**Alfred Mele**
*Self-Deception Unmasked*

**Chapter I**

*Q*: **How do we deceive ourselves?**

*Q*: **Why do we deceive ourselves?**

*Q*: **What is it to deceive oneself?**

*Q*: **Is self-deception even possible?**

*Q*: **What are the differences between self-deception and interpersonal deception?**

§ **[Straight Self-deception] vs. [Twisted Self-deception]**

**[Straight Self-deception]**

In these cases, people are self-deceived in believing something that they want to be true.

**[Twisted Self-deception]**

In twisted cases, people are self-deceived in believing something that they want to be false (and do not also want to be true).

If some self-deception is twisted in this sense, at least one relatively common claim about self-deception is false – the claim that *S*'s being self-deceived that *p* requires *S*'s desiring that *p*.

§ **Two Lexical Assumptions**

1. **By definition, person *A* <u>deceives</u> person *B* (where *B* may or may not be the same person as *A*) into believing that *p* only if *A* knows, or at least believes truly, that ~*p* and causes *B* to believe that *p*.**
⇒ **stereotypical interpersonal deception**

2. **By definition, deceiving is an intentional activity: nonintentional deceiving is conceptually impossible.**

*Q*: **Is either of these assumptions acceptable?  Is either of them applicable to the case of self-deception?**


**§ Static self-deception vs. dynamic self-deception**

**[Static self-deception] ← assumption #1**
\_\_\_ At some time, self-deceivers both believe that *p* and believes that ~p.

*Q*: **Is this a possible state of mind?**

**[dynamic self-deception] ← assumption #2**
\_\_\_ The self-deceiver previously had a belief that *p*, and through some mental processes later comes to believe that ~p.

**Mele: Both assumptions are false.**
**§ Motivationally Biased Belief ≠ Intentional Self-deception**

We may have a tendency to believe propositions that we want to be true even when an impartial investigation of readily available data would indicate that they are probably false.  A plausible hypothesis about that tendency is that our desiring something to be true sometimes exerts a biasing influence on what we believe.

**e.g. Female caffeine consumers**
**e.g. Ike's forging his diary to deceive himself.**

*Q*: Can motivation issue in biased beliefs without the assistance of intentions or efforts?


**§ Two Competing Theories**

I.  **The Agency View:**
    **\_\_\_\_ All motivationally biased beliefs are intentionally produced or protected.  In every instance of motivationally biased belief that *p*, we try to bring it about that we acquire or retain the belief that *p*, or at least try to make it easier for ourselves to acquire or retain the belief.**

II.  **The Anti-agency View:**
    **\_\_\_ No motivationally biased beliefs are intentionally produced or protected.  In no instance of motivationally biased belief that *p* does one try to bring it about that one acquires or retains the belief or try to make it easier for oneself to acquire or retain the belief.**

**§ Pears and Davidson – the Agency View**

**Pears:**

_____ There is a sub-system… built around the nucleus of the wish for the irrational belief and it is organized like a person.  Although it is a separate center of agency within the whole person, it is, from its own joint of view, entirely rational.  It wants the main system to form the irrational belief and it is aware that it will not form it, if the cautionary belief is allowed to intervene.  So with perfect rationality it stops its intervention.

### § Mele: the Anti-Agency View

It is highly unlikely that most people who have a motivationally biased belief that they have a superior ability to get along with others have this belief, in part, *because* they want it to be true that they are superior in this area *and* believes that believing that they are superior can make it.

Desires contribute to the production of motivationally biased beliefs, including beliefs that one is self-deceived in holding, in a variety of relatively well understood ways that fit the anti-agency model.

*Q*: **Are there data that can *only* – or *best* – be explained on the hypothesis that intentions or attempts to deceive oneself are operative in garden-variety cases of self-deception?**

**Mele: The answer that I defend is *no*.**

**\* The example of Beth (p. 18)**
**\* The example of Ann and Bob (p. 20)**
**\* The example of Carlos (p. 22)**