

Faculty of Philosophy
James Martin Advanced Research Seminar Programme (TT09)

Venue: James Martin 21st Century School, Seminar Room 1, Old Indian Institute, Broad Street

Date: 4th Week ~ Wednesday 20 May, 3.00 – 5.00 pm

Speaker: Dr Kathleen Taylor (Department of Physiology, Anatomy and Genetics, University of Oxford)

Title: “Science and Cruelty”

Abstract:

Cruelty is a complex and disturbing phenomenon which has been relatively little studied by scientists until recently. How well can it be incorporated within established scientific frameworks? In the first part of the talk, I will briefly sketch some ways in which scientific research may be able to enhance our understanding of cruel behaviour.

Science involves instrumental and non-instrumental motives, but for cruelty the former is clearly dominant. The study of cruelty aims to reduce its prevalence and the suffering it causes, thereby enhancing human flourishing. In the second part of the talk, I will step back from the science to explore some implications of this project, asking what kind of enhancements we may expect to see and what ethical concerns may arise from a science of cruelty.