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**Division and Deception:  
Davidson on Being Self-Deceived**

**Questions about self-deception:**

**Q 1:** How is it possible for a competent subject to detect the irrationality of a belief that  $p$ , to form and maintain his belief that not- $p$  against weighty or conclusive evidence to the contrary?

**Q 2:** When the process of self-deception has been successfully completed, must the self-deceived subject hold both the rational belief as well as the irrational, self-deceptive belief? Or does the self-deceiver rid herself of the rational belief altogether and hold only the irrational belief?

**Q 3:** If it is claimed that the mind of the self-deceived subject is divided. In what does this division consist?

**Davidson's view:** the intention to form the belief

[It is not self-deception simply to do something intentionally with the consequence that one is deceived, for then a person would be self-deceived if he read and believed a false report in a newspaper. *The self-deceiver must intend the 'deception.'*]

[Argument in support of the Intentional View]:

1. Self-deception is taken to occur in a subject who is intellectually competent to detect the irrationality of her belief.
2. If one is intellectually competent, then one's beliefs must all be intentionally formed.
3. Therefore, that we must appeal to the subject's intention to form a belief in order to explain self-deception.

**Q:** Are beliefs formed by practical reason "non-truth oriented"?

**§ Alternative Accounts:**

1. Emotions are relevant in the explanation of self-deception

## 2. level of attention

Both these factors, emotions as well as attention level, may bias cognition and are closely associated with motivation. .... Yet, typically, these biasing effects do not operate through an intention to form a belief.

### § Lazar's Claim

The irrational belief is not formed by a calm subject who reasons carefully. On the contrary, it is formed by a subject less inclined to reason thoroughly but is rather more impressed with superficial cues. The cues that are more salient to the subject are those that correspond to the level of attention paid to the relevant issues as well as to her emotional state. Beliefs are affected by motivation through a number of biasing mechanisms.

We will be better off accounting for self-deception by appealing to biasing mechanisms rather than appealing to intention. The appeal to intention (to form a belief) in accounting for self-deception is deeply problematic.

### § Davidson's solution: A Divided Mind

His answer is that the beliefs are "kept separate" -- they are never put together.

1. The identity of a belief or a desire is constituted by its relations to events and objects in the world as well as its relations to other beliefs and desires.
2. Rationality is constitutive of the mental, because it establishes the framework within which we understand behavior that is described in mental terms – beliefs, wants, actions, etc.
3. Therefore, understanding an action consists in identifying its rationalizing reasons, and the attribution of a belief must correspond to other beliefs attributed to the subject. An interpretation of an utterance turns on the interpreter's portraying the subject as intelligible.

Because of Davidson's commitment to holism, severe irrationality must be seen as threatening the identity of the beliefs and desires involved.

It is quite difficult to accommodate instances of internal irrationality within Davidson's view of the mental.

*Q:* Should we then reject Davidson's view of the mental?