

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: 8th Week ~ Wednesday 17 June, 3.00 – 5.00 pm

Speaker: Dr Lisa Bortolotti (Department of Philosophy, University of Birmingham)

Title: "Agency, Life Extension, and the Meaning of Life"

Abstract:

Contemporary philosophers and bioethicists argue that life extension is bad for the individual. According to the agency objection to life extension, being constrained is a feature of agency that adds to the meaningfulness of human life. Given that life extension removes constraints, then it also deprives life of meaning. In the paper, I concede that constrained agency contributes to the meaningfulness of human life, but in the end I reject the agency objection to life extension. Even in an extended life, decision-making remains constrained, and many obstacles to the fulfilment of an agent's goals are preserved. Agents with longer lives are also presented with new challenges: for instance, it might be harder for them to avoid chronic boredom, and sustain their motivation to act in the pursuit of their goals. Although objections from agency and boredom are often used in combination to support the view that a much longer life is likely to bring misery and become meaningless, I argue that the acceptance of the boredom objection undermines the persuasiveness of the agency objection.