



Request for Project Proposals “Perspectives on Life, Persons and the Cosmos”

Science, Philosophy and Theology in Latin America
The Ian Ramsey Centre (IRC) for Science and Religion
University of Oxford

Request for Research Proposal

Aim and summary

The Ian Ramsey Centre for Science and Religion (IRC) at Oxford University is pleased to offer four grants of up to **U\$30,000** and six grants of up to **U\$15,000** each to individuals or research groups based at recognised Latin American institutions of higher education to conduct interdisciplinary research on one or more focused questions with the themes of life, persons, and the cosmos. Grant award winners will have up to twelve months to complete their work and the IRC will pay an additional allowance to enable one representative of the team to attend and present their work at a final international conference in Santiago de Chile in July 2017. Grants will be awarded by competitive evaluation on the basis of project proposals. These proposals will need to be sent to the IRC no later than **30 September 2015**. You may download the forms at <http://www.cyril.org/funding>.

Eligibility

Individual scholars or existing or new interdisciplinary research teams based at recognised Latin American universities may apply for these grants, providing that the research proposal engages with issues at the interplay between science, philosophy and/or theology and the themes are broadly included in the IRC project theme “**Perspectives on Life, Persons and the Cosmos**”. Individual scholars should be top-level researchers in their countries and at their institutions, with a proven strong research and publication record. Interdisciplinary teams should be led by a tenured professor or full time faculty member, should involve at least one more junior scholar, and have institutional support.

Topics

Research projects can focus on topics across a broad range of possibilities at the intersection of science, philosophy and theology, and the IRC encourages creative applications. The following questions are intended to help stimulate ideas and guide choices, but applicants are welcome to raise and address other questions within these general themes. If you have any doubt about whether an idea for a project would be suitable, please contact the IRC:

- The Origin and Concept of Life: What is natural, human, and divine life, how do we recognize life, and what do we know or could we know of the origins of life?
 - What are the merits and demerits of the most influential paradigms (e.g. thermodynamics) for answering Schrödinger’s question, “What is life?”
 - Might mathematical ‘life’ be possible, implemented on some suitable hardware, or interchangeable between different hardware platforms?
 - Can a ‘nature’ be distinguished adequately from a ‘machine’? Is some form of teleology required to distinguish a nature adequately from a machine?
 - Does matter have a propensity for life? Is matter necessary for any being that could be described as alive, in the broadest sense of the term?

- Is there more than one 'tree of life' on earth and how might we test this? Are there philosophical and theological implications for more than one tree of life?
- The Brain, the Mind, and the Human Person: Are persons their brains and, if not, how can contemporary science, philosophy and theology promote a more adequate understanding?
 - What am 'I'? Am I to be identified with part of my physical being and, if so, which part? What are my boundaries, for example, can artefacts become extensions of 'me' in some limited sense?
 - Are advances in neuroscience helping to clarify the relation between the brain and the mind, and are there also growing sources of confusion regarding this relation?
 - Is the concept of free will redundant in the light of Libet-like experiments and other contemporary work in neuroscience?
 - Is there or might there be a 'theology' as well as a 'philosophy' of the brain?
 - Does the cognitive science of religion have implications for the rationality of theism, atheism, or more specific religious commitments?
- The Place of the Person in the Cosmos: Are 'persons' irreducible in the cosmos, and are persons irreducibly important?
 - Among the possible meanings of the term 'creation' by a personal God, which, if any, are most appropriate for understanding the origin of the cosmos today?
 - Does the philosophy of the person, especially in relational or second-personal terms, have relevance to understanding physical theories, e.g. quantum mechanics?
 - "You are not a beautiful or unique snowflake. You're the same decaying organic matter as everything else" (cf. film Fight Club: 1999). Can this claim be validated or invalidated, and, if so, how in the light of what is known today?
 - How might the investigation of the cosmos promote personal happiness, considering such fulfilment from a theological, materialistic or other perspective?
 - Can a personal theistic perspective be detrimental or beneficial for the study and motivation to study the cosmos, and ultimate questions regarding the cosmos?

Prospective applicants are strongly encouraged to visit the project's website for a more detailed list of possible research questions. Favourable consideration will be given to clear, focused research topics and questions, with the potential for broader implications.

Monetary amount and timescale of the grants

The project awards will be divided into four larger awards of up to U\$30,000, with the balance in terms of smaller awards of up to U\$15,000. The projects themselves will run for up to twelve months through February 2016 and June 2017. Projects are expected to last for up to twelve months. All projects must be finished by 30 June 2017.

Proposal submission instructions

Prospective applicants should send Letters of Inquiry (a letter or email stating an applicant's intention to apply, the proposed title of the subproject, and the name and institution of the Principal Investigator) to Dr Silva no later than **July 31, 2015**.

For the final proposal, which must be received no later than **September 30, 2015**, applicants are required to submit, in English, Spanish or Portuguese, the following documents:

- A proposal form, with all the following fields completed:
 - project title;
 - summary (if your application is either in Spanish or Portuguese, the summary should be in English);

- questions to be addressed;
- hypotheses for these questions (if it is a science project) or a summary of the main idea or argument (if the project is more philosophical or theological in nature)
- relation to the project themes (life, persons, and the cosmos);
- description of activities;
- outputs (what will be produced);
- academic impact;
- public impact;
- team members;
- request amount;
- a budget narrative explaining the details of the budget;
- evidence of support from the host institution;
- a full curriculum vitae of the principal investigator (PI) or team leader;
- short curricula vitae of the rest of the team (if applicable);
- a budget, stating costs of planned outputs and products (e.g. papers submitted for publication, presentations at conferences, seminars, lectures, monograph manuscripts, etc.), projected audio-visual outputs, and other outputs.

