



The Character Project: New Frontiers in Psychology, Philosophy, and Theology

Request for Proposals: “New Frontiers in the Theology of Character”

Fellowship Announcement

Wake Forest University, with the help of a generous grant from The John Templeton Foundation, welcomes proposals for the “New Frontiers in the Theology of Character” funding initiative. We aim to support young scholars working on the theology of character, who often have new and interesting ideas but who have not yet benefitted from traditional funding sources. Thus we would give preference to proposals from PIs who are within ten years of receiving their Ph.D. at the time of submission of the letter of intent. Interdisciplinary teams of theologians working with faculty in other disciplines, especially psychology or philosophy, are encouraged, but team-based proposals are not required.

Fellowship Description

Fellowship Director: Angela Knobel, The Catholic University of America

Character Project Director: Christian Miller, Wake Forest University

This \$180,000 RFP aims to support work in theology on the topic of character. Proposals can request between \$40,000 and \$100,000 for projects not to exceed one year in duration. We hope to make between 3-4 awards. A residential incentive of \$6,000 for one semester or \$12,000 for an academic year will be offered to theology RFP winners who are willing to move to Wake Forest University during the award period, and this stipend would not count as part of the research funding request. A willingness to move will not be taken into account when evaluating proposals.

Since work here will primarily be theoretical, the funding is aimed at semester or yearlong sabbatical research leave projects involving a book manuscript or series of substantive articles on character. All award recipients are expected to complete and actively disseminate the results of their research.

Background and Big Questions

Theology has witnessed a rebirth of interest in character. In the area of religious ethics, scholars have considered whether to base ethical theories on the virtues and vices rather than on divine commands or systems of rules. Stanley Hauerwas, for instance, has long argued that Christian ethics would benefit by incorporating insights from the Aristotelian virtue ethical tradition (1981, 1991).

If the virtues should have an important role to play in religious ethics, it is not clear how to understand the contribution that both human beings and God are supposed to make in fostering them. Some Christian theologians have maintained that not only faith, hope and love, but also the moral virtues cannot be acquired by human effort but must be infused by God. On the other hand, theologians also acknowledge many cases in which non-believers seem to exhibit virtuous characters which they have acquired on their own over time, and most acknowledge the value of writings on the virtues by non-theistic philosophers such as Aristotle.

In addition, there has been renewed interest in better understanding specific virtues from a religious perspective. For instance, much recent work has been done on the virtues of faith (Adams 1987, Swinburne 2005), hope (Pieper 1986, Volf and Katerberg 2004), and charity (Outka 1972, Santurri and Werpehowski 1992).

Theologians and religion scholars have also been actively exploring the role of character and virtue in the practical life of the religious believer, such as in the context of worship and liturgical practice. For instance, in the Eucharist, Christians have the opportunity to develop the virtue of gratitude for the mercy of God towards them. Through fasting and other ascetical practices, they can foster the virtues of discipline and fortitude. Confession can combat pride, while worship can help instill faith and hope, and regular offerings of time and money can cultivate generosity.

At the same time, there is plenty of room for new work. Much research in religious ethics which appeals to character is not informed by the latest scholarly work in philosophy on the virtues. In addition there has been almost no sustained treatment of the relevance of psychological studies on the existence and nature of the character traits of interest in religious ethics.

This funding initiative is not limited to any one particular religious tradition. Although much recent work has focused on specifically Christian accounts of moral character, we strongly encourage and welcome projects from a variety of traditions.

Projects in theology or religious ethics related to character are welcome so long as they address at least one of the following **Key Questions**:

- In what ways can religious ethics benefit from philosophical thinking about character and virtue?
- In what ways can religious ethics benefit from experimental studies of character and virtue?
- Should theologians and religious ethicists look to secular virtue ethical approaches to inform their ethical theorizing, and if so, what benefits can they derive from such views?

- What is the best way to understand the virtues of faith, hope, or charity, or other traits of character which have been important in religious writings?
- What is the best model of the role of God or the Holy Spirit or some other divinity in fostering character development?
- Should Jesus or other central figures of various religious traditions be understood as fully virtuous individuals whose actions define what a morally right action is and whose lives should be objects of emulation and play a central role in religious ethics?
- In what ways do character and virtue play a role in peoples' actual religious lives?

Character and Virtue

Theologians have defined 'character' and 'virtue' in many ways, with no universal agreement as to their meaning. One common approach has been to say that character traits are dispositions that people can possess, and which can lead to certain relevant beliefs, desires, and (often) actions. On this approach, for instance, the trait of honesty would be a disposition to think, feel, and act in certain ways pertaining to telling the truth. Similarly, a virtue can be understood very roughly as a good character trait, while leaving open the question of whether a particular virtue is intrinsically or instrumentally good.

We will give preference to projects framed in these general terms. However, because we acknowledge the diversity of approaches in contemporary secular and religious ethics, we realize that some projects may have different conceptual starting points. Thus, we definitely welcome applications using one of a variety of definitions. If a project does have a different conceptual starting point, though, we ask that this be noted and briefly justified in the application.

