Audi And Self Deception Essay, Research Paper

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1. What is the philosophical problem of self-deception?

Just as Akrasia of actions is considered weakness of will, Akrasia of beliefs is considered self-deception. Self-deception refers to the way in which we (humans) can work our minds around something to trick ourselves into rationalising something that is irrational.

It can be considered as knowing what we ought to believe, but believing something else. This leads to a problem of inconsistency, in that how can we hold inconsistent beliefs, while being rational beings?

Most people would agree with the idea that humans deceive themselves, and there are a number of examples (as given in the lectures) that outline exactly how everyday this problem is, some including people who are sick but deny that they are, or addicts that deny that their addiction. Both cases show how someone clearly is being affected, but they deceive themselves into believing that they aren t.

Audi sees the main problem with self-deception as being when self-deceivers both believe and disbelieve the same proposition .

2. How does Audi attempt to solve it?

In dealing with the idea that the self-deceiver believes and disbelieves the same proposition he offers that in such cases one of the beliefs is an unconscious belief, this meaning that the belief is hidden from the subject at the time, but in all other respects is almost entirely like any other … [and works] in directing behaviour and serving as a basis for inferences.

By saying this Audi is attempting to explain how a person could deceive themselves into believing something that contradicts itself, and in explaining this he claims that the rational belief is held at an unconscious belief, leaving the subject with a conflicting irrational belief.

3. Is his solution satisfactory? Consider his example.

In his example Audi outlines an example of a subject who is attempting to gain attention by making it appear that they are attempting suicide. In using this example he is trying to show that when the subject admits that they are attempting suicide, they are not lying, even though they know they are not. The subject s belief of the suicide attempts is an irrational one (because they knows that they are false) and thus deceiving themself. The rational belief (that the suicide attempts are incorrect) has become an unconscious one.

This is how I currently understand Audi s attempt to solve the problem of self-deception. Based in this account, Audi s explanation seems to overcomplicate the matter. It seems more reasonable that despite the beliefs being contrary, that they could both exist in the subject s consciousness. As I understand it, there seems no reason why a person could not believe two contrasting views, or at least think they do. In the example of the person attempting suicide, they know that they aren t serious about taking their life (i.e. they have a reason to believe that they are not), but if they can trick themselves into believing it as well, then the affect of the ruse is amplified. If you like, the person would think to themselves If I think I believe I m genuine about the suicide attempts then I m not lying. so they attempt to believe that the attempts are genuine (i.e. they have a reason to believe that they are). In this case both beliefs are justified, and while there in an internal conflict between the beliefs, and that the rational one would probably override the irrational one, for a period of time the subject would have been self-deceived.

Some might say that this is an example of self-delusion rather than self-deception, but I would reply that I see self-delusion as referring to cases of self-deception in which the deception is not strong enough, or lasts long enough to really deceive the subject. Or in other words, self-deception refers to cases of self-delusion which are strong enough to carry through and effectively deceive the subject for a substantial period of time.