Department of Economics – Neuroeconomics Seminar

April 4, 2019 - 17:00 - 18:00

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Neurocomputational basis of social learning and decision-making

The question of whether humans are fundamentally selfish or prosocial has intrigued many disciplines from philosophy to economics for centuries. From small acts of kindness to major sacrifices, just how willing are humans to help others? Here I will use models derived from reinforcement learning and effort-based decision-making to understand how willing people are to put in effort to help others (prosocial motivation) and how people are able to learn which of their actions help others (prosocial learning). I will then discuss how basic associative learning processes might underlie our tendency to be biased towards self rather than other-related information. I will show that in general, people care more about their own outcomes than others, but that there are substantial individual differences that are linked to specific brain areas. These findings could have important implications for understanding everyday social learning and decision-making and its disruption in disorders of social behaviour such as psychopathy.