23.10.2024
16:30 Uhr

Similarity First in Philosophy and Cognitive Science

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Philosophy in the empiricist tradition, up until Rudolf Carnap's *Aufbau*, assumed a central role for similarity as the basis for kind concepts, beliefs, and theories. Following problems in Carnap's work, Nelson Goodman formulated his general strictures against similarity as a philosophical concept. Around the same time, psychologists, such as Eleanor Rosch, based human categorization on similarity (rather than on definitions). However, similarity-based accounts of cognition are often still viewed with suspicion due to the apparent philosophical failures of similarity and its supposed eliminability in favour of more precise concepts.

This talk defends the idea that similarity is fundamental to cognition, and even respectable metaphysical debates. How can this thesis be reconciled with the many objections to similarity, and how does it relate to the fact that there are multiple conceptions and representations of similarity?

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