

"Self-Deception: what it is and what it's worth" Conference
25-26-27th October 2017
University of Basel

Kollegienhaus, Petersplatz 1
Rooms III & II2



Self-Deception
what it is and what it's worth

25-26-27th October
University of Basel

info & contact
<https://cognitiveirrationality.wordpress.com>

Neil Van Leeuwen
Christine Tappolet
Elisabeth Pacherie
Dana Nelkin
Alfred Mele
Keith Frankish

 University of Basel

 FNSNF
FONDS NATIONAL SUISSE
SCHWEIZERISCHER NATIONALFONDS
FONDO NAZIONALE SVIZZERO
SWISS NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION

 FA
Freiwillige Akademische
Gesellschaft

 COGNITIVE IRRATIONALITY
PROJECT

Organized by the Cognitive Irrationality Project
Prof. A. Meylan, Marie van Loon, Melanie Sarzano

PROGRAM

Wednesday 25

<i>Time</i>	<i>Room</i>	<i>Speaker</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Chair</i>
09:00-09:30	Welcome			
09:30 -10:40	111	Elisabeth Pacherie	“Confabulating Reasons for Action: A Case of Self-Deception?”	Anne Meylan
10:40 -11:00	Coffee break			
11:00 -11:50	111	Federico Lauria	“The Affective Filter View of Self-Deception: Emotions in Aid of Non-Intentionalism”	Jie Gao
	112	Lina Maria Lissia	“Against the 'resolutions conception' of weakness of will”	Sophie Keeling
12:00 -13:30	Lunch break			
13:30 -14:20	111	Marie van Loon	“The Reasons-Responsiveness of Self-Deception”	Federico Lauria
	112	Melanie Sarzano	“Costly False Beliefs”	Jakob Ohlorst
14:30 -15:20	111	Sebastian Aeschbach	“Ressentiment and Self-Deception	Melanie Sarzano
	112	Casey Doyle	“Telling Yourself and Deceiving Yourself”	Marie van Loon
15:20 -15:40	Coffee break			
15:40 -17:00	111	Keith Frankish (via Skype)	“Self-deception as Misidentified Pragmatic Acceptance”	Marie van Loon
19:00	Conference dinner			

Thursday 26

09:30 -10:40	111	Christine Tappolet	“Emotions and the Self, with a Coda on Self-Deception”	Melanie Sarzano
10:40 -11:00	Coffee break			
11:00 -11:50	111	Benoit Gaultier	“Self-Deception and Corrupted Judgement”	Melanie Sarzano
	112	Elisabetta Galeotti	“How to Value Self-Deception”	Marie van Loon
12:00-13:30	Lunch break			
	111	Jesùs Lòpez Campillo	“Self-deception: An Expressivist Account”	Lina Marie Lissia

13:30 -14:20				
	<i>112</i>	Jie Gao	“Self-Deception and Pragmatic Encroachment: a Dilemma for Epistemic Rationality”	Martina Orlandi
14:30 -15:20	<i>111</i>	Konrad Talmont-Kaminski	“Is Religion a Form of Self-Deception?”	Xintong Wei
	<i>112</i>	Eleanor Gwynne	“Error About Oneself in Self-Deception”	Benoit Gaultier
15:20-15:40	Coffee break			
15:40-17:00	<i>111</i>	Neil Van Leeuwen	“Motivated Memory Search: A New Paradox for Self-Deception”	Benoit Gaultier
19:00	Conference Dinner			

Friday 27

09:30 -10:40	<i>111</i>	Dana Nelkin	“Self-Deception, Awareness, and Reasons-Responsiveness”	Christine Tappolet
10:40-11:00	Coffee break			
11:00 -11:50	<i>111</i>	Sophie Keeling	“Confabulation and Rational Obligations for Self-Knowledge”	Konrad Talmont-Kaminski
	<i>112</i>	Martina Orlandi	“Towards a Theory of Self-Undeception”	Anne Meylan
12:00-13:30	Lunch break			
13:30 -14:20	<i>111</i>	Xintong Wei	“Is Self-Deception Doxastic?”	Casey Doyle
	<i>112</i>	Jakob Ohlorst	“What Deceiving Oneself Hinges On”	Jie Gao
14:30 -15:20	<i>111</i>	Patrizia Pedrini	“The Lives We Can’t Live: How to Solve the Causal Problem of Self-Deception”	Marie van Loon
	<i>112</i>	-	-	-
15:20-15:40	Coffee break			
15:40-17:00	<i>111</i>	Alfred Mele	“Self-Deception and Selectivity”	Federico Lauria
End				

ABSTRACTS

Keynote speakers

Elisabeth Pacherie (Institut Jean-Nicod)

“Confabulating Reasons for Action: a Case of Self-Deception?”

