Introduction

Were a portrait of man to be drawn, one in which there would be highlighted whatever is most human, be it noble or ignoble, we should surely place well in the foreground man's enormous capacity for self-deception. The task of representing this most intimate, secret gesture would not be much easier were we to turn to what the philosophers have said. Philosophical attempts to elucidate the concept of self-deception have ended in paradox—or in loss from sight of the elusive phenomenon itself. Yet whatever is obscure about self-deception infects our understanding of what it is to be a person, what it is to know oneself, and what it is to act responsibly. Whether in morally assessing ourselves or others, whether in the court of law or in everyday life, we are beset by confusion when once we grant that the person in question is in self-deception. For as deceiver one is insincere, guilty; whereas as genuinely deceived, one is the innocent victim. What, then, shall we make of the self-deceiver, the one who is both the doer and the sufferer? Our fundamental categories are placed squarely at odds with one another.

It is easy to see that an analysis of self-deception will bear not only upon our moral assessments but also upon our understanding of such concepts of perennial philosophical interest as "know", "intend", "choose", and "wish". And the topic of self-deception also takes us deeply into certain large-scale philosophical doctrines, such as Sartre's and Kierkegaard's.

That we deceive ourselves as well as others was no doubt appreciated of old, but it has become of quite particular, explicit interest in recent centuries in the West (cf. Peyre, ch. 8). A Victorian such as Bulwer-Lytton (Vol. II, p. 189) could already take it as evident that "The easiest person to deceive is one's own self". And, in mid-twentieth century, Camus, in his last major work, *The Fall,* still could place the theme of self-deception at the centre of his work:

> ... after prolonged research on myself, I brought out the fundamental duplicity of the human being. Then I realized, as a result of delving in my memory, that modesty helped me to shine, humility to conquer, and virtue to oppress. ...
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> (p. 84)

> I contemplated, for instance, jostling the blind on the street; and from the secret unexpected joy this gave me I recognized how much a part of my soul loathed them. ...
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> (p. 91)

It is of particular interest to note the remark on the "deceiving principle within us" made by the late Jacques Rivière, founder of the *Nouvelle Revue Française,* and "discoverer" of Proust:

> To set out upon the study of the human heart without being informed of the existence and the activity of this principle and without preparing oneself against its subterfuges is like

wanting to determine the nature of the depths of the sea without a sounding instrument, by trusting the surface of the water alone.

(p. 181)

Rivière talks of the "deceiving principle" in the course of an essay on psychoanalysis. He expresses the early and wide-spread appreciation of the fact that one of the great regions of self-deception is the one which has been blocked out and explored by psychoanalysts. Any of an innumerable number of psychiatric case histories could serve to illustrate the point as well, but let us consider at least one briefly. It is the case of a bedridden patient in a hospital (Nemiah, pp. 126–128).

The patient was very much concerned about his disability. He insisted over and over again that he "had to get going", that the "inactivity was killing him", that he would "rather be dead than a hopeless cripple". Although he seemed to be quite sincere in making these statements, his behaviour belied his overt attitudes. During his entire stay in the hospital, he lay passively and helplessly in bed. . . .

Because his total collapse had occurred after his second operation, the focus of psychiatric interviews was directed to this event in the hope of uncovering relevant emotional problems. The patient stated in a matter-of-fact way that he had not really wanted the second operation. He had been afraid that it might make him worse; and furthermore, although he did have pain, he was satisfied with his ability to work and function despite the limitations imposed by his condition. When he was asked if he had resented the pressure brought to bear on him to undergo surgery, he denied having had such feelings. He spoke very quietly,

calmly, and without show of emotions about the entire matter.

(He was given sodium amytal intravenously.) The effect of the drug was striking; as the patient now discussed the second operation, he told with considerable show of resentment how his doctors had called him almost daily to urge him to enter the hospital immediately for an operation. His family's pressure was even greater and more insistent. His mother told him "he owed it to his family to get completely well" and that he was "only being selfish to refuse the operation". His wife added her urgent persuasion and finally threatened to divorce him if he did not go along with her wishes. When he finally agreed to the operation he was told that the procedure would take three hours; in actual fact, he was in the operating room for eleven hours, because "the specialists left in the middle for lunch". He was "boiling mad" about this, but felt he could make no complaints because "it might make a breach with the surgeons". As the patient described these pressures and his attempts to withstand them, he began to express greater and greater anger at everyone involved, both family and doctors, of whom he said vehemently, "They stink!" Suddenly, speaking of at last deciding for surgery, he said, "So I finally decided if I had to cut my throat, I *would* cut my throat— and here I am; the family needed a lesson."

