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## Humboldt Research Award for Lucy O'Brien

**Prof. Lucy O'Brien from University College London receives a research award from the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation. Prof. Dr. Markus Gabriel from the Center for Science and Thought at the University of Bonn nominated the scientist for the award, which is endowed with 60,000 euros. Now both researchers are intensifying their collaboration. The scientist conducts research on the nature of self-consciousness and self-knowledge.**

"Lucy O'Brien is one of the leading researchers in the field of philosophy of mind with a focus on theories of self-consciousness," says Prof. Dr. Markus Gabriel of the Center for Science and Thought at the University of Bonn. In addition, the philosopher is the editor of "MIND", one of the most important journals in philosophy.

The scientist's main interest is the nature of self-consciousness and self-knowledge. Lucy O'Brien is currently working on a book on social self-consciousness. Her thesis: "Humans are social animals. We can make sense of little we do without thinking of ourselves in the context of other humans. And other humans make us conscious of ourselves."

She starts her investigation by looking at what it is like to fall under the gaze of another. "In English, we say that we 'feel self-conscious' when we are 'under the eyes of another'," O'Brien says. "But, what is it to feel that?" It's a peculiar doubling phenomenon, she says - a doubling of standpoints of the self and the observer within a single interpersonal state of mind.

The evaluation by the other is integrated into one's own consciousness, she says. How does self-consciousness manifest itself in such a connection? Through social emotions such as shame, embarrassment, or pride. "How do we control our self-consciousness and that of others?", asks O'Brien in her studies. She argues that people aim at pleasurable forms of social self-consciousness, through praise, recognition, or reassurance, but also invoke painful self-consciousness, through acts of criticism and contempt.

Excellent intellectual atmosphere

Lucy O'Brien has been to the University of Bonn more often in recent years, "I found the intellectual atmosphere excellent: productive, friendly, and open to different approaches to doing philosophy." Recently, she already completed her first residency as part of the Humboldt Research Award. Next summer, she plans to participate in Prof. Gabriel's summer school on "Delusion, Illusion and Confusion."

During her stays on the Rhine, the philosopher feels at home: "Bonn is a wonderful city: very safe, compact and manageable - with beautiful town houses." She had the opportunity to explore the region and was thrilled by the landscape. But not only that: "I love German food and have now also discovered the delicious wine!"

Collaborations worldwide

Prof. Lucy O'Brien studied philosophy at Sheffield University and earned her doctorate at Oxford University. She has conducted research at King's College London, Oxford University, Sheffield University, University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), and the University of Leipzig, among others. She has worked at University College London since 1992, becoming a professor in 2014. She has written books, including "Self-Knowing Agents", received several prizes and awards, and collaborates with researchers in philosophy worldwide.

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Prof. Lucy O'Brien from University College London comes to the University of Bonn with a Humboldt Research Award.  
Photo: Privat