

SAYING, FEELING, AND SELF-DECEPTION

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What I mean by saying that someone deceives himself is that he evades dealing with something. The word "evade" entails purposefulness and suggests a pattern of behavior a point of which is to facilitate not dealing with some issue, not "facing" it. Roughly, what I mean by "dealing" with something is a matter of taking actions and attitudes appropriate to it. People are sometimes inappropriately cool and detached in the way they view something, and we may think of them as deceiving themselves via their detachment; yet there are people who are inappropriately and excessively emotional in the way they think about something, and we may want to call them self-deceived also. So it will be necessary to be flexible about what is meant by "appropriate." My main interest in this paper will be to try to clarify how self-deception is possible. A characteristic (though inessential) aspect of self-deception is a matter of avoiding thinking about something, and I want to discuss how this could be done. Another characteristic aspect of self-deception, not sufficiently acknowledged in literature on this topic, is the business of thinking about something in a manner which facilitates not dealing with it; this too I wish to discuss. Here I shall highlight an exploration of how talking in certain ways can be *constitutive of feeling* certain ways, and how this can figure into self-deception. Finally, I will remark on why anyone might bother to deceive himself.

Section 1. Avoiding thinking. How might one avoid thinking about something? The following example will provide us with a description of something which is a familiar variety of this phenomena (though not quite an example of self-deception).

Suppose I have slight feelings of discomfort in my stomach, and I believe that I am likely to become ill. I tell myself that I will probably be better off if I can manage not to pay attention to it. Presumably we have all had such experiences. Perhaps I am on an outing in a boat, and I suspect that I may be getting seasick, so I follow someone's advice to "keep your eyes on the horizon." Here are two reasons why such advice might be mentioned. First, looking at the horizon has a certain effect on one's sense of balance, and so tends to correct a maladjustment

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of balance which contributes to seasickness. Secondly, it may help to distract the ailing person from his misery. Apparently nausea tends to worsen if one thinks about it, and may lessen if one successfully avoids thinking about it. Here a medical expert might tell us that worrying about something tends to activate stomach acid which, in turn, aggravates the nausea. (Perhaps worrying about looking at the horizon would have the same effect, provided the person is in fact *worrying* about staring at the horizon.) Maybe that is why a likely candidate for seasickness is a person who worries about getting sick before even getting on the boat. Anyway, the advice rests on the simple (but fascinating) truth that there is sometimes a connection between what a person thinks about and how he feels; this seems to be such a case.

So, I will look at the horizon, and I will try my best not to think about my discomfort. Now how can I manage to ignore (or not pay attention to, or distract myself from) feelings of illness? Attempts at distracting oneself in such cases are interesting for the way in which they often fail. Perhaps I tell myself to look at the horizon (actually say to myself, "keep your eyes on the horizon"), but, with increasing desperation, only thereby remind myself that I feel nauseated. We know from experience that such self-directed utterances often fail to do the trick. In particular, they don't work when uttered (said to oneself) with an overtone of despair. And so we should remember that the way one says to oneself, "keep your eyes on the horizon" is quite important. To "talk to oneself" in a frantic way simply won't work. When we succeed in calming down and instructing ourselves in such circumstances, we adopt a "tone of voice" that *another person* might employ: "Now calm down fellow. Just keep your eyes on the horizon. You're feeling better already. Come on now." Such self-instructions involve an important pretense of sorts, namely, that I'm not seasick-me, but someone talking to me. I, the speaker, feel fine. Only I the listener am ill. Much depends on the quality of the pretense, since this bit of pretending marks the difference between the calm instructions (of another) which are needed and the frantic instructions of seasick-me which fail.

The effort to look at the horizon will fail if it amounts to a token made in a spirit of desperation. It is not enough to look at the horizon. I must look at it in the way one would for reasons other than those of getting over nausea. I can attempt to lose myself in any number of pretenses. Perhaps I play at being the captain of the boat; I swagger about the deck with eyes peeled for the first sign of land—in my fantasy I am in the midst of high seas adventure, looking for a sign of America, the New World! Or I draw a deep breath, smile, and play at being one ecstatically lost in appreciation of that beauty where the water meets the sky. The point is to look at the horizon, but not with the despair of "I must look at the horizon or else I shall be sick!" To become well I must pretend I am well, look at the horizon and pretend that I have—act as if I had—reasons other than my nausea. In short, I try to "be" someone who feels well, I try to be other than one who feels ill. Sometimes such efforts last the short distance from the cabin to the rail, but sometimes, it would seem, they work.

The key to my attempt to overcome my seasickness seems to lie in throwing myself wholeheartedly into playing at one who feels well, when in fact I do not feel well. By "throwing myself" I mean that I *do* certain things, among which are things I say aloud or in "silent speech." The things I do may be quite contrary to my inclinations to pamper myself, lie down, or put my head between my knees; I may resist the urge to look away with revulsion from the sight of food. Instead, I walk about the deck with an attempt at a jaunty, confident step. As part of pretending to be one who feels well, perhaps I go so far as to have something to eat. (I actually do this when I begin to feel seasick. I have a beer and a peanut butter sandwich. This usually helps me, though it may be a bit hard on my companions!) My aim here is more one of self-transformation via "thinking positively" than what we should call "self-deception." I do not wish simply to maintain an attitude about myself which is inappropriate to what I am; I wish to *be* something which I presently am not. And yet, looked at in more immediate perspective, there *is* here the aim of deceiving myself: I do not feel very well, and I play at being something I am not (a captain who feels fine); the audience I hope to fascinate with this pretense is none other than myself.