People readily confabulate explanations for their action. I explore the relations between these confabulatory beliefs and self-deceptive beliefs and the forms of irrationality they manifest.

Keith Frankish (Open University UK, University of Crete)

“Self-deception as misidentified pragmatic acceptance.”

How can one deceive oneself -- trick oneself into believing something one doesn't believe? This talk will argue that an account of self-deception falls out naturally from a two-level view of the human mind, which distinguishes a level of passive belief and a level of active, commitment-based acceptance. It introduces the distinction between belief and acceptance and goes on to argue that self-deception typically involves the pragmatically motivated acceptance of a falsehood, designed to shield the subject from a truth they find troubling. It argues that the subject deceives themselves, not by making the acceptance itself, but by concealing that it is pragmatically motivated. The self-deceiver actively encourages themselves to misidentify their attitude as epistemically motivated and genuinely doxastic.

Christine Tappolet (University of Montréal)

“Emotions and the Self, with a Coda on Self-Deception”

The thought that emotions and the self are tightly connected is plausible. To find out how emotion and the self are connected, it might seem that there is a simple recipe: start off with an account of what emotions are; specify what the self is; and then consider what relation(s) holds between the two. But this simple recipe oversimplifies the issues. I will start by providing a map of the many questions into which the initial question splits. Then, I will turn to theories of emotions and briefly present the account I favour, i.e., the perceptual theory of emotions. On the basis of this, I will discuss the view that emotions are constitutive of the self and argue that the self is (partly) constituted by emotional dispositions. I will end with some thoughts on the role emotions play in self-deception.

Neil Van Leeuwen (Georgia State University))

“Motivated Memory Search: A New Paradox for Self-Deception“

Several recent and old results in social psychology suggest that, even when people have distorted cognitions, they often still have underlying accurate cognitions on the topic about which the distortion occurs. Furthermore, there is reason to think, if we follow Kunda (1990), that much of the distortion that occurs in motivated reasoning occurs because of a biased

memory search, and the biased cognition occurs because rational mechanisms are operating on a distorted sample of memories that result from the search. But I will argue that a paradox arises from looking at the specifics of the idea of a motivated memory search. Either the search mechanism filters out results that comport with the direction of the motivated cognition or it doesn't. If it does, then the search mechanism must be as intelligent as the rational mechanism that it's feeding, which seems absurd. If it doesn't, then it's no longer really a motivated search. I explore several solutions and argue they are all unsatisfactory.

Dana Nelkin (University of California)

“Self-Deception, Awareness, and Reasons-Responsiveness”

In this paper, I pursue the question of whether, and if so, how, we can be responsible for our self-deceptive processes and beliefs, the actions we perform on their basis, and their consequences. A particular challenge in accounting for responsibility related to self-deception arises when one combines, as I do, an understanding of self-deception as a non-conscious, non-intentional process with a conception of responsibility as requiring a reasons-responsive capacity of control. I argue that the challenge can be met, and that in the process we can see that awareness of an important sort must play an important role in grounding responsible agency, even in the case of self-deception.

Alfred Mele (Florida State University)

“Self-Deception and Selectivity”

This paper revisits the alleged “selectivity problem” for my position on self-deception, a problem that can allegedly be solved only by appealing to intentions to bring it about that one acquires certain beliefs, or to make it easier for oneself to acquire certain beliefs, or to deceive oneself into believing that p. I argue for the following thesis: (1) the so-called selectivity problem does not undermine my position on self-deception, and (2) anyone who takes it to be a problem for my position should regard it as being just as serious a problem for those who advocate the intention-featuring solution I mentioned.

Selected speakers

Federico Lauria (University of Geneva)

“The Affective Filter View of Self-Deception: Emotions in Aid of Non-Intentionalism”

Intuitively, self-deception is motivated by protection from distress. Yet, its affective dimension has been neglected. With the help of empirical findings, we propose that self-deception involves affective filters, i.e. evaluation of information in light of one's well-being. The unfortunate evidence/situation is appraised as uncertain, negative, and low in coping potential, which inhibits the treatment of unfortunate information. Conversely, the preferential treatment of the happy evidence is explained by positive appraisal and dopamine

regulation. This picture favors non-intentionalism. Intentions are not needed to explain self-deception; emotions are sufficient.

Lina Maria Lissia (Northwestern Italian Philosophy Consortium)

“Against the "resolutions conception" of weakness of will”

Richard Holton has proposed a definition of weakness of will as “over-readiness to abandon one’s resolutions”. In my talk, I argue that Holton’s definition is inadequate. The reason for this is that, in my view, the very notion of resolution plays no role in weakness of will, or, at least, no philosophically relevant role. In the final part of the talk, I sketch an alternative account of weakness of will, drawing from Kripkenstein’s behaviourist conception of rule-following: the weak-willed is someone who would like to obtain from herself a certain behaviour, but does not obtain it.

