

Seminario Permanente
Instituto de Estudios de la Ciencia y la Tecnología

FILOSOFÍA, CIENCIA Y TECNOLOGÍA

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Aula 11.2 del Edificio I+D+i

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“Trusting the speaker”

<https://usal-es.zoom.us/j/84757860824?pwd=cE00UEtxWm1mT2p6QlBud1BCUjJKQT09>

Abstract

In most conversations the audience adopts as a default a stance of trust in speakers' truthfulness (Levine 2014) even if this trust is vigilant and can be easily rescinded (Sperber et al 2015). Most of the time the presumption that the speaker is honest pays off. It has been empirically shown (Serota & Levine 2014) that most communication by most people is honest most of the time, while deception is relatively infrequent in comparison with honest messages (and most dishonest messages are due to a few prolific liars). Building on the Gricean framework, as well as on more recent literature (e.g. Moran 2017) I aim to explore whether this trust extends to epistemic reliability or not. Does the audience assume, most of the time, that the speaker is epistemically reliable? I will tackle this question by looking at situations where the speaker is not epistemically reliable, namely when she is bullshitting. For this I will use a notion of bullshit more encompassing than the one proposed by Frankfurt (1985). I propose that we should not analyze bullshit in intentional terms (i.e. as indifference). Secondly, I propose that we should not analyze it in relation to truth. Roughly put, I propose that bullshit is best characterized as speaking with carelessness toward the evidence for one's conversational contribution. I put forward a number of examples that motivate this characterization. Furthermore, I argue that we can analyze speaking with carelessness toward the evidence in Gricean terms as a violation of the second Quality maxim. I will explore whether the Quality supermaxim, together with its subordinate maxims, demand not only that the speaker is truthful but also that she is epistemically reliable. I will argue this is backed by data from epistemic hedges and evidentials which jointly suggest that in most contexts speakers' reliability for her contribution is tacitly assumed. I further discuss whether we should interpret what counts as adequate evidence, as stipulated by the second Quality Maxim, in contextualist terms or in subjectivist terms and weigh the different predictions that these interpretations give.