

Donald Davidson: *Who is Fooled?*

§ Examples of self-deception

- mass self-deception of the value of John Cage's work
- dreaming
- compulsive gambler
- Akrasia
- day dreaming
- Madame Bovary

§ lying to oneself vs. self-deception

Q: What are the differences?

* Conceptual problems related to self-deception

1. The first such problem concerns the clarity of the notion of lying to oneself.
Is it possible to lie to oneself?
 who is being deceived? Who is doing the deceiving?
 how is one communicating to oneself in the act of self-deception? (internal dialogue?)
 Is lying something one can do without knowing it?

2. There is also a difficulty in identifying the proposition with respect to which the liar wishes to mislead.
 A liar must make an assertion, and so represent himself as believing what he does not.

3. Self-deception would require that one perform an act with the intention both that that intention be recognized (by oneself) and not recognized (since to recognize it would defeat its purpose.)

§ self-deception vs. wishful thinking

Q: What are the differences?

In self-deception one must at some time have known the truth, or, to be more accurate, have believed something contrary to the belief engendered by the deception. This original knowledge must, of course, have played a causal role in the self-deception.

§ The puzzle for the belief-ascriber:

___ If disbelieving a proposition entails not believing it, then the puzzle is ours: we would have to say that the agent did and did not believe the same thing.

The distinction we need here is between believing contradictory propositions and believing a contradiction:

___ believing that p and believing that $\text{not-}p$;

vs.

___ believing that $[p \text{ and } \text{not-}p]$.

§ Davidson's Assumption of Holism

___ The mere possession of propositional attitudes implies a large degree of consistency, and that the identification of beliefs depends in large part on their logical relations to other beliefs.

Vs. Mental Atomism: Jerry Fodor

§ Davidson's Claim:

___ All genuine cases of irrationality -- akrasia, wishful thinking, self-deception, bad reasoning -- involve inconsistency.

*** Standards of Rationality:**

___ There is no eternal, absolute standard of rationality.

___ But standards of rationality are not individualistic or relativistic either.

*** Davidson's Assumption of Overall Rationality:**

___ It is only by showing ourselves largely rational and consistent that we show ourselves capable of irrationality and inconsistency.

Q: Do you agree?

*** Two problems about self-deception**

I. The first problem is that as a form of irrationality it undermines its own clarity of application.

___ The contents of propositional attitudes are determined in part by their logical relations with the contents of other attitudes; to the extent that these relations of a

particular attitude are broken or confused, the identity of that attitude is rendered less precise.

II. The second problem concerns explanation.

___ Our normal mode of explanation of actions and beliefs is to review the reasons an agent had in acting, or the course of reasoning that led to the belief. Such explanations rationalize the action or belief by singling out other attitudes in the light of which the action or belief is reasonable -- reasonable not only to the agent himself, but reasonable also to the explainer.

* Davidson's two proposed solutions:

[A] A different form of causal explanation that accepts the idea that there may be mental states or events for which they are not reasons.

[B] the partitioned mind theory

___ the two obviously opposed beliefs could coexist only if they were somehow kept separate, not allowed to be contemplated in a single glance.

Notes:

- i) not fixed divisions
- ii) no permanent or temporary boundaries
- iii) the territories overlap
- iv) a single mind not wholly integrated; a brain suffering from a perhaps temporary self-inflicted lobotomy
- v) the idea of thoughts held apart

Q: Does this theory solve the puzzle of self-deception?