

**Davidson:**  
*Deception and Division*

**§ The Problem of self-deception**

Self-deception is notoriously troublesome, since in some of its manifestations it seems to require us not only to say that someone believes both a certain proposition and its negation, but also to hold that one belief sustains the other.

- (1) D believes that he is bald.
- (2) D believes that he is not bald.
- (3) D believes that he is bald and he is not bald.
- (4) D does not believe that he is bald.

In the sort of self-deception that I shall discuss, a belief like that reported in (1) is a causal condition of a belief which contradicts it, such as (2).

**The task:**

\_\_\_ We have the task, then, of explaining how someone can have beliefs like (1) and (2) without his putting (1) and (2) together, even though he believes (2) *because* he believes (1).

**§ [the Principle of Contenance]**

\_\_\_ One should not intentionally perform an action when one judges on the basis of what one deems to be all the available considerations that an alternative and accessible course of action would be better.

**§ [the requirement of total evidence for inductive reasoning]:**

\_\_\_ When we are deciding among a set of mutually exclusive hypothesis, this requirement enjoins us to give credence to the hypothesis most highly supported by all available relevant evidence.

**§ Two forms of irrationality: weakness of the warrant and weakness of the will**

The existence of conflict is a necessary condition of both forms of irrationality.

**\* [Weakness of Will]:**

\_\_\_ A weak-willed action occurs in a context of conflict; the akratic agent has want he takes to be reasons both for and against a course of action. He judges, on the basis of all his reasons, that one course of action is best, yet opts for another; he has acted 'contrary to his own best judgment.'

**\* [Weakness of the Warrant]:**

\_\_\_ When a person has evidence both for and against a hypothesis; the person judges that relative to all the evidence available to him, the hypothesis is more probable than not; yet he does not accept the hypothesis.

**(1). Summary on Self-deception**

\_\_\_ An agent A is self-deceived with respect to a proposition p under the following conditions:

1. A has evidence on the basis of which he believes that p is more apt to be true than its negation;
2. The thought that p, or the thought that he ought rationally to believe p, motivates A to act in such a way as to cause himself to believe the negation of p.
3. The action involved may be no more than an intentional directing of attention away from the evidence in favor of p; or it may involve the active search for evidence against p.
4. All that self-deception demands of the action is that the motive originates in a belief that p is true (or recognition that the evidence makes it more likely to be true than not), and that the action be done with the intention of producing a belief in the negation of p.
5. The state that motivates self-deception and the state it produces coexist; in the strongest case, the belief that p not only causes a belief in the negation of p, but also sustains it.

Self-deception is thus a form of self-induced weakness of the warrant.

**Examples**

[A]

1. I care about my health; I am afraid of dying.
2. I should not do anything that gravely endangers my health.
3. I know that smoking gravely endangers my health.
4. Therefore, I should not smoke.
5. But I still smoke. Why?

**Q:** What is “weakness of will”?

[B]

1. All beliefs are genuine beliefs: a subject does not hold any belief that she does not truly believes.
2. One forms a belief on the basis of available evidence.
3. When presented with a set of mutually exclusive hypotheses, we would choose to believe in the one that is most supported by all available relevant evidence.
4. I believe, on the basis of all available relevant evidence, that there is no afterlife.
5. But I believe in afterlife after all. Why?

**Q; What is wishful thinking?**

**[C]**

- 1. I know that my boyfriend does not love me.**
- 2. I believe that he doesn't love me.**
- 3. My belief is supported by all available relevant evidence.**
- 4. But I cannot believe that he really doesn't love me.**
- 5. Therefore, I believe that he still loves me, in his special way. Why?**

**Q: What is self-deception?**