

Philosophy, Evolution and the Human Sciences

A seminar at Magdalen College, Oxford, organised by the Calleva Research Centre and New Insights in Religious Epistemology project

2nd May 2013, 5pm in the Daubeny Building (directly opposite the Porters' Lodge)

In each session, there will be a 15 minute talk, a 10 minute response, and then 10 minutes for questions from the audience.

Part 1: Evolution and Moral Sentiments

Prof Stuart West (Professor of Evolutionary Biology at Oxford University) will outline the account evolutionary theory gives of the development of moral sentiments (such as compassion, moral approval and disapproval, and guilt)

Prof John Hawthorne (Waynflete Professor of Metaphysical Philosophy at Oxford University) will respond, reflecting on the implications of this account for our understanding of ethics. (What is the role of moral sentiments in moral epistemology? On the basis of contemporary science, should we take ourselves to be capable of apprehending objective moral truths? Does religion have any explanatory advantage in this field?)

Part 2: Evolution and Rational Belief

Dr Ralph Walker (Emeritus Fellow in Philosophy at Magdalen College, Oxford) will argue that secular understandings of evolutionary theory undermine the trust humans can place in their beliefs. He will contend that, if our belief-systems simply evolve in response to selective pressures, this undercuts the confidence we can have that they are also 'rational'.

Amia Srinivasan (Prize Fellow at All Souls College, Oxford) will respond – arguing that secular accounts can overcome this challenge, and that evolutionary theory need not threaten the rationality of human beliefs.

6.30pm: Drinks Reception in the Old Kitchen Bar

We are grateful to the donors to the Calleva Centre and to the John Templeton Foundation (which is funding the New Insights project) for making this event possible