It would be misleading to represent my aim as that of getting myself to think *that* (believe that) I feel fine. I try to *think like someone who* feels fine, in seeking to have the sort of occurrent thought or silent speech that might be had by one who feels fine. This picture fits well with the suggestion made by Herbert Fingarette in his excellent book, *Self-Deception* (1969), that our analysis of this phenomena should shift focus away from supposed paradoxes about whether self-deceivers both believe and disbelieve the same proposition, and should focus on how self-deceivers act in ways they don't "spell out." We can see how fruitless it would be to try making it out that I both believed and did not believe myself to be ill. I believe my state to be one such that certain sorts of corrective maneuvers are in order, and the maneuvers I do take represent and evidence this belief at work. The strategy employed includes a clever "cover story" (Fingarette's phrase) which facilitates my entertaining thoughts (silent speech), about what I am doing within the "captain" pretense, which are not thoughts of the threatening and undesirable sort.

There is an element of "conflict" in this example, but it is not a conflict of beliefs. It would be more accurate from a phenomenological point of view to call it a conflict over possible selves. For the ambiguity regarding what I "am" here (remember that in this example I'm just a bit ill, not violently so) ties in with the uncertainty regarding what I might become; both "I am all right" and "I am ill" are anticipations of how things might be, what I might become. As one seeking self-transformation via playing at one who is well, the catch is not that I have beliefs to the contrary, but that I am prone to having *feelings* to the contrary, namely, feelings of nausea of the sort which typically would find their natural fruition in words of complaint. As I may become involved either in being sick or in trying to be as one who feels fine, which way I go is not decided by the presence of "the feelings themselves." Borrowing from what Wittgenstein (1958a, p.33;

1958b) says about mental occurrences, these "stand in need of interpretation." The feelings may awaken what Kierkegaard (1944) calls the "dread of possibility," for I can "go with them," in which case I shall be ill, or I can "go with" the pretense and "put the feeling out of my mind." The tension is between these possible "me's."

Let us consider the transition from the "me" troubled by nausea to the "me" playing at being well, by examining what Sartre might call my "reflective" nature, focusing on the things I say aloud to myself as a device used in making the shift. Suppose that initially I explicitly comment on myself as seasick: I exclaim, "Oh-oh! I'm getting seasick!" We will suppose that this is a case in which escape from nausea may still prove successful, and so suppose that this remark is not made in the "tone of despair" which characterizes the cases which succumb to nausea from the start. In this case the statement is made in a calm (inner) voice, with an air of detachment.

The way it is said is such as to make the speaker other than the (seasick) one "spoken to"; I might well have said, for instance, "Oh-oh . . . You're getting seasick." So both words and tone are such as to remove me somewhat from my ill feelings. *In commenting* on my state I remove myself from it, even if only a shade. The idea here is to make use of the fact that I am thinking about seasickness; the catch is that I must think about it in a certain way. I must think about it as if I were one giving advice rather than one receiving it. Talking "to myself" in such a fashion represents a pretense comparable to playing at being the captain, but we might say the pretense is on a smaller scale. If I can become calm through thinking calmly, then the way is eased to the captain pretense.

Suppose the next self-directed remark is, "You'd better fix your eyes on the horizon." The advice is good advice, and it is important that it be followed. It would seem this sort of self-transformation is going to require action as well as the reflection that is here employed. But something equally important occurs *in the saying* itself. Namely, once again I make myself a bit of the observer, contemplating the "me" who has been feeling ill. Our question is, how can I move from that seasick person toward becoming another—the one enjoying the adventure of the sea? The answer is that I *am* already automatically becoming other than what I was. I *am* the reflective advice giver—almost another person!—and in this capacity I am and I behave more calmly than I would were I merely listening to advice in panic.

Suppose I now advise, "Try walking around the deck, try pretending you feel well." Again, I am already closer to that possibility, because that aspired-for person is characterized by his ease, his lack of anxiety; but I am closer to being this calm person because I have become more detached. By now I am not the one gripped in nausea. I am the relatively calm advice giver. And while it would be extremely difficult for the person overwhelmed with seasickness to get up, walk about the deck, and engage in the relative luxury of day-dreaming of adventures, this involves no great effort or transition for *me*, since I am already fairly calm, relaxed, detached from that seasick person of a moment ago. As I am now in a

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position to profit from it, and as I may or may not explicitly counsel myself to do, I now take up the pretense of being the boat's captain.

