

PHIL 3923H: Deception and Delusion
Prof. Funkhouser
10/14/08

MIDTERM EXAM (250 points)

Since this is a take-home exam, you are free to use any written resources to help you with your answers. This includes the readings, online notes, other online resources, etc. I expect that you will answer these questions on your own (honor system) and “in your own words”. Type your answers according to normal formatting standards (double-spaced, sane margins, etc.). Do not write too much, and do not write too little. Your exam is due *by the beginning of class* on Tuesday, October 21st.

The exam divides into three parts, corresponding to our three authors. You will answer exactly one question on Dennett, exactly two questions on Mele, and exactly two questions on Hirstein. Each question is worth 50 points. Type no more than three pages for any given question.

Dennett

1. Physical facts about the world — such as those a physicist discovers — are objective and can often be characterized with mathematical precision. Beauty, in contrast, is in the eye of the beholder. According to Dennett, is belief more like beauty or the physical facts? Or is belief like neither? Or both? Explain Dennett’s position here, as well as his reasons for it. What consequences does this position have for describing, say, cases of self-deception with tension as described by Hirstein (Chapter 9)?

2. Explain the prominent role that rationality should play, according to Dennett, in attributing beliefs. How is rationality’s role here analogous to the role that optimization plays for adaptationist evolutionary theory? Under what kinds of conditions, if any, would Dennett attribute irrational beliefs to an intentional system? Explain and provide details.

TURN OVER!

Mele

3. Some think that genuine self-deception requires an intention to deceive oneself. The idea is that without an intention to deceive the subject might get things wrong, but he certainly wouldn't be getting things wrong in virtue of *deceiving* himself. Explain Mele's position on this issue. In doing this make use of his discussion of the distinction between motivation and intention.

4. Mele utilizes the FTL model to explain the biases of self-deceivers. Using this model and its key concepts, explain how two hypothetical subjects could react to the same evidence in radically different ways such that one engages in straight self-deception and the other engages in twisted self-deception. (To do this you will need to tell a story — e.g., provide the “evidence”.) The FTL model is an empirical hypothesis, as is its application to self-deception. What discoveries about self-deceivers could disprove its applicability to self-deception?

5. Some think that self-deceivers both believe some proposition (p) and its negation ($\text{not-}p$), but Mele denies that this is typically the case. In fact, he argues against attempted empirical demonstrations of dual-belief self-deception. Explain how Mele objects to Gur and Sackeim's attempt at such a demonstration. What does Mele's objection here reveal about his standards for belief attribution? How does this fit with the fact that Mele invariably supposes that self-deceivers successfully acquire or retain the belief that they are motivated to accept?

Hirstein

6. Hirstein claims that many different syndromes and situations can give rise to confabulations — e.g., Korsakoff's syndrome, ACoA, anosognosia, Anton's syndrome, Capgras' syndrome, as well as various every day situations. Is Hirstein correct in applying the term 'confabulation' this loosely? If you think so, justify his liberal application of the term by noting the theoretically interesting features that justify treating these various reports as sharing a common cause or explanation. Otherwise, explain why some of Hirstein's examples should be excluded from the list of confabulations because they differ significantly in their cause or explanation. Regardless, you should explain the features that you take to be essential to confabulation.

7. Hirstein claims that many confabulators share a mind-reading problem. What is the nature of this supposed problem? What evidence does Hirstein offer for the claim that confabulators have a mind-reading deficit? What aspects of confabulation is this mind-reading deficit supposed to explain? Provide an alternative explanation of these aspects.

8. What, if anything, does the needle experiment discussed on p. 138 tell us about the extent of the cognitive damage to these anosognosics? Apart from their physical damage/illness, do we have any reason to think that these patients are significantly different from garden variety self-deceivers? Should confabulation be seen as a type of self-deception? Alternatively, should self-deception be seen as a type of confabulation? Explain the connection, if any, between these two phenomena.