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A Functional Analysis of Self-Deception

Date : 7 October 2024 (Monday)

Time : 16:45 – 18:15

Venue : LKK105 & Zoom Seminar

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According to so-called *deflationism*, self-deceivers act intentionally but they do not intend to deceive themselves; this is a by-product of their behaviour. This approach is problematic because it entails that people can deceive themselves accidentally or by mistake, which contradicts standard analyses of biological and human deception. However, the *traditional* view, according to which self-deceivers intended to deceive themselves, generates paradoxes: you cannot deceive yourself intentionally because you know your own intentions. What this means is that, if you, for example, intend to lie to yourself, you will know that you are lying to yourself and thus will not believe your own lie. I argue that a functional analysis of human deception elegantly solves both problems and a few more. On the functional view, a certain behaviour or trait is deceptive if and only if its function is to mislead. Thus, while self-deception need not be intended, it is never accidental or caused by an error. And because the self-deceiver need not benefit from deception, it does not follow that self-deception must be adaptive. Finally, this proposal not only makes good theoretical sense but also there are many instances of human behaviour that involve deception while the deceivers do not intend to mislead anyone.

All are welcome

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