Here the path to avoiding thinking about something was through thinking about it. The captain pretense is a behavior designed to accomplish something in such a way that one avoids thinking of what one is accomplishing, and why; but my undertaking this was facilitated in and by thinking of matters which I subsequently would "put from my mind." This is not the place to argue more fully that such strategies can be undertaken without occurrent thought, but the present example, far from undercutting such a thesis, gives it support from a different direction. For while it is true that (as the subject in this example) I did give explicit thought to adopting a clever pretense, I did not give explicit thought to exercising the skill of (silently) speaking calmly in the course of contemplating this pretense, so as to calm myself. That is, while I did think to myself, "Why don't you pretend to be the captain, so that you'll have your eyes on the horizon without thinking of why?", I did not also think to myself, "Why don't you cast your self-directed instructions in a calm 'inner voice'?" Anyone who agrees that we do possess such talents for altering our affective states and that we employ them skillfully, adaptively, without reflection, will have reason to suppose that our techniques for deceiving ourselves do not require us to have thought occurrences which would undermine the project of deception.

Section 2. Affect and trait-constitutive speech. What I have been describing turns on connections between *being* such-and-such and *doing* such-and-such, e.g., between being calm and behaving and ("inwardly") speaking calmly. I am going to try to make some of these connections clearer, emphasizing relations between what one is and what one says which fall within what Alexander Sesonske (1968) has called "constitutive speech."

A fairly common view is that language is essentially a matter of a speaker communicating information to a listener. Yet there are many cases for which this sort of model is inappropriate. When I hit my thumb with a hammer and yell "Damn," I need not be trying to tell someone—for instance, my companions—about my mishap. Nor am I trying to tell myself about it, supposing I am alone. Rather, as Sesonske points out, it is

more accurate to say that uttering the imprecation "Damn!" is a way of being irritated (try saying "Damn!" vehemently and see if you do feel irritated) and that singing (while walking alone in the rain) is a way of being joyous. These linguistic acts are not mere external accompaniments or consequences of an inner state; they are themselves constituents of the states in question. We can, of course, be irritated without saying anything, and we can sing without being joyous. But if we do feel joyful and sing, the singing is like the smile on our lips—a constituent of our joy and not a consequent of it. (1968, p. 26)

Similarly, speaking angrily is typically a constituent of being angry, making unkind remarks of being unkind, boasting of being boastful, talking about one's troubles of being troubled, speaking cheerfully of being cheerful. I may be

speechless with anger, and I may restrain my natural inclinations to say something I might later regret, but if I speak (unguardedly), the way I speak forms an integral part of the way I am angry. That there is this relationship (of part to whole, rather than cause to effect) is easily seen when we consider in relation to anger our "internal speech." Here I recall times when I have been thinking about an injustice someone has done me. I mull over his transgressions; in my mind I say things to him, I tell him off. The more I think about him the angrier I get. Clearly the things I say to myself go a long way toward constituting the precise quality of my anger. Of course it is not necessary that there be words of anger, but angry words feed an angry disposition. I live my mood in language.

A rough and merely convenient distinction can be made between what I shall call *affect-constitutive* speech, dealing with connections between how one talks and how one feels, and *trait-constitutive* (or *role-constitutive*) speech, dealing with connections between what one says and the sort of person one is.² Talking emotionally is affectively-constitutive of feeling and being emotional, talking a lot is constitutive of the trait "talkative." Often, though, these blur, where affects and traits typically run together. They do so for our earlier example of a man who attempts to speak ("to himself") calmly in order to feel and be calm. He is, on the one hand, attempting to take on a certain emotional state (of calmness) and, on the other hand, trying to facilitate his being able to *describe himself* ("to himself") as calm, as he may wish to do subsequently in a further application of his strategy, e.g., when he says "see how calm you are."

My main interest here is with affect-constitutive speech, but I must first remark briefly on the importance of trait-constitutive speech for the topic of self-deception.

I have argued elsewhere³ that when self-deceivers make avowals about what they think, they do so on the basis of grounds from which they make a biased selection, and with a special authority built into our linguistic practices. Armed with the terminology just introduced, we can explain that point from a new direction. Consider a man of whom it is said that he is selfish but is self-deceived, and thinks of himself as generous. He avows that he is generous, and he claims to care deeply about the needs and wishes of other. How does he piece together such a picture of himself? He reflects on numerous occasions on which he has entertained generous *thoughts* ("silent speeches"), for he knows that saying or "silently saying" such things is constitutive of being generous; of course he avoids reflecting that words of generosity represent only a part of being generous, and that taken alone they are not enough.

Looked at as a whole, his project operates on two fronts. He behaves selfishly, and the sorts of explicitly selfish thoughts he skillfully avoids having

²The terminology is mine, but the distinction is suggested by a passage of Sesonke's (1968): "While such words as *joy* and *anger* describe occurrent and short-lived human states, others refer to traits of personality and character. *Irascible*, *considerate*, *easy-going*, *cheerful*, *melancholy*, *sympathetic* do not apply to momentary states" (p. 27).

³Russell, 1973.

would be constitutive of the selfishness of those who did have such thoughts; as he does not have these, and as they represent a typical (though not a necessary) feature constitutive of being selfish, he can make out a weak case for his not being selfish. On the other hand, because of the thoughts he does have and the fact that these sayings would typically be constitutive of the generosity of one who was indeed generous, he can make out a weak case for his being generous. This may not be utterly convincing (my original characterization of self-deception does not require that the self-deceiver be utterly convinced), and yet it does allow the person to flee into feeling (not so) "righteous" indignation over the very suggestion that he is selfish.

