

# NEH Application Cover Sheet (FA-232901)

## Fellowships for University Teachers

### PROJECT DIRECTOR

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**Field of expertise:** Political Theory

### INSTITUTION

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University of Texas at Austin

Austin, TX 78712

### APPLICATION INFORMATION

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**Title:** *Wisdom and Character: The Moral Foundations of Aristotelian Political Philosophy*

**Grant period:** From 2016-07-01 to 2017-06-30

**Project field(s):** Political Theory; Ethics; Classics

**Description of project:** I propose to complete a book on the relation between moral and intellectual virtue in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. This study will make several important contributions to contemporary debates about Aristotle's ethical thought and moral responsibility. First, it will show the unappreciated indebtedness of Aristotle's moral theory to the Socratic thesis that virtue is knowledge; second, it will distinguish Aristotle's theoretical and practical intentions and show how puzzles in the *Nicomachean Ethics* can be understood in light of his dual audience and complex purposes; third, it will bring his treatment of intellectual virtue in NE 6 to bear on his treatments of responsibility for character and action and *akrasia* in NE 3 and 7 in a way that has not been done; and finally, it will draw on recent work across the fields of philosophy, classics, and political science to bring relevant contributions into fruitful dialogue with each other.

### REFERENCE LETTERS

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# NEH Supplemental Information for Individuals

This form should be used by applicants to the NEH Fellowships, Fellowships for Advanced Social Science Research on Japan, Awards for Faculty, and Summer Stipends Programs.

Field of Project:

Field of Project #2:

Field of Project #3:

Project Director Field of Study:

The mailing address provided on the SF 424-Individual is for your  work  home

## Institutional Affiliation

Are you affiliated with an institution? (If yes, provide information below.)  Yes  No

Institution Name:

Street 1:

Street 2:

City:

County:

State:

Province:

Country:

Zip / Postal Code:

DUNS Number:

Employer/Taxpayer Identification Number (EIN/TIN):

Status:  Senior Scholar  Junior Scholar

# Reference Letters

## Reference 1

First Name:

Last Name:

Email:

Title:

Department Name:

Institution:

## Reference 2

First Name:

Last Name:

Email:

Title:

Department Name:

Institution:

## Nominating Official (Summer Stipends Applicants Only)

Are you exempt from nomination? If not, provide information below.  Yes  No

First Name:

Last Name:

Email:

Title:

Institution:

**Project Narrative**  
**Wisdom and Character: The Moral Foundations of Aristotelian Political Philosophy**  
**Lorraine Smith Pangle**

I seek support for a year's leave in order to complete a book on the Aristotelian understanding of moral responsibility. This project involves a close interpretive study of the treatise that Aristotle presents as the foundational work in his political science, although one often neglected by political scientists, the *Nicomachean Ethics*. This study will be a companion volume to my recent book on Plato, *Virtue is Knowledge: The Moral Foundations of Socratic Political Philosophy* (Chicago, 2014). That work explores the Socratic claim that virtue is knowledge and related paradoxes in all their extravagant strangeness—the claims that virtue guarantees wealth, strength, and happiness; that indeed virtue alone *is* happiness; that all who know the good will do the good; that vice is ignorance; that vice is involuntary; that tyrants have no power and do virtually nothing of what they wish; and that the proper remedy for crime is education, not punishment. Aristotle, by contrast to all this, comes to sight as the epitome of common sense and sobriety. In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, he acknowledges the importance of fortune and good friends in addition to virtue for human happiness, and likewise the central place of discipline, practice, and habituation in addition to understanding in the cultivation of virtue. He repeatedly condemns the folly of people who, instead of training themselves in virtue, take refuge in speeches. He insists that wisdom is itself dependent on experience. To say, then, as Socrates does, that virtue is knowledge is to ignore the critical part that healthy passions and good habituation play in shaping character; to say that vice is ignorance and hence involuntary is to say what is neither true nor socially responsible. Aristotle insists that both virtue and vice are voluntary and that individuals are responsible for their characters. He insists on the existence of *akrasia*, the failure of self-control in which one acts against one's better judgment, offering an extended and nuanced explanation of what it is and how it occurs.

Beginning with this apparently sharp departure from Plato, this book will explore the place of intellect and intellectual virtue in Aristotle's moral thought. What is the role of knowledge or opinion in determining human choice? Are we free to choose otherwise than we do, given who we are and how things appear to us? In what sense are we responsible for our good or bad character? What end or standard does reason look to in guiding moral choice? How is the intellectual virtue that governs choice, *phronēsis* or active wisdom, related to *sophia* or theoretical wisdom? To answer these questions, this volume will offer a selective, focused commentary of extensive portions of the *Nicomachean Ethics*.

