

Reconceiving Self-Knowledge: Self-Deception and Richard Moran's Account of Self-Knowledge

Self-knowledge has been thought to be a crucial part of being rational agents, but biases significantly impact our daily lives, and we are often self-deceived. Given that we view self-deception as problematic or blameworthy and that we value self-knowledge, it is natural to expect that self-deception and self-knowledge should not be compatible. Nonetheless, since it has been assumed that we are generally good at knowing our minds, the philosophical literature on self-knowledge has paid insufficient attention to self-deception. In this paper, by focusing on Richard Moran's account, I target the assumption behind the overly optimistic view of self-knowledge and investigate how the phenomenon of self-deception sheds new light on what an adequate account of self-knowledge should be. I argue that Moran's account could fall prey to an atomistic assumption—the assumption that one can consider the self-knowledge of one attitude in isolation from one's self-knowledge of any other attitude. This assumption would have problematic implications on his account, such as misidentifying cases in which one is self-deceived to be cases in which one has self-knowledge. One broad takeaway is that we reject the atomistic assumption and reconceive self-knowledge to be concerned with more than one atomistic attitude.