The generalization to be drawn, then, is that trait-constitutive speech is important to the self-deceiver because it affords a ready avenue for his constructing a picture of himself such that he will have some semblance of being what he views himself as being.

Let us return to affect-constitutive speech. Imagine having a drink with a depressed friend. He relates trouble after trouble, and each time you attempt to present a brighter side to his situation he dismisses what you mention as unimportant, or argues that what you have pointed out is really an evil disguised as a blessing. His woes flow on and on and on. Up to a point you try being sympathetic, but finally you become exasperated. For a while it might have seemed that he was *describing* his difficulties, and *telling* you that he would like them to end, but it becomes evident that he is *brooding* over them—he is moping. His words fulfill his depression. You say, perhaps, "Look. You're just making matters worse with your enumeration of heartaches! Think about something else. Let's talk about sailing!"

The fact that we give such advice shows that we recognize that people live their moods in the things they say. We find the man aggravating because he is so clearly an accomplice to the very depression he complains of. He envelopes himself in depression just as surely as the man who cries "Oh God, I'm going to be seasick!" immerses himself further in his sorry condition. *By talking* in a depressed way the man *constitutes himself as* depressed.

I regard such speech as a variety of affect-constitutive speech; it may be called *immersion-constitutive* since the idea is that in the talking one "immerses himself" or "throws himself into" an affective state. Another variety of affect-constitutive speech is the sort of talk utilized by the person dealing with his nausea by "talking to himself" as if he were another person. I call this *detachment-constitutive* speech. These terms call attention to familiar phenomena, and facilitate considering the earlier suggestion that a person could deceive himself about some matter in and by thinking (truthfully) about it. He might think in such a way as to render himself inappropriately and overly "detached," so as not to "take it to heart," or in an overly emotional manner, so as to flee from dealing with the issue in a reasonable frame of mind.

Speech will be affectively constitutive of immersion or detachment *more according to how it's said* than what is said. Here we have to focus on what is

done by the speaking, and not just on the apparent content. I may think, "I've got to close my eyes and get some sleep," but owing to the way I say this, which is affectively constitutive of a highly agitated person, I keep myself awake through the night with such thoughts. Or, working late in the night on a dull task, I may play at keeping myself awake with the half-hearted pretense of agitated soliloquy—"You've got to stay awake now! This is terribly important!"—but say this in the soothing tone of voice of one who feels indifferent about the project, and facilitate the transition to a nap on the desk.

It is very difficult to say how much potential control over our affective states we really have if we employ affectively constitutive speech as a tool (as we surely often do). For as the above examples show, we may be engaging in speech affectively constitutive of a different sort of person from what it might *prima facie* seem. In other words, we should not depreciate the effectiveness of such speech as a technique just because we can recall cases in which, e.g., we tried unsuccessfully to keep ourselves awake by talking like persons who were wide awake. We should re-examine such cases and consider whether we might have been constituting ourselves as feeling sleepy at the very moment at which, at first blush, we would have said we were trying to keep ourselves awake.

As a guideline for how efficacious affect-constitutive speech *might* be, we ought to allow (until we know better) that a person can act on himself with (silent) speech to much the same extent and in much the same way as one person can act upon another with speech. With what we say we can calm, excite, confuse and befuddle, hypnotize, encourage, discourage, delay, and much else, including, of course, instruct. In suggesting that the relationships between my speech and my reactions might be like the relationships between my speech and another's reactions, I am not suggesting that these have the same "logic," but that as a "matter of fact" there are connections we have insufficiently noted, which can be brought into view with a bit of reflection.

Why might affect-constitutive speech (of the immersing and detaching varieties) work as it apparently does? The main theoretical implications regarding relations between thoughts and action are of two sorts.

1. What I say (or say "to myself") provides part of the *setting* or situation or context for what I subsequently say, do or feel. Speech behavior, like other behavior, can alter situations (the speaker's or the listener's) for the simple reason that it provides a component of that setting. There is a Sartrean point built into how I am putting this: We can come to see connections between thought and action not in terms of cause and effect, but in terms of setting and chosen response, where the "chosen response" *is* (is constituted by) what one says or does next, how one goes on. From this point of view the reason why you or I become agitated when I speak in an agitated way is because we then have a context in which—for the sake of continuity—agitation is an appropriate response. Note however that the existence of a setting or context in which further agitation would be an appropriate response is no guarantee that further speech

constitutive of agitation will be forthcoming. Further agitation is invited, but the invitation need not be accepted.

2. On the other hand, *saying* seems not only to make the setting; it seems to make the agent himself, to create his "being." This perhaps can be explained by way of considering a pretty strong form of behaviorism: To be depressed (sea-sick, angry, wide awake, sleepy, affectively immersed, affectively detached) is to be disposed to do the things which "count" for this, both publicly and in the "inner life" which includes such "activities" as silent speech. The more of these things one is disposed to do, the closer one is to what "being depressed" is all about, and, accordingly, the more one may be said to "feel" as depressed persons feel. If you can maintain along with other relevant behavior so important a feature of depression as the (silent) speech typically appropriate to it, then in terms of the "experience," at least, you will virtually have the depression, you will be depressed. According to this perspective, by doing as such persons do, one is as they are.