Application materials are available at <http://www.cyril.org/funding>, and should be submitted via email to Dr Ignacio Silva at latin.america@theology.ox.ac.uk stating in the subject line: "RFP - Perspectives on Life, Persons and the Cosmos".

Prospective applicants are strongly encouraged to contact Dr Ignacio Silva well in advance of the submission deadline for informal queries about possible research projects.

The IRC will announce the results of the applications by 30 November, 2015.

Should you require further information about the application process, please refer to the Frequently Asked Questions below. If your question is not answered, please contact Dr Silva.

Selection criteria

Proposals will be rated by a panel of IRC members and external assessors in the United States and Europe according to the following criteria:

- quality of the proposed research project and outputs (products);
- quality of planning of proposed project outputs;
- engagement with contemporary scientific developments, linked to philosophical and/or theological perspectives;
- prospects for dialogue across disciplines, institutions, and confessions;
- academic achievement and promise of the individual applicant or team members;
- quality and opportunities provided by the host institution;
- prospects for effective academic outputs and outcomes.

The assessment will also look favourably on projects that have demonstrable potential for longer-term success which will maximise the benefit of investment. This potential will be assessed principally by the integration of the proposed project within longer-term plans for the personal development of the applicants, and broader prospects for their home institution. In addition, the IRC encourages the prospects for effective public communication of results through the media.

Applicants should explain in the project description how their proposed projects meet these criteria.

Successful applicants' obligations

Successful individuals or research teams will be required to:

- carry out the research and activities described in the project description;
- prepare a brief autobiographical statement or group description in English and Spanish/Portuguese for the IRC project website;
- submit a half-term report;
- submit a final report;
- attend the 2017 final conference of the IRC's project.

Application process milestones

1. Applicant must prepare and request documents for application (informal contact with the IRC team well in advance is strongly encouraged)
2. Applicants must send a Letter of Inquiry by July 31, 2015
3. Applicant must submit documents before deadline: 30 September, 2015
4. Assessment of applications
5. Announcement of successful applications: 30 November, 2015
6. Grants are held anytime, for up to twelve months, between February 2016 and June 2017

Frequently Asked Questions

1. Who can apply?

Individual scholars or existing or new interdisciplinary research teams based at recognised Latin American universities.

2. Can the project last longer than twelve months?

Large grants (of up to U\$30,000) are expected to last no more than twelve months, while smaller grants (of up to U\$15,000) are encouraged to last no more than ten months. In exceptional cases, larger grant could request for a more extended grant period in their application. The IRC will consider this on a particular basis. Please let Dr Silva know if you are considering applying for a longer grant period in your Letter of Intent. Once awarded, grants cannot be extended.

3. Is there a minimum duration for the project?

There is no set minimum duration for the project, but grant awards cannot be used to fund projects with just one meeting or event, such as a single conference on its own. The expectation is that the project will be carried out over an extended period.

4. Can the budget for my project be less than U\$15,000?

Yes, although we encourage projects to benefit from the full amount available. In any case, you should prepare a grant budget which is appropriate to the length and proposed products and activities of the project.

5. When is the deadline?

The deadline for submissions is 30 September, 2015.

6. Who should provide the institutional support?

The proposal form should be signed by an authority of the Faculty where the host individual or research group is based, or by any appropriate authority of the host university that is able to provide evidence of institutional support.

7. Which topics are acceptable?

Research projects can focus on topics across a broad range of possibilities at the intersection of science, philosophy and theology, and the IRC encourages creative applications. Projects focusing on fine-tuning, theistic evolution and the like are welcome, although the IRC will not consider projects on creationism and/or intelligent design, in the anti-evolutionary sense in which these terms are usually understood.

It is important to remark, however, that the IRC is interested in projects falling under the general theme of life, persons, and cosmos. Prospective applicants should visit the project's website for a detailed list of possible research questions. Favourable consideration will be given to clear, focused research topics and questions, with the potential for broader implications.

8. Can I submit a project proposal if I have received other grants from the IRC or I have participated in other activities of the IRC project?

Yes. There are no restrictions arising from participation in other activities of the IRC project.

9. When should the project begin?

Projects can begin and finish any time between November 2015 and April 2017. We suggest you make early arrangements to allow sufficient time for money allocation and organisation of events.

10. How will the grant be disbursed?

It is expected that the host institution will receive half the amount of the grant around a month before the commencement of the project, and the balance half-way to the end, upon reception of a short research and financial report.

11. Should my university contribute to the project in any way?

Host universities are not expected to incur in any extra expense to run the project besides providing work space and facilities to the project team members. However, we encourage universities to collaborate in any other ways they find fit, and applicants should express this collaboration in the budget narrative.

12. Where can I find more information and download the forms for the proposal?

More information can be found at the project's website <http://www.cyril.org>, where you can find all the necessary forms for the proposal: the Project Proposal Form, the Institutional Support Form, and the Budget Template.