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Self-Deception Unmasked

Chapter V

Twisted Self-Deception

[Twisted Self-deception]:

By definition, in *twisted* instances, people who are self-deceived in believing that p do not desire that p .

Examples?

- ___ believing that one's wife *is* having an affair
- ___ believing that one's favorite team will lose the game
- ___ believing that one will not get an award that one has actually won
- ___ believing that one is responsible for something that is not one's fault
- ___ believing that one is not liked by one's peers

Q: What makes one believe in something (that is false) when one actually does not desire it to be the case?

§ Five Different Accounts for Twisted Self-deception

1. Pear's Motivational Account

He suggests both that the man wishes to eliminate all rivals for his wife's affection and (without supposing that the husband is consciously thinking along these lines) that the value of his jealousy-inspired belief in his wife's infidelity lies in its capacity, in combination with his desire for her fidelity, to lead him to take steps to reduce the chance that she will have affairs by, for example, increasing his vigilance.

⇒ **The agent has a different motivation.**

2. A Global Motivational Account (the FTL Model)

The FTL analysis of lay hypothesis testing suggests a "unifying" view of self-deception – specifically, the view that, in all cases of self-deception, straight and twisted alike, a tendency to minimize errors that are costly, given the person's current motivational profile, plays a central explanatory role.

3. A Purely Emotional Account

Emotions can make it easier for the person to believe that p by leading to increased vividness of evidence for p , by enhancing the salience of various p -supporting memories of his, by prompting him to consider hypotheses supportive of p (thereby setting the stage for the confirmation bias), or the like.

Sometimes these effects of emotions that p contribute to the acquisition or retention of an unwarranted, false belief that p .

[Hypothesis E]:

___ Emotions play roles in twisted self-deception as desires do in straight self-deception.

§ 4. A Purely Cognitive Account

Potentially, some people are capable of the type of control that would allow them to examine and control their cognitive strategies. If instead they persist in using biased strategies to search for, combine and retrieve information, with the consequences that their biased cognitive strategies lead them to draw false conclusion about the truth of p , we would say that their false belief is the result of self-deception.

§ 5. A Hybrid Motivational/Emotional Account

In twisted cases of being self-deceived in believing that p , on the FTL model, which errors are most costly for the agent hinges on desires, but not on a desire that p .

According to hypothesis E, emotion has biasing effects on cognition that *parallels* some biasing effects of motivation.

Perhaps it is the combination of motivation (by the FTL model) and the emotion (by hypothesis E) that explains twisted self-deception.

Owing to the tight connection between emotions and associated desire, testing empirically for cases of self-deception in which emotion, and not motivation, plays a biasing role promises to be difficult.

It may be that in some or many instances of self-deception, including the twisted variety, biasing roles are played both by emotions and by desires that are intimately related to the biasing emotions – either as part to whole, or as a partial cause or effect, or as responses to the emotions.