

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: 6th Week ~ Wednesday 3 June, 3.00 – 5.00 pm

Speaker: Professor Folke Tersman (Department of Philosophy, Uppsala University)

Title: “Non-Debunking Evolutionary Explanations of Moral Intuitions”

Abstract:

Some philosophers treat moral intuitions as evidence. That is, they take the fact that a theory conflict with intuitions to be a reason to think the theory is false and the fact that it squares with the intuitions to be a reason to accept it. Do moral intuitions deserve this status? On one view, that depends on how the intuitions are to be explained. If the best explanation of an intuition is debunking (i.e., roughly, such that the truth of the moral claim that constitutes its content is independent of the truth of the explanation), treating it as evidence seems unjustified. Sharon Street, Richard Joyce and others think that evolutionary theory gives resources for providing debunking explanations of moral intuitions, and take the alleged success of those explanations to provide support for moral skepticism (even if we assume that there is such a thing as truth in ethics). In this paper, I am going to explore and assess that line of reasoning.