When he awoke, (the patient) had no memory of the interview, of the rage he had expressed, or of the details of his family's and the doctors' behaviour which he had recounted while under the influence of the drug. Instead . . . he spoke without anger or feelings, and described the circumstances of his surgery exactly as he had done before being given sodium amytal.

We can be sure that an analysis of self-deception will have an intimate bearing upon such concepts as "conscious", "unconscious", and "defence", and upon the elucidation of psychoanalytic and psychiatric theory more generally.

Who can doubt that we do deceive ourselves? Yet who can explain coherently and explicitly how we do so?

> So long as Lucien tries only to convince others, the evil is merely embryonic; this is the first step towards hypocrisy. But have you noticed that, with Lucien, the hypocrisy becomes deeper day by day. He is the first victim of all the false motives he brings forth; eventually he convinced himself that it is these false motives that are guiding him, whereas in reality it is he who bends and guides them. The true hypocrite is the one who ceases to perceive his deception, the one who lies with sincerity.
>
> (Gide, pp. 393–4)

"The one who lies with sincerity", who convinces himself of what he even then knows is not so, who lies to himself and to others and believes his own lie though in his heart he knows it is a lie—the phenomenon is so familiar, the task so easy, that we nod our heads and say, "of course". Yet, when we examine what we have said with respect to its inner coherency, we are tempted to dismiss such a description as nonsense.

In the following pages I shall try to unravel these paradoxes by getting a clear understanding of how we use the language associated with self-deception. But this way of putting matters does not adequately characterize what I am attempting to do. I am also trying to isolate, identify, and discuss certain features of the self-deception situation with which there is no everyday language as-

sociated. In order to do this, it will be necessary to bend familiar usage and develop a terminology with which we can forthrightly express certain significant, usually unexpressed features of self-deception. My aim is to develop a way of talking about self-deception which will in turn elucidate the way we usually talk about it as well as the circumstances which lead us to talk of it that way. My aim is also to develop a way of talking about self-deception which is sufficiently rooted in everyday speech so that it will amplify our everyday talk about self-deception. At present we possess a language which permits us only hints and imputations, by means of paradox; my aim is to enable us to reason explicitly and clearly about our psychological, moral, legal, or spiritual concerns insofar as self-deception is involved.

In order to develop such a language, I have avoided making out of whole cloth a new technical language (which, to a good extent, is what Freud did). I have used, instead, a family of everyday terms, metaphors and images. Speaking more broadly, I propose a non-esoteric model, an alternative to the usual models, in terms of which we can talk about such notions as "self-deception", "conscious", "unconscious", and yet others to be introduced as discussion proceeds.

As the above suggests, I shall not be able to provide a complete and unequivocal set of rules for use of the terminology I do develop. Nor can there be a decisive "proof" of the validity of my proposals. The "argument" in favour of them lies in the plurality of profitable and interesting results which emerge from developing the approach, applying it, and relating it to other approaches to similar problems.

I attempt in chapter two to show why, as I see it, there has been failure in the recent efforts of philosophical analysts to pro-

vide a non-paradoxical account based on familiar models of self-deception. In doing this, my purpose is not only to present a critical review of the literature, but also to draw several general morals. One such moral is that these efforts by contemporary philosophical analysts all share a certain blindness to essential features of self-deception. Another moral we learn from the review of the analytical literature is how many are the ways of falling into this blindness. And finally, by finding ourselves forced repeatedly to re-state in a variety of contexts the central issue, we develop, I believe, a certain resistance to similar blindness when once we ourselves engage in systematic and constructive analysis.

Chapters three and four contain just such a systematic and constructive statement. Though there is some critical discussion of other writers, and in particular A. E. Murphy, the main effort is to give direct and substantive answers to the questions: How do we go about deceiving ourselves, Why do we deceive ourselves, What is it to be in self-deception, What are its distinctive signs, and Why are they such as they are? I aim to present the texture of our experience, not just coherently, but with the patterns more visible and their significance more clearly displayed than before. In these two chapters I am—to use a different metaphor—trying to draw a new map of the region, rather than to correct details in the familiar sort of map. I try to provide enough detail on specific check-points to make it evident that the map does correspond in its main outline with the terrain, and to warrant the hope that the new map is worth using as a basis for subsequent, more intensive explorations of particular areas within the region depicted.

