmony not conflict, creating a tolerant, fruitful and wholesome environment in which to thrive.