

Application for Research, Scholarship, and Creativity Grant

Peg O'Connor

Department of Philosophy

Gender, Women, and Sexuality Studies Program

Previous work supported by Research, Scholarship, and Creativity grant

In AY 1998-1999 I received a Research, Scholarship, and Creativity grant to complete two chapters of my book *Oppression and Responsibility: A Wittgensteinian Approach to Social Practices and Moral Theory*. Monies from that grant were used for the purchase of a CD-ROM program of the published works of Ludwig Wittgenstein. As part of my grant application, I requested to use a portion of the funds so that I would be able to participate at the World Congress of Philosophy, an international conference held every four years, and at which I presented two of the book chapters.

In AY 2001-2002, I received a Research, Scholarship, and Creativity grant that helped me to complete a co-edited anthology (with Lisa Heldke) entitled *Oppression, Privilege, and Resistance: Theoretical Readings on Racism, Sexism, and Heterosexism*, that was published by McGraw-Hill in December 2003. Additionally, I used money to purchase a CD-ROM program of the notebooks and lectures of Ludwig Wittgenstein. The CD-ROMs purchased with both grants continue to be an invaluable tool in my research.

In AY 2004-2005, I received a Research, Scholarship, and Creativity grant that helped me to (nearly) complete a new monograph entitled *Morality and Our Complicated Form of Life: Wittgensteinian Metaethics*. This work argues for a shift in the dominant metaphor of foundations to stability. In order to make this argument, I purchased numerous architecture books, which are notoriously expensive since they have so many color photographs. I also purchased a number of books that were more traditionally philosophical. I note here that the CD-ROM programs of Wittgenstein's works have continued to be an invaluable resource in my research.

Morality and Our Complicated Form of Life will be published in summer 2008.

In AY 2006-07, I was awarded but declined a partially funded RSC grant. My grant application being partially funded was a consequence of my having received an RSC grant in 2004-05.

Description of projects for which funding is being sought

I have two new projects on the horizon. Each of these is just in its formative stage. These projects are separate at this point, though they are linked by my continued use of Ludwig Wittgenstein's philosophy. I have published three books on Wittgenstein, and so I am well positioned to begin a new project using his work. The first paper (hopefully) will be presented at the Radical Philosophy Association in November. The second paper may find a home at any of several upcoming feminist conferences and will occupy my attentions throughout the academic year.

Project One: An essay that explores the legacy of a radical dualism of minds and bodies in the context of survivors of sexual trauma.

Project Two: An essay that extends Wittgenstein's concept of "form of life" to alcoholics/alcoholic identities.

Detailed Project descriptions

Project One: The Cartesian Mind in the Abused Body: This Pilot Isn't Going Down with the Ship

In the *Meditations*, Descartes undertakes a quest to discover the secure foundations of knowledge. In this quest, Descartes offers a dualism that defines the mind and body in terms of their mutual exclusivity. For Descartes, the mind is an immaterial substance whose nature is thinking. As an immaterial substance, it has no extension. The nature of bodies is extension, and anything having extension cannot think. This mutual exclusivity makes possible the mind's complete independence of and superiority over the body. For Descartes, being a mind is being free, exercising will, and having consciousness. In the process of discovering his own identity and subjectivity, Descartes objectifies and banishes his own body. This banishment removes a major impediment to objectivity. As Susan Bordo notes, this radical dualism makes any continuity between subject and object impossible.

This radical dualism presented many problems for Descartes, some of which were raised by his contemporaries (Princess Elisabeth and Thomas Hobbes) and others by feminists. Most troubling for Princess Elisabeth was the interaction between an immaterial substance and a material one. One model of interaction Descartes clearly rejects in *Meditation VI* and in his replies to Princess Elisabeth is that the mind controls the body like a pilot controls a ship. This model is inadequate because it entails that the mind perceives what happens to the body purely by intellectual perceptions. Everyday living and our experiences of hunger and thirst reveal that the mind and body are intermingled and that the mind understands the body in ways that do not only involve intellectual perceptions.