In connection with this, consider the case of the blues singer. According to Sesonske (1968), the professional, the *performer* who sings a blue song is not engaged in something constitutive of his mood, and so is unlike some of us, who "sing blue songs only when we are blue, and the song is always genuinely expressive of our mood . . ." (p. 32). While it is often true that the mood of the trained performer and the mood of his song differ, we also speak of those performers who are so well able to move *us* because they "put themselves into" their parts, they "make themselves feel it." Such events remain performances because of context: it isn't the singer whose love is unrequited; but that is how he *feels*— or so say some performers and "method actors."

We are so used to being somewhat aloof from our own pretenses, so *explicitly* aware when it is all for show, that it does not strike us that this aloofness and these explicit reminders might themselves represent a skill with which we protect ourselves against the feelings. For the feelings are as much the natural progeny of the behavior as the behavior is natural to the feelings. We may tend to think that the performer who "really puts himself into" his performance has *added* an extra something to his act; but really his art of "letting go" is one of leaving something *out*, namely the self-directed (inner) speech of one trying to preserve a sense of restraint, a gulf between him and his act.

Section 3. Distraction, immersion, and detachment. Let us now ask how someone may maintain a project of self-deception by speaking truthfully about what he is doing. How is it that, as Sartre (1956) holds, someone may flee something in and by being conscious(ness) of it?

I portrayed self-deception as a fleeing from dealing with something, and said that characteristically this involved the disposition to avoid thinking about that issue. It is noteworthy that this portrait might apply to someone who (truly) said, "I am deceiving myself." For it might be true that someone was disposed to avoid thinking about some matter, and also disposed to avoid thinking about this

very disposition, and that his words admitting this might represent no more than a temporary breach in this general policy. To this we may now add that the words the person utters may themselves represent a suitable strategic move in the maintaining of this general policy.

Consider a man on a high diving board who, in "silent speech" goes through the motions of "talking himself into" going off the end. Often such self-directed coaxings do play a role in one's getting oneself to make a dive. The preceding section equipped us to interpret this relation between speaking and diving. One may "talk to oneself" with the aim of *becoming* more and more a person confident enough to make the dive. What one says "to oneself" can have a constitutive role in this increased confidence much in the same way that one person's remarks can bolster the confidence of another. But there is another side of the picture with the person in my example: The point of his "coaxing himself to dive" is to stall for time; what he says thus is constitutive of hesitancy.

In such circumstances anything the man says may be part of a project of stalling—even uttering the words "I am just stalling." He may truly say that his reason for commenting on what he is doing is to stall and procrastinate, and (by saying so) *still* be stalling. We need to know *why* the man soliloquizes as he does. Is he genuinely trying to get over his tendency to hesitate, is he simply taking stock of himself, is he even now putting off the moment of reckoning, or what? There are all sorts of possible ways in which what is ostensibly a comment *on* what one is doing can function strategically *within* what one is doing.

Similar possibilities pertain in the case of the man disposed to avoid thinking about the import of his own conduct. Suppose we do get him to reflect on the behavioral pattern we find so significant, or get him to say (aloud or "to himself") that he is inclined to change the subject because he fears contemplating the truth. We must ask whether he is abandoning his policy of avoiding dealing with this issue, or only using a device to quickly consider these matters in order to lapse back into a pattern of avoiding them. For perhaps what he so briefly contemplates—ideally with a sense of detachment achieved in the *way* he contemplates—is only token contemplation.

Such a maneuver is a *high-risk strategy*. It is risky because an accurate assessment of the import of one's conduct changes the situation by making further reflection and, eventually, a change in conduct more glaringly appropriate. When a self-deceiver says what he is doing he runs the risk of others demanding, "Well then why don't you change!" To the extent that he has some commitment to commenting on his own actions and comments as another would do, there is even a danger that he will himself embark on or intensify this call for a change of ways. This threat may be risked because of a situation which "demands" more explicit commentary than the person may have hitherto entertained (rather as a ringing telephone "demands" answering). One gambles that with a few brief remarks one can relegate the topic to the category of something which has been dealt with.

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1956, p. 61.

An analogous high-risk strategy is found with a man who, upon being told by his wife that she no longer loves him, covers his ears with his hands "so as not to hear any more." His conduct is bizarre, for the matter has been said. But this gesture can serve as a maneuver establishing the situation as justifying flight. His facial expression is contorted and intense. He transforms this situation into being "too much."⁴ He remakes a context which calls for further reflection and then a new mode of action into one in which further reflection "is more than could be expected of one." A call for revised action is indefinitely postponed, and a general policy of avoiding thinking about something has been protected precisely by thinking about it.

I believe that practically anything a person might say (or say to themselves) might figure into this business of "going through the motions" of dealing with something in order not to deal with it. Perhaps remarks of the form "I know that x but I don't believe it" ought to be viewed in terms of high risk strategy. There has been much debate over whether such an "assertion" is intelligible, but little or no discussion of what a person who makes such a remark might be *doing* apart from "asserting" something. Might they not be trying to establish a situation in which, since token acknowledgement is given to the fact that there is something they flee from facing up to, further consideration of that matter is unnecessary? Such a maneuver would be something of a "last resort," since the risk is high that a listener would prod the speaker to face the matter more squarely, and, indeed, to speak in a more "reasonable" way about it.