Application Instructions

Letters of Intent are due by September 1, 2011. Notification will be made by October 15, 2011, with submission of full proposals no later than January 15, 2012. Final award decisions will be issued by April 1, 2012 for research to begin no later than September 1, 2012.

Letter of Intent (LOI) Stage

Applicants are required to submit:

1. A complete curriculum vitae for the PI and for all major team members (if applicable).
2. A letter of intent that includes the central questions of the project, the background and significance of the questions, the way in which the project addresses at least one of the **Key Questions** of this RFP, and a summary of the main idea or argument. The letter should not exceed 1,500 words (references do not have to be counted in this total).
3. The amount of funding requested (one sentence is fine for this). No budget narrative or justification is needed at this stage. The amount can be revised at the full proposal stage.

Application materials should be submitted by e-mail attachment, if possible, to character@wfu.edu. The words "Theology of Character" should appear in the e-mail subject line.

The only acceptable file formats are .doc and PDF. Questions about the application process can be sent to the same address. All LOI materials must be received no later than September 1, 2011. An acknowledgement email will be sent within seven days of receiving the materials. If you do not receive such an acknowledgement please write again to character@wfu.edu and to seachrjw@wfu.edu.

Full Proposal Stage

Those applicants invited to submit full proposals must include:

- A cover letter with the title, amount requested, duration of the project (not to exceed one year), and team members (if applicable).
- A description of the work to be carried out, not to exceed 5,000 words (references do not have to be counted in this total). The description should include the central questions of the project, the background and significance of the questions, the way in which the project addresses at least one of the **Key Questions** of this RFP, and a summary of the main idea or argument.
- A project abstract of up to 500 words which explains the project and its significance to non-academics, and which would be published on The Character Project website and possibly in Templeton materials, and included in publicity materials if the proposal is funded.
- A time line.
- A detailed budget, between \$40,000 and \$100,000 in total costs (direct and indirect), with accompanying narrative explaining line items, not to exceed two single-spaced pages. Overhead is limited to 15%, and funds cannot be used for major equipment purchases.
- Approval of the department chair and university signing officials.

CVs submitted at the LOI stage do not need to be resubmitted. Full proposals should be submitted by e-mail attachment, if possible, to character@wfu.edu. The words “Theology of Character” should appear in the e-mail subject line. The only acceptable file formats are .doc and PDF. Questions about full proposals can be sent to the same address. Full proposals will be accepted only from applicants who have been invited to submit by the fellowship director on the basis of the LOI phase. Full proposals must be received no later than January 15, 2012. An acknowledgement email will be sent within seven days of receiving the materials. If you do not receive such an acknowledgement please write again to character@wfu.edu and to seachrjw@wfu.edu.

Grant Eligibility

The PI must have a Ph.D. and be in or contracted to a faculty position at an accredited college or university before March 15, 2012 (exceptions may be made on a case by case basis). Applicants from the U.S. and any other country are welcome to apply. Applicants can only have their name on one proposal for this competition (whether as a PI or a team member), and cannot compete as a PI in the philosophy funding competition nor have been funded as a PI in the psychology funding competition. We may contact an applicant and suggest that he or she apply under the philosophy competition if in our opinion the project would be a better fit there instead.

Selection criteria will include: feasibility of the project in the specified timeframe, prior research accomplishments of the PI and other team members, relevance of the project to the **Key Questions**, originality and interest of the intended project, quality of the budget justification, and coherence of the intended research plan. Preference will be given to proposals from PIs who are within ten years of receiving their Ph.D. at the time of submission of the letter of intent. All applications must be submitted in English and all payments will be made in US dollars.

Projects which are primarily historical in focus will not be funded.

The PI of a funded project must commit to the following:

- 1) Submit interim and final reports, as well as interim and final expenditure reports. The interim and final reports should not exceed 5 pages, and should detail the outcomes of the funded project. Reports must be submitted at the end of six months and at the conclusion of the project if the project is for one year.
- 2) Attend the two day Initial Research Workshop in June of 2012 where PIs from the “New Frontiers in the Psychology of Character” funding initiative will present their initial findings (expenses covered).
- 3) Attend and present central conclusions at the three day Final Research Colloquia in June of 2013 where the PIs from funding initiatives for the psychology, philosophy, and theology of character will each present their conclusions (expenses covered).
- 4) Consent to have their presentation at the Final Research Colloquia be videotaped for The Character Project website.
- 5) Submit a chapter length version of their paper from the Final Research Colloquia by December 31, 2013 for publication in a two volume edited work tentatively entitled *The Character Project: New Perspectives in Psychology, Philosophy, and Theology*.
- 6) Notify the Project at character@wfu.edu of all conference presentations, papers, and books which arise from the funded research.
- 7) Follow stipulations of grant award as communicated by Templeton either to WFU or to the recipient directly, and as determined by WFU.

All questions should be directed to:

Character@wfu.edu

or

The Character Project
Department of Philosophy
P.O. Box 7332
Wake Forest University
Winston-Salem, NC 27109

References

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