Marie van Loon (University of Basel)

“The Reasons-Responsiveness of Self-Deception”

In this presentation I argue that, following a certain account of doxastic responsibility, we are essentially responsible for self-deceptive beliefs. After introducing and motivating the question of responsibility for self-deception, I offer a reminder of Alfred Mele’s account of self-deception. I go on to review the reasons-responsiveness account of doxastic responsibility and show that, if Mele’s account of self-deception is right, then self-deception is by definition the kind of state for which we are responsible, in contrast with other types of irrational beliefs.

Melanie Sarzano (University of Basel)

“Costly False Beliefs”

In this talk, I bring together two sets of cases which aren't ordinarily compared: cases of self-deception and cases borrowed from the literature on pragmatic encroachment. By referring to Mele's (1997, 2001) account of self-deception, I argue that these two sets of cases lead to a tension concerning epistemic rationality. This tension is built around the idea that both self-deception and cases of pragmatic encroachment are motivated by the will to avoid costly false beliefs. Finally, I suggest some hypothesis for solving this tension.

Sebastian Aeschbach (University of Geneva)

“Ressentiment and Self-Deception”

Several authors have recently argued that the phenomenon of resentment involves a form of self-deception. My presentation shall discuss this claim and illustrate how the phenomenon of resentment may provide an account of self-deception when the latter involves axiological properties. In other words, resentment describes the case where the fox comes to believe that the sweet grapes are sour, that is, cases where one indulges in a form of reevaluation. I shall then argue that resentment is neither a form of hypocrisy nor a successful internalization of new values, but an illusion of inner-perception.

Casey Doyle (University of Oxford)

“Telling Yourself and Deceiving Yourself”

I argue that self-deception, or at least a form of it, involves self-ignorant pretense. In self-deception a subject engages in the activity of “telling oneself” as when, in a moment of anxiety, one tells oneself, “it will be alright.” Telling oneself is an act of pretend assertion or deliberation that is aimed at the alleviation of anxiety or other unpleasant emotions. In telling oneself one acts as if one was weighing evidence, inquiring, and attempting to grasp the truth, when, in fact, one is not. In ordinary cases, of course, one is aware that this is what one is up to, at least implicitly. My central claim is that in self-deception one is unaware of one’s own pretense. The self-deceived subject surrenders herself to her own activity of telling in speech or thought. There are elements of both activity and passivity in self-deception, which distinguish it from other forms of irrational belief formation, like wishful thinking.

Benoit Gaultier (University of Aix-Marseille, Collège de France)

“Self-Deception and Corrupted Judgement”

My aim in this talk is to draw a distinction between two different ways in which one’s desires can lead one to form beliefs that, given the available evidence, one would not have formed had one not had these desires. The distinction I’ll draw between corrupted judgement, on the one hand, and manipulated judgment, on the other, seems to me more important than that between wishful thinking and self-deception. I’m inclined to think that self-deception is a species of wishful thinking and that the two phenomenon do not really differ in nature and are equally blameworthy as cases of corrupted judgment, while cases of manipulated judgment can be radically different from cases of corrupted judgement and be beyond criticism. An important consequence of the way I’ll argue for these claims is that cases in which one’s judgment is biased by one’s emotions but not by one’s desires (assuming this is conceivable) should not be characterized as cases of corrupted judgement and are not instances of culpable weakness, contrary to cases of corrupted judgement. This means that we should not merely distinguish ‘cold’ instances of biased believing from ‘non-cold’ instances of biased believing but divide ‘non-cold’ instances into two groups: motivationally biased believing and emotionally biased believing.

Elisabetta Galeotti (Università del Piemonte Orientale)

“How to Value Self-Deception”

In the first section of the paper, I shall deal with the evaluation of SD as bad or good, in prudential terms, due to the consideration of SD as an irrational state. . In the second section of the paper, I shall consider instead the moral evaluation of SD and present the different reasons for conceiving SD a morally faulty condition, besides being an epistemically faulty state. If SD is seen as practically rational, though, there are no grounds for moral disapproval of the self-deceiver. In the third section, I shall propose my view and argue that the moral evaluation should take into account the ex-post evaluation of previous self-deceiver.

Jesús López Campillo (University of Murcia)

“Self-deception: An Expressivist Account”

Self-deceived subjects share two key features: 1) they exhibit a certain kind of irrational and conflicting behavior, and 2) they tend to biasedly rationalize their irrational behavior making up excuses. Motivationalist accounts are able to explain very nicely how self-deceived subjects try to rationalize their behavior, but they fail to explain the conflicting behavior of some types of cases of self-deception. It will be argued that the conflicting behavior of those cases is better explained within the framework of an expressivist notion of mental states, namely, that mental states are identical with patterns of expression.

