

TW Notes on

Robert Trivers, (2011) *The Folly of Fools: The Logic of Deceit and Self-Deception in Human Life*
Basic Books

He's Professor of Anthropology and Biological Sciences at Rutgers

His basic argument is that "we lie to ourselves the better to lie to others" xv

"Our sense organs have evolved to give us a marvelously detailed and accurate ~~view~~ view of the outside world... But once this information arrives in our brains, it is often distorted and biased to our conscious minds" p 2

"The brain can act more efficiently when it is unaware of the ongoing contradiction" p 4

"Both the detection of ~~a~~ deception and often its propagation have been major forces favoring the evolution of intelligence" p 5

"The more social a discipline, the more its development is retarded by self-deception" p 8

He argues that deception occurs at all levels of life - bacteria, plants, insects and animals

"Even within our genomes, deception flourishes as selfish genetic elements use deceptive molecular techniques to over-reproduce at the expense of other genes." p 7

Overconfidence is poorly ~~associated~~ ^{associated} with knowledge.

"Self-inflation is the rule of life" p 15

This process occurs in the medial prefrontal cortex

derogation of others is closely linked in and out group attitudes and behavior

p 20 "Power corrupts our mental processes almost at once" It makes us pay less attention to others' views

Stock brokers with a higher illusion of control tend to do worse

"illusory pattern recognition" construction of biased social history and false personal narratives

"The hallmark of self-deception in the service of deceit is the denial of deception" p 27

He suggests understanding deception mathematically as an evolutionary game
"different sections of the brain appear to have been co-opted in evolution to suppress the activity of other sections to create self-deceptive thinking" p 58

The immune system is quite costly to operate and self-deception reduces the strain on it

the roles of denial, projection, and cognitive dissonance

"out-perceptual systems are set up to orient very quickly toward preferred information" p 142

"Memories are continually distorted in self-serving ways" p 143

denial is self-reinforcing

tendency to rationalize

tendency toward thrill seeking

as well as over confidence in stock trading

metaphors in the stock market systematic bias in the use of language "up trends are more the action of agents, while down trends are externally caused" p 160

the euphemism treadmill

"There is a close analogy between self-deception within an individual and self-deception within an organization" 203

All countries have false historical narratives

He argues that "For roughly a century biologists had the social world analyzed almost upside down" p 304 because they thought natural selection worked for the group rather than the individual

He's extremely critical of economics and argues it isn't a science since it "fails to ground itself in underlying knowledge (in this case, biology)" p 310

Maximizing utility is "a shell game" biology now has a well-developed theory of exactly what utility is... based on Darwin's concept of reproductive success" p 311