Many feminists have been deeply critical of Descartes's dualism, and the ways in which Cartesian thinking permeates our culture. Susan Bordo and Leslie Heyward have demonstrated the ways that the Cartesian legacy infuses our culture, especially as it relates to the logic of anorexia that has been incredibly harmful to women. The logic requires that women reject their bodies by starving them, thus proving that they are not bodies but minds. Obviously, the physical, mental, and emotional effects of acting out of this logic are immense, and call for immediate response and intervention. Underlying some of these responses is the view that one is somehow distorting her humanity by living as a disembodied mind (though one constantly preoccupied with her body) as this logic dictates. To restore her humanity, a woman needs not only to stop waging war against her body, but to be unified in mind and body. She needs to be made whole. There is something very compelling about this view. But this view, perhaps, relies upon a mistaken assumption that everyone wants to be fully unified in this way and live as a coherent, embodied whole. This assumes that everyone's body, feelings, and emotions have never been the site or source of abuse. For a large number of women who have been the victim of sexual violence (rape or childhood sexual abuse), and whose bodies have been made into objects and have been the sites of terrible traumas and betrayals, such unification or wholeness may be horrifying. For such victims and survivors, a Cartesian dualism may be attractive and perhaps even life saving. The pilot in the vessel model is very similar to how some victims and survivors of sexual trauma understand what has happened to them, and how they forge their own self identities. Like Descartes, there is a strong identification with being a mind, and understanding themselves to be not-body. Often times there is a need to make a complete break between subject and object, especially when someone else has so objectified your body that you

no longer can understand that body as being part of you. As one survivor says, “I left my body at this point. I was over next to the bed, watching this happen...I dissociated from the helplessness. I was standing next to me and there was just this shell on the bed.” Adopting such a radical dualism may be an adaptive, life saving behavior.

The experiences of survivors are important in theorizing about metaphysical questions about the nature of self, and as such, need to be taken into account in any critique of Descartes’s method and dualistic conclusions. Considering Descartes’s dualism from the perspectives of survivors of sexual violence raises philosophically important issues. Whereas Descartes was able to achieve a certain freedom as a solitary thinking thing and as such was able to secure the foundations for knowledge, the survivor of sexual violence realizes a solitariness and acquires knowledge that not only are not liberating but rather are deeply harmful. While survivors experience solitariness and the grammar of sexual violence requires silence, their experiences are far from anomalous and are, in fact, quite common. This solitariness and knowledge strip a woman of her subjectivity and agency.

Project Two: On the Rocks Is a Form of Life: A Wittgensteinian Approach to Alcoholism

Wittgenstein wrote that “Work on philosophy--like work in architecture in many respects--is really more work on oneself. On one’s own conception. On how one sees things. (And what one expects of them.)” For Wittgenstein, the philosopher’s work is liberating herself and others from bewitching pictures, skewed conceptual schemes, unreasonable and perhaps unjustified expectations. Above all else, philosophy ought to aim for clarification--of oneself, one’s place in the world, and the ways we make meaning. Philosophy as typically practiced generates more confusions than clarifications, which explains why Wittgenstein spent so much time diagnosing the sicknesses of philosophy. Philosophy, when practiced well, can be *useful*. It can enable us to grapple in productive ways with questions about the meaning of life. I am beginning a long-term project to bring Wittgenstein’s insights back to questions about the meaning of life, especially for those marginalized in multiple ways. The first portion of that project is the paper for which I am requesting RSC money.

My goal in this first essay is to take one of Wittgenstein’s best known concepts, “form of life” and make the argument that alcoholics have a form of life that is in significant ways different from the forms of life of non-alcoholics. There are also significant differences between the forms of life of active and recovered alcoholics. “Forms of life” are the conditions in which we make meanings both individually and socially. They provide the frameworks for making sense of our actions, lives, and the world around us. Different forms of life quite genuinely mean alternative ways of experiencing, of being in the world. For example, a scientist who sees the world as an ongoing process of evolution—with chance and mutation playing important roles--has a different form of life from the fundamentalist theologian who sees the world as a product of Intelligent Design. While they share the world in many important respects (they breathe air, shop for food, love their kids, and feel the effects of gravity, eg) in many ways they do not.

Recovered alcoholics often talk about seeing and experiencing the world in radically different ways once we became sober. Where in the past we might have blamed others for the state of our lives and seen ourselves as having no agency (and hence no responsibility), we now are able to chart the consequences of our actions, and take responsibility for them in the process. We achieve a kind of clarity that could not have existed while abusing alcohol. It is not uncommon to hear a recovered alcoholic speak of the ways she previously believed that she

alone drank excessively/relapsed frequently and felt enormous shame for our drinking. In many ways, the lives of active alcoholics of deeply colored by shame and isolations. We may well think this is just the way life is and believe there is nothing to be done. Part of the recovery process is working through the shame and isolation. The forms of life of recovered and non-recovered alcoholics do overlap; many recovered alcoholics often recognize that they are but one drink away from immersion back into the form of life an active alcoholic.

The forms of life of the alcoholic and non-alcoholic are different as well. What an alcoholic regards as a reasonable risk would often stun someone who has no substance problems. For example, alcoholics talk about alcohol as the love of our lives, and in the name of this love are willing to risk our own well-being as well as that of our families.