These are all devices of distraction. They are employed by the self-deceiver in such a way that he transforms himself, or his situation, or both, so as to facilitate and/or effect a flight from considering the matter about which he is self-deceived. It presumably is this sort of distraction which Sartre had in mind when he reviewed the study of frigidity made by the psychiatrist Steckel:

Admissions which Steckel was able to draw out inform us that these pathologically frigid women apply themselves to becoming distracted in advance from the pleasure which they dread; many for example at the time of the sexual act, turn their thoughts away toward their daily occupations, make up their household accounts. Will anyone speak of an unconscious here? Yet if the frigid woman thus distracts her consciousness from the pleasure which she experiences, it is by no means cynically and in full agreement with herself; *it is in order to prove to herself that she is frigid*. We have in fact to deal with a phenomenon of bad faith since the efforts taken in order not to be present to the experienced pleasure imply the recognition that the pleasure is experienced; they imply it *in order to deny it*. (1956, p.54)

Supposing this woman in silent speech thinks to herself about what she has to get at the market; we can see how she might thereby immerse herself in, throw

⁴Here I am, of course, taking my clue from Sartre's (1948) theory of emotions. See also Sartre, 1956, p. 61.

herself into being immersed in, "being uninterested" in her partner's overtures. Simultaneous with allowing these overtures to take place, she constitutes herself as "being detached" or "being other than" what is happening to her. While it is not clear from this passage whether Sartre would agree, I would not call this a case of self-deception if, say, she simply did not want to "let go" her sexual feelings, but was not generally disposed to flee from thinking about this fact. On the other hand, if the position she takes in what she thinks to herself is that she *wants* to be sexually responsive but is *unable*, if she skillfully achieves this unresponsiveness with these techniques, and yet also flees facing her responsibility for this, then we ought to regard this as a case of self-deception.

I think it is possible but not plausible that a woman committed to avoiding reflection on how she perpetuates her own unresponsiveness could do so by distracting herself with thoughts of groceries. I think it is a practical requirement that she think of things which better enable her to have evidence to back the stand she will take about herself, which is that she tries to be responsive but is unable. This might be done by engaging in silent speech which was role-constitutive of a person who wanted to "let herself go"—"I want to enjoy this! I have got to let myself enjoy this!"—but affectively constitutive of despairing and panic, of thinking not about sexual fulfillment but about failure. Then we would have someone whose "inner" conduct contributes simultaneously to the stand she takes about herself, and to the aim we ascribe to her. In fact in so far as we regard her silent speech as constitutive of her *feelings*, the very same remarks of hers which allow us to say she *feels* frigidity a curse fit into the behavioral pattern about which we say she thinks frigidity a desideratum.

This same feature, where some one piece of conduct fits in with and perpetuates both the view the self-deceiver takes of herself and the project we ascribe to her, about which we say she is self-deceived, is found where speech constitutive of *being detached* is employed as a strategy. Let us apply this notion to Sartre's famous example of the disingenuous flirt. Her escort makes advances toward her, and, "She is profoundly aware of the desire which she inspires, but the desire cruel and naked would humiliate and horrify her" (1956, p. 55).

How can she be "profoundly aware" of this desire, and yet not bluntly confront it?

Were she unmitigatedly aware of such desires (her's or her companion's) she might simply act on them. Or, she might abandon herself to her desires with immersing-constitutive (silent) speech, e.g., "Oh my God, he's taking my hand!" But how can she establish a qualified and protective "awareness" which will lend itself both to her *being* a flirt and to her *feeling* that she is not a flirt? It is by persisting in the conduct requisite for flirting, for maintaining her escort's affection for her, while throwing herself into the attitude that "her thoughts are (were) on other matters." She may to this end (silently) say, in the "tone of voice" appropriate to someone other than this woman, someone who was observing what was transpiring, "So he's taken your hand. Well what is it to hold hands, anyway? It is a far cry from sleeping with a man!"

The content of her soliloquy is important and should be constructed with care, for it provides the context or situation for her feelings. But the detached affective tone of what she says may be even more important. If this is true it should be possible for her to say rather explicitly what she is doing, where the high risk of this is reduced by her maintaining a detached affective state. In Sartre's discussion the woman "does not notice" that she leaves her hand in his, and this is because "it happens by chance that she is at this moment all intellect. She draws her companion up to the most lofty regions of sentimental speculation; she speaks of Life" (1956, p.56). Of course Sartre does not seriously mean to attribute this to "chance"; this attitude is something *achieved* by her, and we are in a position to say *how*. It is achieved in the way she talks. This conversation, the topic, is suitable to the project of being detached, and will enable her subsequently to reflect that, "as far as she was concerned they were not flirting but just talking." But even if as he caresses her hand it "crosses her mind" that she is flirting, this bit of commentary will be entertained with all the impartiality of a comment on someone else. And now if she should go so far as to remark that she is attempting to achieve a sense of detachment so as not to face the fact that she is flirting, this thought, entertained in the requisite "tone of voice," achieves the flight and detachment it comments on.

