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Pan narrans | **Collective narratives and cooperation**

Human cooperation has always been underpinned by shared beliefs—mythologies, ideologies, and cultural narratives—creating common ground among diverse individuals. While traditional views hold that these narratives must carry explicit moral imperatives to foster prosocial behaviour, our research demonstrates that even arbitrary beliefs can effectively catalyse cooperation. Through an evolutionary model, we reveal how these beliefs operate as coordination devices, fostering trust by aligning individual actions toward shared goals. Such narratives, even when morally neutral, transform self-interested actors into a cohesive group, suggesting that the power of collective imagination is rooted first in its ability to unite and, perhaps later, define morality. Extending this inquiry, we also find that the structure of social networks impacts belief-driven cooperation, with densely clustered networks accelerating the spread of trust and collective action. These insights suggest that narrative and social connectivity are vital to sustaining cooperation, reflecting a deeply ingrained human tendency to seek common ground through shared stories.

Wednesday, 08 January 2025, 17:00

Institute for Biological Physics, Zülpicher Str. 77a

Seminar Room S0.02, Ground Floor

Hosted by Joachim Krug