It will be my contention that Plato and Aristotle, for all their striking differences in presentation, are in fact much closer than they seem in their fundamental thought on the nature of intellectual virtue and its role in determining choice and character. I will also argue, however, that Aristotle develops on the basis of Socratic insights a new moral theory that is uniquely conducive to thriving active lives, to effective moral education, and to philosophical reflection alike. He does this by developing an account of moral virtue as separate from both civic and philosophic virtue, carving out for it a dignified and autonomous realm of activity that is choiceworthy as the chief substance of a happy life. This account offers a healthy way to think about our choices, our characters, and the priorities that should guide us. At the same time, it raises important puzzles about the moral and intellectual virtues, puzzles that require us to dig beneath the surface of the text for their solution, and that provide clues to the deepest reasons for Aristotle's otherwise surprising claims at the end of the *Ethics* for the superiority of philosophic virtue and the philosophic life.

Thus, I will argue, Aristotle's *Ethics* has a complex and even paradoxical structure that has not been well understood. On one plane the whole work might be read as a counter-argument to the claim that virtue is knowledge. Virtuous choices are motivated not by knowledge of what is good for us but by a love of what is noble; the virtuous person does what is right for its own sake. The different moral virtues are not so many expressions of a single insight that belongs only to the wise, but instead each is a distinct

constellation of well-formed passions, tastes, and habits. Moral virtue is, to be sure, guided by active wisdom or *phronēsis*, but *phronēsis* as a form of wisdom that has its own sphere quite separate from philosophical wisdom, residing in its own part of the soul, and forged through long experience of practical affairs. On this plane Aristotle's *Ethics* has uniquely sound, healthy, and much-needed contributions to make to our own understanding of the importance of character, its role in human thriving, and moral responsibility. Our society has in recent decades been polarized between those who place great weight on moral character, who view its cultivation as essentially a private matter, and who advocate punitive responses to crime on one hand, and those who place great weight on the factors beyond individuals' control that blight lives, who deplore the judgmental and patronizing character of many past efforts at moral education, and who seek non-judgmental ways of addressing social problems on the other. Meanwhile, we are grappling with the disappointing results of many of our best-intended social programs and are recognizing anew the importance of such moral qualities as "grit" and institutions such as marriage for individual and societal well-being. Aristotle offers a sensible way of thinking about moral responsibility neither in terms of a radically free will nor in terms of determinism but in terms of character, character that depends on good habituation, good models for emulation, and a vision of what a happy life can be, but that is also shaped in significant part through our own actions and that it therefore is up to us to make better or worse.

Nevertheless, I will argue, on another and deeper plane, the *Ethics* may be read as a project of testing—and to some considerable extent in fact confirming—the Socratic thesis that virtue is knowledge, by assuming the opposite and seeing what follows. Although what follows on the practical level, usually and for the most part, is something very good, what follows on the deepest theoretical plane is a certain intractable incoherence in morality's claim to autonomy that comes to a head in book 6 of the *Ethics*, the book on intellectual virtue. Here Aristotle presses the question of what *phronēsis* itself looks to in guiding moral choice, and the answer, surprisingly, is circular: while moral virtue looks to *phronēsis* to guide it, *phronēsis* looks to moral virtue. As long as *phronēsis* revolves within this cul-de-sac it cannot claim to be real wisdom; it is at best, as Aristotle puts it at one point, a perfection of the "opining" faculty, which is to say, a distillation of conventional and unexamined moral opinion. Something in this opinion—something in moral seriousness itself—resists giving a rigorous answer to the question of why virtue is good and how we know it to be good. *Phronēsis*, then, only rises to the level of true wisdom if it is educated through rigorous dialectic so that it comes to be grounded in solid knowledge of human nature. This means, however, that truly adequate *phronēsis* is not a separate faculty from but only an applied branch of theoretical wisdom.

To unpack the rich layers of meaning in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, my approach here as in my previous books on Plato and Aristotle will consist in close textual analysis with frequent excursions into the practical implications of the text. My approach is also interdisciplinary. This is important because of the fragmented state of current scholarship on Aristotle and ethics. There exists a substantial body of relevant and highly interesting work on these topics in the fields of contemporary philosophy, ancient philosophy, and political theory, but little communication between the fields. Contemporary ethicists such as Strawson, Wallace, Watson, Kane, Mele, Fischer, and Williams have been engaged in a lively debate about the nature of moral responsibility, its compatibilism or incompatibilism with determinism, and the requisites of meaningful moral agency. One sees in their discussions a keen awareness of some of the problems Aristotle explores, such as the way in which stability of character and consistency of action seem both essential for attributing full responsibility to an agent and problematic for the idea that the agent is truly acting with freedom. Yet these discussions are insufficiently engaged by scholars of classical philosophy and are virtually ignored by political scientists, despite the fact that the problem of moral responsibility goes to the heart of the core problem of political theory, the meaning of justice.