Section 4. Can you be what you say? The flirtatious woman in Sartre's example thinks about (comments on) what she is doing as a high risk strategy which is part of fleeing from thinking about what she is doing. But what exactly is the risk? What is it that one is fleeing, and why? This issue is raised and vigorously pressed by Fingarette (1969), who says:

We have repeatedly spoken of an individual's having over-riding reasons *not* to spell-out some engagement and therefore skillfully avoiding doing so. Yet what's in a word? Why should it matter whether or not we spell out something which we are doing or experiencing in any case, and why should our refusal constitute so peculiarly human, so peculiarly demoralizing an illness as self-deception?(p. 65)

The question Fingarette raises ought to trouble any therapist who has ever been struck with how hard it can be to get a client to merely say certain (dreaded) words. And it should trouble Sartre. According to Sartre, "reflective consciousness" is always "other than" the consciousness it reflects on. Sartre views distraction via detachment as an "activity of flight which operates on the very level of reflection" (1956, p.39). This is undertaken as a flight from "anguish," which is explained as a "reflective apprehension of the self" (1956, p. 30). Yet for this reason he appears to hold that I cannot be the being I reflect on. "I can make no pronouncement on myself which has not already become false at the moment when I pronounce it" (1956, p. 116). This is not just because there is always something, viz., one's latest action, which is left out of one's inventory on oneself, as Ryle's "systematic elusiveness of 'I'" would have it. (See Ryle, 1949, Chapter Six, Section Seven.) It is because when I reflect I make myself be radically other than that which I reflect on, since in making myself conscious-

ness of it I "negate" and "transcend" it. So I cannot be what I reflect on being: I cannot be what I say. But if I never am that which I reflect on being, what could be the point of fleeing from reflecting on what I "am"? My comment cannot touch me.

Furthermore, on Sartre's account I am ("unreflectively") conscious of this alienating structure. It won't do to say that I flee reflecting on the *mistaken assumption* that it threatens me. So why there should be a *risk* to reflecting is unexplained. In fact Sartre trades on these ideas in developing another point, namely, that self-deception "Is possible because sincerity is conscious of missing its mark" (1956, p. 66). He develops this point against the background of an example of a waiter whose conduct is comic, overdone, awkward, "a little too precise, a little too rapid" (1956, p. 59). According to Sartre, being a waiter, or being sincere, is to be understood as a "representation" which one "plays" at. One can only "be" something in the mode of "playing at being." In effect Sartre holds that you can never be what you say you are, because what you say (like everything else you do) indicates what you feel you are not, what you are unreflectively conscious of not being, which you aim at being. This thesis is supported with complicated and interesting arguments, and also gains a "boost" from Sartre's trading on examples of people who are not "at home" in what they do. But the conclusion is that there is no danger of representing oneself to oneself as one is. So why flee?

The closer one considers Sartre's notion of "reflective consciousness" the more obscure it becomes. "Reflection" is defined as "the for-itself conscious of itself" (1956, p. 150). Usually the for-itself is, as Sartre writes it, "consciousness (of) itself." This means that usually when I act, as when I push my coffee cup away from me, the "object" of my consciousness is the coffee cup, and it is "posited" as such, while I am "unreflectively consciousness (of)" myself as spatially so located as to be able to push the coffee cup, or as "having drunk enough." In reflective consciousness the parentheses are removed, and I am posited as the object of my consciousness. But according to certain facets of Sartre's dialectics, this cannot make sense. If the for-itself is other than what it is consciousness of, it cannot be the for-itself which consciousness is "of" in reflection. Reflection is impossible.

Consider the sea-sickness example again. There the man reflects on what he is not (i.e., one who feels well), as if he were it, in order to be it. But should this be called "reflection"? In this example the for-itself (the person) reflects on something which it is not, which it aims at being; but as it is not this, we do not have a case wherein the for-itself is conscious of what it is, nor could there be such a case. And yet it seems plain that someone who says "I feel ill" does exemplify what Sartre would call "reflective consciousness."

Actually, the point I wish to make is more Sartrian than a criticism of Sartre, but I think it does bring out unclarity in Sartre's text. One root of the problem is that it is often unclear whether something someone says which ostensibly is "about" oneself is more a case of taking the detached point of view of an

observer, or a case where the saying is an integrated constituent of the doing. In other words, remarks which have the surface grammar of being *reports* about what one is, sometimes turn out to be *constitutive* of what one is. Speech is not always detaching. Sometimes it "immerses." Sartre seems at some points to have forgotten this. Furthermore, speech could only be employed to achieve a detachment or an immersion, one could only "play at being" with such speech, because sometimes such speech is constitutive of what one is. The popular idea that commentary always means alienation and falsification is not true. The relationship between commentary on oneself and alienation is contingent, and, as Sartre himself maintains, the import of one's explicit reflections must be understood in terms of the project to which it contributes.

Sartre's use of examples of awkwardness indicates that he would too readily assume that a person who says "I am sincere when I say I care for you" is thinking about *himself*, and who feels his words ring hollow. The fact is, such a person just might be thinking about the person to whom he speaks. Then his words are constitutive of being a person who sincerely cares.

