

Alfred Mele
Self-Deception Unmasked

Chapter IV

Attempted Empirical Demonstrations of Strict Self-Deception

Q: Is the dual-belief condition ever met in cases of self-deception?

[Dual-belief]:

___ One simultaneously believes that p and believes that $\sim p$; the possession of a pair of contradictory belief.

Some preliminary conceptual observation:

1. The large collection of propositions believed by a person at a time may well include inconsistencies.
2. Possessing a body of evidence that provides greater *warrant* for $\sim p$ than for p should not be confused with believing that $\sim p$. We do not always believe the propositions that our evidence warrants.
3. Some people use the term “belief” to refer both to *what* is believed and to the associated *state of mind*. The propositions p and $\sim p$ are logically contradictory; that is, it is logically impossible that both p and $\sim p$ are true. This does not entail that it is logically impossible to believe that p while also believing that $\sim p$.

*** The Target Thesis:**

___ **Normal adult human beings always recognize – at least at some level – what is motivating their behavior.**

Q: Should we accept this thesis?

§ Case Studies

1. Someone might believe that his brother is honest while also having a sense that in fact he is deceitful.
2. “I know and believe that I’m a success at work because I only have to look at the evidence but deep down I still believe that I am a failure.”
3. The case of “blind-sight.”
4. The case of voice recognition.
5. The case of amnesia or hypnosis.
6. The experiment of cold water and heart condition.

Mele's Claim (on Case #6)

In no case is there an evident need, in explaining the data, to hold that these subjects were *trying* to bring it about that they believed certain things.

Given that there is no clear first moment at which gradually increasing pain has become intolerable, and given the postulate confidence thresholds, such an exercise of agency is not required to explain the variation in pain ratings across trials.

Conclusion:

I have not claimed that believing that p while also believing that $\sim p$ is conceptually or psychologically impossible. But I have not encountered a compelling illustration of that phenomenon in a case of self-deception.

I am happy to grant that there is a lot of unconscious processing of information (e.g. in perception).. however, the proposition granted certainly does not entail that there is a lot of unconscious intentional action – for example, unconscious attempts to deceive ourselves, or to cause ourselves to believe certain things, or to make it easier for ourselves to believe these things. Nor does it entail that there are *any* such unconscious efforts.