Classicists and scholars of philosophy who study Aristotle, while finding many interesting subtleties and inconsistencies in Aristotle's account of moral responsibility, often underestimate Aristotle's awareness

of the complexity of the problems that modern ethicists have discerned. They have often attributed to Aristotle a naive obtuseness to the problems (e.g. Furley), or a simple inability to make up his mind between mutually exclusive positions (Irwin). Commentaries on Book 3 generally assume that Aristotle is presenting here a theory of the free and responsible will (Grant, Walsh, Meyer), or that he is groping towards such a theory (Ross), or that his account suffers because it lacks such a theory (Gauthier, Roberts). Thus the scholarly literature on Aristotle fails to take sufficiently seriously the challenge he presents precisely in accounting for human action without introducing a theory of the will. More importantly, most Aristotle scholars assume either that Aristotle in his ethical works is merely an apologist for conventional morality (Grant, Burnet), or that he is simply trying to explicate as clearly as possible the hidden workings of the human soul, without any special attention to the problem of how his own account may itself influence, for better or worse, the lives that people lead.

At the opposite pole are political theorists who, in the best cases, see clearly the practical and morally constructive goals of Aristotle's project: scholars such as Burger, Bodéüs, Collins, Salkever, and Yack show compellingly the ways in which Aristotle, in the *Ethics* as well as the *Politics*, is writing as an educator of lawgivers, seeking to show above all how virtue and political arrangements that sustain virtue may be achieved. Most of these scholars, however, are not concerned with analyzing the details of Aristotle's account of moral responsibility or *phronēsis*, and their insights are neglected by those who do. The result is that existing discussions of *Nicomachean Ethics* 3.1-5 and 7.1-10 tend either to treat Aristotle as an inquiring but apolitical dissector of the soul, or as an uninquiring moralist, untroubled by what his analysis actually shows about the limits of human responsibility.

The guiding principle of my reading of Aristotle is that the *Ethics*, being addressed *both* to students of philosophy and to lawgivers, is concerned *both* to discern the workings of the soul, showing among other things the extent to which choice is indeed governed by unchosen opinion, and to do justice to the effectual truth of the matter of moral responsibility: the effectual truth that how we think and talk about responsibility affects the character of the decisions we in fact make, and the actions of which we are in fact capable, and that certain ways of thinking are better able than others to promote individual happiness and a healthy political society. While the theoretical and the political strands in Aristotle's work are not simply in harmony, it is in large part his sensitivity to the dialectical relationship between thought and action that gives his political and ethical writings their unique power and depth.

The book will have the following six chapters:

1. The Task and the Puzzle of Intellectual Virtue (selective discussion of *NE* 1 and 2)
2. Voluntary Action, Choice, Responsibility (*NE* 3.1-5)
3. Knowledge and Purpose in the Moral Virtues (selective discussion of *NE* 3.6-5.11)
4. Theoretical and Active Wisdom: The Intellectual Virtues (*NE* 6)
5. Failures of Reason and Their Remedies (*NE* 7.1-10)

This volume will bring to completion the project for which I received a NEH fellowship in 2001-2. That project was conceived as a single volume on moral responsibility in the thought of Plato, Aristotle, and the stoics. What was originally envisioned as an introductory chapter on Plato grew into a volume in its own right, *Virtue is Knowledge*, published last year by the University of Chicago Press. The Aristotle volume is more than half drafted, so that it should easily be completed with a year's academic leave. I am fluent in classical Greek and intimately acquainted with Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, having taught four graduate seminars and published a previous book on it. I will be working in Austin, where the University of Texas libraries have all the research materials I will need. Finally, I already have a publisher: Executive Editor John Tryneski of the University of Chicago Press has written to confirm his strong interest in publishing *Wisdom and Character* as a companion volume to *Virtue is Knowledge*.

## Bibliography

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- Sorabji, Richard. 2015. *Necessity, Cause, and Blame: Perspectives on Aristotle's Theory*. Duckworth.
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- Wallace, R. Jay. 1994. *Responsibility and Moral Sentiments*. Harvard.
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- Williams, Bernard. 1986. *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*. Harvard.
- Yack, Bernard. 1993. *The Problems of a Political Animal: Community, Justice, and Conflict in Aristotelian Political Thought*. California.

## **Lorraine Smith Pangle**

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### **Education**

University of Chicago, Committee on Social Thought: Ph.D., 1999. Thesis: *The Philosophy of Friendship: Aristotle and the Classical Tradition on Friendship and Self-Love*. Committee: Nathan Tarcov, Leon Kass, and Robert Pippin.

University of Toronto: Bachelor of Education, 1985.

