Theology of Joy and the Good Life

Grants for Comparative Research in Ethics & Religion

The Yale Center for Faith & Culture is soliciting proposals to produce descriptions of the good life with special attention to the affective dimension in religious and ethical traditions other than Christianity, including (but not limited to):

- Judaism
- Islam
- Buddhism
- Hinduism
- Confucianism
- Utilitarianism
- Nietzscheanism
- Positive Psychology
- Existentialism
- Aristotelianism/Virtue Ethics

We hypothesize that the good life has three basic dimensions (or aspects): agential (what you do), circumstantial (how the world is for you), and affective (how you feel). Given this formal account, our hypothesis is that, on the Christian description, joy is the crown of the good life, integrating all three basic dimensions. Joy is a positive affective response to an objective external good construed rightly and about which one is rightly concerned. Therefore, joy cannot be described without reference to the good life. Likewise, the good life cannot be described without reference to joy. Each is integral to the other.

Furthermore, we expect that all descriptions of the good life—not just Christian descriptions—will offer some sort of account of each of these three dimensions of life. These accounts will vary in terms of how each dimension is defined and how each dimension relates to the others. This is one way of articulating important differences between traditions—and, indeed, between rival versions of a given tradition. In the extreme, a tradition may even deny entirely the importance of a given dimension. (For example, a radical Stoicism might be understood as denying the significance of the affective dimension of life.) Nevertheless, such a denial constitutes an articulation of a given dimension and its relative significance.

Given that our context is pluralist, answering the project’s central questions requires examining our hypothesis about the tripartite structure of the good life in other religious and ethical traditions: How do these traditions describe each dimension of the good life? Does the hypothesized tripartite structure of the good life “fit” these traditions’ articulations of the good life? How do these traditions describe affective dimension of the good life? How might attention to joy and the good life create new opportunities for meaningful dialogue between traditions?

Collaborative Cohort

Each of the eight sub-grants provides $3,000 to be used to support a junior scholar as a key project collaborator. ($3,000 is the minimum of the $20,000 that must be allocated to fund this collaborator; proposals may allocate more than this minimum in their budget.) Taken together, these eight
collaborative teams will form a collaborative cohort that will read one another’s work and meet in February 2018 for a three-day symposium at Yale Divinity School. (The spirit of these collaborative inter-tradition conversations is articulated in the prologue to Miroslav Volf, *Flourishing: Why We Need Religion in a Globalized World* [YUP, 2016].)

**Dissemination**

The primary research outputs of each team (an approximately 40-page description of the tradition’s account of the good life), along with a Christian account produced by YCFC, will be compiled into an inter-tradition reader on the good life. This reader will serve as course material for YCFC’s Life Worth Living course and similar courses that adopt a humanistic approach to religion and normative visions of the good life.

**Eligibility**

The intended applicants are scholar-practitioners from religious and ethical traditions other than Christianity (e.g. Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, Confucianism, Utilitarianism, Nietzscheism, Positive Psychology, Existentialism, Aristotelianism/Virtue Ethics). Scholars who self-identify with both Christianity and another tradition and are willing to write on the latter without reference to Christianity are welcome to apply.

**Other Requirements**

Successful applicants must commit to the following:

1. Submit, by the end of the funding period (June 30, 2018), an approximately 40-page description of their tradition’s account of the good life in dialogue with the project’s hypothesized tripartite formal analysis, with special attention to the affective dimension of the good life.
2. Submit final expenditure reports at the conclusion of the project.
3. Attend and present their research at a symposium in February 2018 (expenses covered).
4. Consent to have presentation at symposium events and interview sessions videotaped for the Theology of Joy and the Good Life project website.
5. Consent to the publication of their manuscript in the Life Worth Living reader.
6. Notify the project at: joy@yale.edu of all conference presentations, papers, and books that arise from the funded research, including presentations and publications occurring after the conclusion of the grant.
7. Follow stipulations of grant award as communicated by Templeton either to the Yale Center for Faith and Culture or to the recipients directly, and as determined by YCFC.

**Review Process**

Proposals will be reviewed by the PI, Project Leadership Team, and YCFC Scholars. (The PI and PLT will have final decision-making authority.) If a proposal involves content or methods that require further expertise, additional ad hoc reviewers may be sought.

Selection criteria will include:

1. Relevance of the project to the key topics and themes—particularly the project’s ability to contribute to examination of the tripartite structure of the good life articulated above.
2. Coherence of the intended research plan
3. Feasibility of the project within the specified timeframe
4. Prior research accomplishments of the applicant (and other team members, if any)
5. Originality and chance of success of the intended project
6. Quality of the budget justification

Successful proposals will be those that contribute most directly to the project’s broad research agenda and show promise of contributing significantly to our goal to find common ground, identify further areas of research, and test the hypothesized tripartite formal account of the good life.

All applications must be submitted in English and all payments will be made in US dollars.

**Application Instructions**

Applicants should submit the following by November 1, 2016:

1. A cover letter of no more than 1 page with the title, amount requested, and team members.
2. A complete curriculum vitae of both team members
3. A brief abstract of the proposed work of no more than 150 words.
4. A narrative description of the work to be conducted, not to exceed 5,000 words (excluding references). The description should explain how the project will take up the hypothesized tripartite formal description of the good life, how the project hypothesizes each dimension is articulated and ranked by the particular tradition (with particular attention to the affective dimension), a summary of the main idea or argument, and plans for the dissemination of research outputs.
5. A project summary of up to 500 words that explains the project and its significance to non-academics for publicity purposes.
6. A timeline for the proposed work.
7. A detailed budget with accompanying narrative explaining line items, totaling $20,000 in direct + indirect costs, $3,000 of which will support research by a junior scholar. Overhead is limited to 15%, and funds cannot be used for major equipment purchases. Examples of acceptable use of funds include sabbaticals, course buyouts, conference related travel (limited to 10%/$2,000), awardee compensation, and research materials.
8. Written approval of the department chair and university-signing officials.

**Submission Instructions**

Proposals should be submitted by email attachment as a single PDF (and in the order listed above) to: joy@yale.edu.

The following words should appear in the subject line:

“Grants for Comparative Research in Ethics & Religion”

The only acceptable file format is PDF. An acknowledgment email will be sent within seven days of receiving your full proposal. All questions about the application process should be sent to: joy@yale.edu