Project Design

As a philosopher who is not on the technological edge of anything (even the overhead presents challenges to me) I have no equipment requests or needs. Monies from this RSC grant would be used for the purchase of books and other reference materials. Since I am working with at least three different bodies of literature, my book needs are significant. With respect to books about alcoholism and sexual abuse, I would be very happy to make them available to other offices on this campus concerned with these issues.

Request: \$1100.00 (base)
 \$ 500.00 (stipend)

Expenses with a very partial bibliography:

Wittgensteinian Works:

| | |
|--|---------|
| <i>Ludwig Wittgenstein: Public and Private Occasions</i> | \$96.00 |
| <i>Wittgenstein and Approaches to Clarity</i> | \$54.00 |
| <i>Wittgenstein and Psychology</i> | \$34.00 |
| <i>Experience and Expression</i> | \$68.00 |
| <i>Wittgenstein's Philosophy of Psychology</i> | \$68.00 |
| <i>Perspicuous Presentations</i> | \$85.00 |
| <i>Speaking from Elsewhere</i> | \$75.00 |

Works Related to Alcoholism:

| | |
|---|---------|
| <i>My Way Out</i> | \$12.21 |
| <i>Nice Girls Don't Drink</i> | \$11.95 |
| <i>First Year Sobriety</i> | \$11.95 |
| <i>Drinking: A Love Story</i> | \$16.00 |
| <i>Whiskey's Children</i> | \$12.00 |
| <i>Treatment Approaches for Alcohol and Drug Dependency</i> | \$54.00 |
| <i>Overcoming Your Alcohol or Drug Problem</i> | \$35.00 |

Works Related to Sexual Abuse:

| | |
|--|---------|
| <i>The Body Remembers</i> | \$30.00 |
| <i>Trauma and the Body</i> | \$30.00 |
| <i>The Mindful Brain</i> | \$26.95 |
| <i>Body, Breath, and Consciousness</i> | \$21.95 |
| <i>Victims of Cruelty</i> | \$18.95 |

APPLICATION CHECKLIST

Research, Scholarship, and Creativity Grant

Deadline March 15th (or following Monday if a weekend)

Please print and complete this checklist and attach it as the cover page of your grant application.

For more information about RSC grants, please see

<http://gustavus.edu/facdev/GrantOpportunities/RSCGrant.php>

Faculty information

Name: Peg O'Connor Dept: Philosophy and Gender, Women, and Sexuality Studies

Email: poconnor Rank: Professor

Checklist

- ☐ **Description of previous projects (and outcomes) funded by RSC grants**
- ☐ **Complete project description, including separate statements of:**
 - 1. Purpose.** What are the intellectual, conceptual, or artistic issues? How does your work fit into other endeavors being done in this field?
 - 2. Feasibility.** What qualifications do you bring to this project? What have you done/will you do to prepare for this project? What is the time period, i.e. summer, summer and academic year, academic year only? Is the work's scope commensurate with the time period of the project?
 - 3. Project Design.** This should include a specific description of the project design and activities, including location, staff, schedules or itineraries, and desired outcomes.
- ☐ **RSC Budget Proposal Form attached as last page of application**
- ☐ **Nine (9) copies of completed application and budget (including this checklist) to be submitted to the John S. Kendall Center for Engaged Learning (SSC 119)**

If successful, my proposal can be used as an example to assist future faculty applications. This decision will not in any way influence the evaluation of my application. **Yes / No (please circle one)**

BUDGET PROPOSAL FORM
Research, Scholarship, and Creativity Grant

| ITEM | | AMOUNT |
|---|-------|-------------------|
| Equipment (not to include computer hardware) | | \$ |
| 1: | Cost: | |
| 2: | Cost: | |
| 3: | Cost: | |
| Materials | | \$ 1100.00 |
| 1: Books (biblio on proposal form) | Cost: | |
| 2: | Cost: | |
| 3: | Cost: | |
| Personnel (check the faculty book white pages for recommended rates) | | \$ |
| 1: | | |
| 2: | | |
| Travel Costs | | \$ |
| Airfare: | | |
| Mileage: Number of miles _____ @ \$0.505/mile | | |
| Lodging | | \$ |
| Number of days _____ @ \$ _____ /day | | |
| Other Expenses (check the faculty book white pages for excluded items) | | \$ |
| 1: | Cost: | |
| 2: | Cost: | |
| 3: | Cost: | |
| Faculty Stipend (\$500 professor; \$600 associate professor; \$700 assistant professor) | | \$ 500.00 |
| | | |
| TOTAL EXPENSES | | \$ 1600.00 |
| | | |
| AMOUNT REQUESTED (not to exceed \$1500 + stipend commensurate with rank) | | \$ 1600.00 |

O'Connor RSC grant 2008

Have you applied for, or received funding from, another source to help support this project? NO