Expansive Other-Regard and Civic Excellence

*Promotional Abstract*

A well-functioning democracy requires an actively engaged citizenry that makes good political decisions together. We aim to test whether three character traits that involve having expansive regard for other people might enhance these features of democracy, leading their possessors to be more civically engaged and to contribute better to collective decision-making processes. The three traits we will examine are identification with all humanity (which involves caring for an expansive domain of others), others-centeredness (which involves caring for others to an expansive extent) and intellectual dependability (which involves caring for an expansive scope of others’ interests, including others’ intellectual interests in what is cared for). We will examine whether these traits are correlated with civic engagement; whether they predict high performance in collective tasks, including collective democratic tasks; how they make a difference for such performance if they do; and how they can be developed. Using new and emerging methods for measuring our focal traits and studying their influence and cultivation, this project holds the potential to enhance our understanding of which features of character contribute to civic excellence and how they do so, to enrich the methods employed for studying character and its civic significance, and to transformatively influence civic education.