The accuracy and usefulness of the new map are further confirmed in the course of the sympathetically critical exposition,

in chapters five and six, of other influential doctrines pertaining to self-deception and related themes, particularly those doctrines to be found in the work of Sartre, Kierkegaard, and Freud. The first part of chapter five consists of a systematic review of Sartre's doctrine. My aim is to show that there is a remarkable parallelism between Sartre's doctrine and my own account—with the further demonstration that, by the use of my account, translated into Sartrian terminology, Sartre's own version can be freed of much of its terminological incoherence and surface paradox. This fact has a double significance. It tends to confirm my own account, since there can hardly be any doubt that Sartre's doctrine, whatever its defects and incoherencies, contains much that is profound and just. Moreover, this "translatability" and parallelism also widen the scope of both my account of self-deception and of Sartre's. The fact that we can move easily from one formulation into the other means that the possibilities for mutual correction and amplification are significantly increased.

I have not attempted a similarly systematic treatment in the case of Kierkegaard. The aim of this book is essentially analytical and synthetic rather than historical or critical. I have thought it necessary to say only enough about Kierkegaard to make it plain that my own account does not have a merely coincidental parallelism to Sartre's, that my account has a generality which links it to lines of thought broadly classified today as "Existentialist".

In chapter six I have undertaken a systematic, critical re-statement of the Freudian doctrine of defence and the unconscious. I believe that the rigour and detail with which I have done this are justified by the intrinsic importance and interest of Freudian theory and, through it, of much psychiatric theory today. In addition, of course, the doctrine of Freud on defence and the uncon-

scious also constitutes the most elaborately worked out, the most extensively applied contemporary doctrine touching self-deception. Hence I have felt, as I did in the case of Sartre, that if a convincing parallelism between my own account and Freud's could be shown, this would be very strong confirming evidence for my account. This confirmation is all the more deepened if, as is the case, my own account enables us to bring out features fundamental to Freud's doctrine which had not been appreciated before, and if it enables us to resolve, *within* the basic Freudian framework, long-standing puzzles and inconsistencies, some long acknowledged by Freudians, some never appreciated but readily formulatable in orthodox Freudian terms.

As in the case of the discussion of Sartre, by establishing such translatability and parallelism between my own account and Freud's, the benefits of each account are available to the other. Moreover, through Freud my own account of self-deception is linked up with the great stream of contemporary psychiatric thinking, and in turn psychiatric theory is linked up with the main lines of Existentialist thought.

In the final chapter of this book, I offer a series of remarks touching upon issues which I call spiritual, and which also bear upon issues in moral theory and psychotherapeutic doctrine. I believe that much of the confusion and controversy over the moral responsibility of the self-deceiver—and the moral status of psychotherapy—can be resolved by reference to my own account of self-deception. What is more, the account of self-deception which I have given carries with it an adumbration of a doctrine concerning what it is to become and to be a person. My concluding remarks therefore deal not only with the retrogressive movement into self-deception, but also with the movement out of self-de-

ception and into personal integrity and responsibility. These re-
marks thus inevitably touch upon and bring together themes al-
ready raised in earlier discussions in the book.

I have added, as an appendix, a brief statement concerning
some recent developments in certain kinds of brain surgery and
the behavioural effects thereof. I place this as an appendix, and
not as a portion of the main text, because the meaning of these
new neuropsychological developments is still in so many ways un-
clear to those working in the field, and because the relation of the
material to my philosophical account can be little more than spec-
ulative where it is not merely obscure. Yet what there is seems so
startlingly parallel and relevant to some of the special concepts I
have used in my analysis that I cannot think it should go un-
mentioned. What makes the parallel more striking is that the
ideas of the main text were in fact worked out entirely inde-
pendently of the neuropsychological material.

Faced with the choice whether or not to incorporate into the
main text these essentially independent and speculative ideas con-
cerning neuropsychology, I decided to let my own original argu-
ment and text stand entirely unchanged. But I could not resist
referring the interested reader to the neuropsychological mate-
rial by way of a brief summary and discussion in an appendix.

I am all too aware that much more than I have done in this
book might have been done in an exploration of the enormously
rich topic of self-deception. I have only one excuse for not dis-
cussing other philosophers, psychological theories, literary works,
and psychological case histories: Though I have, in a way, ranged
widely, my central tactical purpose has been quite circumscribed.
I justify the introduction of a certain variety of materials not
merely because of the intrinsic interest in each case, but because

I could use the material to serve this quite specific purpose. This purpose, as I have said, is to stake out, if possible, the major landmarks for a coherent, intelligible, and large-scale conceptual map of self-deception, and to do this with just sufficient breadth of materials and detail as would show the essential accuracy of the map and the possibilities for significant further philosophical exploration which it might provide. I cannot refrain from emphasizing that, in doing this much, I have not merely written a prospectus for a map, nor have I merely sketched, as a prolegomenon, an outline of how such a map might look. I have attempted to draw the actual map, and to use it.