

Self-Deception and Kindred Phenomena

One good way of gaining a philosophical understanding of something is to compare it with kindred phenomena. This helps to put its features, including its essential features, into sharper relief. For instance, we might get clearer about what a chair is by comparing it to similar things, like a bench or a stool. Comparing it with a bench might teach us that a chair is essentially for a single person (if it were long enough to sit more than one person, we'd call it a bench). Comparing it with a stool might teach us that a chair essentially has a back rest. In this paper I will compare self-deception with some closely related phenomena to see how they are different and in the process determine some characteristic or essential features of self-deception, as well as of the related phenomena. Among the phenomena I will compare with self-deception will be wishful thinking, cognitive dissonance, confirmation bias, and escapism. This exercise will help disabuse us of certain misapprehensions about self-deception, where for instance one might conflate self-deception with distinct though similar things.