Yale University: Bachelor of Arts in History, 1981. Senior Thesis: "Education and Liberty: A Study in the Thought of Thomas Jefferson." Supervisor: Edmund S. Morgan.

### **Foreign Languages**

Ancient Greek; German.

### **Professional Employment**

Professor (2011-present), and Associate Professor (2004-2011), Department of Government, University of Texas at Austin. Co-Director, 2009-present, Thomas Jefferson Center for the Study of Core Texts and Ideas.

Associate Professor (2003-04), Postdoctoral Fellow (2001-03), and Adjunct Professor (2000-01) Department of Political Science, University of Toronto.

### **Honors and Grants**

Raymond Dickson Centennial Endowed Teaching Fellowship, 2014.

University of Texas Subvention Grant for *Virtue is Knowledge*, 2013.

Fellow, George W. Littlefield Professorship in American History, 2013-present.

American Freedom Alliance "Heroes of Conscience Award" for academic leaders, shared with Thomas Pangle (Los Angeles, CA, May 2012).

University of Texas College of Liberal Arts Research Fellowship, 2011.

University of Texas Subvention Grant for *The Political Philosophy of Benjamin Franklin*, 2006.

Earhart Fellowship, 2005.

National Endowment for the Humanities Fellowship, 2001-02.

Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada Postdoctoral Fellowship, 2001-03.

University of Chicago Olin Fellowship, 1983-84.

University of Chicago Searle Fellowship, 1981-84.

Phi Beta Kappa, 1981.

Yale University Porter Prize for best essay in American history, 1981.

Yale University Wrexham Prize for best senior essay in the humanities, 1981.

Yale University BA granted summa cum laude, with honors in the major, 1981.

### **Books**

*Virtue is Knowledge: The Moral Foundations of Socratic Political Philosophy* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 271 pp.

*The Political Philosophy of Benjamin Franklin* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, Political Philosophy of the American Founders Series, hardback and paperback, 2007), 277 pp.

*Aristotle and the Philosophy of Friendship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003; paperback 2008), 250 pp.

*The Learning of Liberty: The Educational Ideas of the American Founders*, Lorraine Smith Pangle and Thomas L. Pangle (Lawrence, KS: The University Press of Kansas, American Political Thought Series, 1993; paperback 1996), 330 pp.

### **Selected Refereed Articles and Book Chapters**

“The Divided Soul in Platonic and Aristotelian Philosophy,” in Dustin Gish, Christopher Conostas, and J. Scott Lee, eds., *The Quest for Excellence: Selected Papers from the Seventeenth Annual Conference (2011) of the Association for Core Texts and Courses* (University Press of America, forthcoming 2015).

“Moral Indignation, Magnanimity, and Philosophy in the Trial of the Armenian King,” in Andrea Radasanu, ed., *In Search of Humanity: Essays in Honor of Clifford Orwin* (Lanham, MI: Lexington Books, 2015), 101-113.

“Reclaiming the Core: Liberal Education in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century,” *Perspectives on Political Science*, 42:4 (fall 2013), 207-11. Also published in *The Future of Liberal Education*, ed. Timothy Burns and Peter Lawler (London: Routledge, 2014), 27-31.

“Virtue and Self-Control in Xenophon’s Socratic Thought,” in Lee and Ann Ward, eds., *Natural Right and Political Philosophy: Essays in Honor of Catherine and Michael Zuckert* (South Bend, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2013), 15-35.

“Ben Franklin and Socrates,” in Paul Kerry, ed., *Benjamin Franklin’s Intellectual World* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2012), 137-152.

“Moral and Criminal Responsibility in Plato’s *Laws*,” *American Political Science Review*, 103:3 (August 2009), 456-73.

“Commentary on Susanne Foster, ‘Aristotle on Moral Considerability,’” *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy* 18 (2002): 89-94.

“Friendship and Human Neediness in Plato’s *Lysis*,” *Ancient Philosophy* 21 (fall 2001): 305-23.

“What the American Founders Have to Teach Us About Schooling for Democratic Citizenship,” Lorraine Smith Pangle and Thomas L. Pangle, in Lorraine McDonnell, P. Michael Timpane, and Roger Benjamin, eds., *Rediscovering the Democratic Purposes of Education* (Lawrence, KS: The University Press of Kansas, 2000), 21-46.

“Friendship and Self-Love in Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*,” in Susan Collins and Robert Bartlett, eds., *Action and Contemplation: Studies in the Moral and Political Thought of Aristotle* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1999), 171-202.

“George Washington and the Life of Honor,” Lorraine Smith Pangle and Thomas L. Pangle, in Peter McNamara, ed., *The Noblest Minds: Fame, Honor, and the American Founding* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1999), 59-71.

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10 May 2015

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Sincerely,

*David Konstan*

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Professor of Classics

May 11, 2015

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