Jie Gao (University of Leuven)

“Self-Deception and Pragmatic Encroachment:
a Dilemma for Epistemic Rationality”

Self-deception is taken to be epistemically irrational because it involves holding a doxastic attitude as a consequence of some motivational bias. Pragmatic encroachment on epistemic rationality is the thesis that the rationality of a doxastic attitude partly depends on practical factors (e.g., Schroeder 2012). In this talk, I aim to argue for a dilemma about epistemic rationality: either one abandons the idea that self-deception is epistemically irrational, or one abandons pragmatic encroachment on epistemic rationality.

Konrad Talmont-Kaminski (University of Bialystok)

“Is Religion a Form of Self-Deception?”

One form of deception that is often met with in the animal kingdom is Batesian mimicry, where one species of harmless animal mimics another dangerous species in order to avoid being eaten. I will argue that religious beliefs are somewhat like that in so far as to function they must mimic common sense beliefs. As this view has some similarities to Van Leeuwen’s religious credences, I will endeavor to make clear the differences between them. In particular, I will draw attention to the significance of the means by which beliefs, including religious ones, come to be stabilized within an individual and a culture.

Eleanor Gwynne (University of Southampton)

“Error About Oneself in Self-Deception”

The thought that emotions and the self are tightly connected is plausible. To find out how According to Richard Holton (2001) self-deception involves a failure of self-knowledge which is constituted by an error about one's own reasoning. I will agree with Holton's observation that the motivational account of self-deception (Mele, 2001) is incomplete insofar as it fails to represent the subject as lacking self-knowledge, while rejecting Holton's description of this failure of self-knowledge in favour of a more minimal alternative.

Sophie Keeling (University of Southampton)

“Confabulation and Rational Obligations for Self-Knowledge”

I argue that confabulation is motivated by the desire to believe we have fulfilled rational obligations to be in a position to know and report certain mental facts about ourselves. As such, I see confabulation as a form of self-deception. My conclusion impacts two discussions. It tells us something about confabulation – how it is brought about, which engenders lively debate in and of itself. And it also has implications for understanding self-knowledge – that we have rational requirements to be in a position to acquire it.

Martina Orlandi (McGill University)

“Towards a Theory of Self-Undeception”

In this paper I develop Van Leeuwen’s view of self-deception as a phenomenon of subjective irrationality where the agent violates her own epistemic norms. I fill in some relevant but missing details and I show how this developed view maps onto the largely neglected phenomenon of coming out of self-deception (what I call self-undeception). Lastly, I defend the philosophical relevance of self-undeception by showing that an investigation of this phenomenon contributes to our understanding of self-deception.

Xintong Wei (University of Saint Andrews / Stirling)

“Is Self-Deception Doxastic?”

According to the doxastic view of self-deception, the end-product of self-deception is a belief (Rorty 1972; Pears 1984; Mele 2001; Davidson 2004). Gendler (2007) challenges the doxastic view and argues that self-deception does not involve acquiring a false belief but consists of imaginative pretense. The main gist of her argument is to appeal to certain conception of belief and show that since the end-product of self-deception does not match the profile, it is not a genuine belief. I will first draw up a normative profile of belief and distinguish a descriptive reading from a constitutive reading of the normative profile. I will argue that Gendler’s objection relies on a constitutive reading which is too demanding and requires further justification. I will also argue that the significant difference between the motivational role of belief and pretense should not be neglected. Self-deception as pretense cannot sufficiently accommodate the phenomenon of self-deception.

Jakob Ohlorst (University of Cologne)

“What Deceiving Oneself Hinges On”

This talk focuses on what I shall call tragic self-deception. It is characterised by the subject persevering in their false belief even when confronted with overwhelming sufficient evidence to the contrary. This raises the question how subjects maintain local rationality, i.e. do not fall into incoherence. I propose that as we can have hinge-beliefs (Wittgenstein 1969), in tragic self-deception there are parasitic hinges. These warrant the self-deceived subject’s rejecting any contrary evidence as misleading.

Patrizia Pedrini ((University of Florence)

“The Lives We Can’t Live:

How to Solve the Causal Problem of Self-Deception”

I address the selectivity problem for self-deception with a view to solving the “causal problem” it creates for self-deception. I pursue a strategy which appeals to the specific features of the general psychology of the individual self-deceiver that seem to be causally relevant to bring about self-deception (“The Single-Case Thesis”). I also argue that the individual features that are causally relevant to bring about self-deception play a functional role which is suitable for generalization (“The Generalization Thesis”). Finally, I approach the problem of the resulting “metaphysical composition” of motivation to self-deception (“The Metaphysical Composition Thesis”), which invites reflection on both the “causal set” of self-deception and the nature of motivation, more broadly.

This workshop was funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNFS) and the Freiwillige Akademische Gesellschaft (FAG). We also dearly thank the Philosophy Department of the University of Basel for their generosity.