These remarks enable us to propose an answer—one heavily indebted to Sartre—to the question of why one should bother to flee saying. The risk is not reflection, *per se*; one flees from *being* different. But first, let us briefly review Fingarette's answer to the "why bother" question he poses.

Fingarette (1969) develops an answer to this question in terms of a theory that personal identity is constituted by avowal. His view is that the self is a kind of synthesis achieved in "spelling out" one's identity in fairly explicit and generally verbal avowals. The self-deceiver disavows, and will not spell-out, because to spell-out would be to integrate features which are incompatible with the identity or self which—in terms of avowal—he is. Fingarette argues for this position in several chapters of his book, and analysis of these arguments is not possible here. His position gains considerable plausibility from comparisons he draws with the views of Sartre and Kierkegaard, and from integrating his notions of ego avowal and disavowal with the mainstream of psychoanalytic theory. In Sartre one finds both the view of the self as explicit commitment, and the view that one "is" what one (unreflectively) does. In effect Fingarette emphasizes the first of these while—though my discussion of this elsewhere (1973) closely resembles Fingarette's notion of avowal—I have here emphasized the latter.

The only objection to Fingarette's views which I shall consider here is that I have argued for the possibility of one's being self-deceived regarding something which he does "spell-out," and it is not clear to me that Fingarette's views can accommodate such cases. More precisely, Fingarette can allow for such cases, but only by a route not available to me. He can say that the woman who says that she is flirting in order to flee saying that she is flirting, is not really "spelling-out" but only going through the motions with "lines" which superficially resemble spelling-out, but which are not in truth spelling-out (1969, p. 89).

For Fingarette, spelling-out which is avowal is something done "in the privacy of one's own soul" (1969, p. 68). He says it is an "inner act" (p. 71,

quotes in original) and that "it is not in the ordinary sense an act at all, for we can never say of any piece of overt conduct that it *is* the act of avowal" (p. 71). In contrast, I have treated the act of *saying* as if it amounted to much the same thing whether one spoke aloud or in "silent speech." The sort of "silent speech" (often called "thinking") which is *contingently* private is the sort of thing which could in principle be replaced by overtly public behavior. In that respect I have throughout this essay preferred a variety of a "behaviorist" position. Where Fingarette pins the importance of "outer" remarks on an "inner" gesture, I try to cast the importance of such "inner" episodes as silent speech in terms of how they mesh with a pattern of behavior. Fingarette and I differ over the importance of what transpires "within." Rather than attempt to adjudicate with respect to these differences, I shall simply offer an alternative suggestion.

I prefer Sartre's idea that for human reality *being is reduced to doing* (1956, p. 476). As I see it, the self-deceiver flees from saying or doing what would constitute him as being different. His aim is to avoid situations which invite a person to candidly comment (aloud or silently) on some matter; occasionally he will risk commenting with either an excess of emotion or of detachment. He seeks situations which facilitate avoiding these occasions for candid speech. Yet such situations do not necessarily undermine the self-deceiver's commitments. Even the commitment to avoid thinking about some matter may remain intact even though the person thinks about this. Even though one speaks candidly it does not follow that one automatically ceases to be a self-deceived person. So what is the risk of saying?

Such candid speech *does* provide yet a further and more transparent situation which invites still further commentary, as well as inviting the person to abandon his ways. The context for change builds a kind of momentum as there is built up a context or situation of accurate commentary. The self-deceiver who speaks candidly runs a high risk because his remarks set the stage for yet further commentary. Simultaneously, the person who risks such commentary has constituted himself as being a different sort of person from what he had hitherto allowed himself to be. In so far as his speech is trait-constitutive, he becomes a person with different traits. In so far as his speech is affect-constitutive, he feels differently. He *is* more a person disposed to self-scrutiny as he does more self-scrutinizing. In sum, the person who candidly spells-out thereby contributes to a situation in which it will more and more be appropriate for him to say more, and to change, be a different sort of person; but simultaneously with altering his situation, he tampers with his being. He constitutes himself as being a sort of person different from—other than—what he had hitherto constituted himself as being.

So, the self-deceiver runs away from the possibility of being different, and from situations which would press him to change. Situations can build a "momentum," in that change can become more and more glaringly appropriate. Hence a person's general policy of avoiding thinking about some issue will be threatened by a history of thinking about it.

Even so, this threat derives its strength from the person being at least somewhat committed to responding to such a history "as a reasonable person would." That is not a commitment one *must* adhere to. And consequently I do not believe that *any* circumstances would render someone *incapable* of reviving and maintaining a policy of fleeing from facing, and fleeing from thinking about some issue. There will never be a moment of insight and clarity—never be an "outcome" of "therapy"—so forceful as to make it *impossible* to return later to a pattern of self-deception. One may be more likely to feel a bit silly falling back into the same old patterns, but it can be done. This ought to be kept in mind when debating the "effectiveness" of insight therapy, for what is "produced" there is not so much change as a context in which change is appropriate. Without the ongoing collaboration of the person, no factual or historical state can either undermine self-deception or guarantee self-transformation. And if the abandonment of a project of self-deception is not simply undergone, it must be undertaken in an ongoing way. New conduct, being different, and the related risk of abandoning old projects and developing new styles, will unfold as the person enters into word and deed constitutive of new and different ways.

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