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Hypocrisy and self-deception

DANIEL STATMAN

ABSTRACT *Hypocrites are generally regarded as morally-corrupt, cynical egoists who consciously and deliberately deceive others in order to further their own interests. The purpose of my essay is to present a different view. I argue that hypocrisy typically involves or leads to self-deception and, therefore, that real hypocrites are hard to find. One reason for this merging of hypocrisy into self-deception is that a consistent and conscious deception of society is self-defeating from the point of view of egoistical hypocrites. The best way for them to achieve their ends would be to believe in the deception, thereby not only deceiving others but also themselves. If my thesis is sound, we ought to be more cautious in ascribing hypocrisy to people, and less harsh in our attitude toward hypocrites.*

Hypocrisy [H], closely akin to one of the seven deadly sins, is viewed with repugnance by most individuals and societies. Most of us would not want hypocrites as friends, because we would never know for sure what was going on in their minds, and we would be reluctant to take hypocrites as partners, since we would doubt their loyalty. Hypocrites are widely viewed as cynical egoists, bent on manipulating society to enhance their personal objectives [1].

The connotation of self-deception [SD], by contrast, is more ameliorative. To be sure, SD is also condemned, but usually in gentler terms. One reason for this difference in judgment is the assumption that while SD is unavoidable for human beings, H is avoidable, and thus one's choosing to engage in hypocritical behavior is a clear manifestation of a corrupt character.

In this essay, I seek to cast doubt on this widely-held view regarding the normative status of H and SD and I do so by arguing that the two phenomena are closely related to one another. I seek to establish both a descriptive thesis, concerning the nature of H and SD, and a normative thesis, concerning the appropriate attitude toward H. I contend that if the descriptive thesis is sound, we ought to be more cautious in ascribing H to people and, often, less harsh in our judgment of hypocrites.

I begin by presenting the view I wish to reject, namely, the view that SD and H are different and separate phenomena. I then proceed to show why this view is mistaken, and to explain the implications of adopting a different view.

Daniel Statman, Department of Philosophy, Bar-Ilan University, Ramat-Gan 52900, Israel. Email: statmd@ashur.cc.biu.ac.il

I. The dichotomous view

The concept of SD is highly problematic, and any discussion of it lies beyond the scope of the present essay [2]. I would only like to remark that discussions of this concept provide a good example of the lack of contact between moral philosophy and psychology. Though SD is the topic of dozens of articles in each of these two fields, it is only rarely that philosophers refer to psychological research, or psychologists to philosophical literature. It is my contention that both fields have suffered from this lack of connection and that in our present inquiry, empirical research can contribute to our philosophical understanding.

As I would not like my analysis to rely on any specific theory of SD, I shall assume throughout the paper the most broad and general notion of SD as a situation in which a subject is motivated to believe p in spite of strong evidence to the contrary. For the purpose of the present section, however, I presuppose a more literal understanding of SD, as a situation in which some subject knows p , yet, because this knowledge threatens her in some way, the subject also believes not- p . Though this understanding is highly controversial, it is still widely held [3] and it is the most convenient understanding to start with in order to present the view under consideration in the clearest way. Thus, an example of SD would be that of John, who knows that his wife is having an affair with his best friend but, unable to face the truth, continues to believe that she is loyal to him. His false belief involves ignoring or distorting evidence that points in the other direction. It is thus a kind of deception. Just as the "standard" liar distorts or hides evidence in order to persuade others of some false view, so too, in this example, John knows that his wife is unfaithful, but manages to persuade himself that she is faithful. With this approach to SD in mind, we can now point out the apparent main differences between SD and H:

1. Structure

First, in SD, the deceived person is the self, while in H, it is the other. Second, in H the content of the deception relates to the subject; specifically, the subject deceives the other with respect to the subject's character or beliefs, seeking to present a better image than the one she thinks she deserves, whereas in SD the deception does not necessarily relate to the subject. Thus, in the example I used above, the deception concerns John's wife and friend and not John himself. To use more formal terms: in H, a subject, A, deceives another subject, B, with respect to A, while in SD A deceives A with respect to some matter which is not necessarily about A (cf. Kittay, 1982, p. 278).

2. Context

H is a phenomenon that necessarily presupposes the existence of a social context. Conceptually speaking, Robinson Crusoe could not have been a hypocrite because he did not operate within a social context: there was no-one around to deceive. In

contrast, SD can operate within the individual even without a social context. Though Robinson Crusoe could not deceive others, he could deceive himself and probably had good grounds for doing so. SD in such a situation (e.g. about the chances of survival) can often be a powerful factor in retaining a will to endure.

3. *Purpose*

The purpose of SD is to enable the subject to protect himself from various beliefs that threaten him. In other words, SD has a protective nature [4]: the more threatening the cause for SD, the deeper and wider the spread of SD in the subject's mind. By contrast, H entails active commission on the part of the subject. By pretending to be different from how they really are, hypocrites want to improve their social image and enjoy its benefits. They are not forced to behave in this manner in order to protect themselves from some threat. When their pretence is motivated by a kind of self-defense, for example, when Jews pretend to be Christians to save their lives, we usually do not regard this as a case of H. Thus, while a kind of "self-defense" is typical in cases of SD, it is typically absent in cases of H.

4. *Moral status*

The previous point is connected to the negative connotation assumed in the concept of H. Saying that somebody is hypocritical is to accuse him or her of a serious sin, which would be inappropriate if the pretension were forced upon the subject. By contrast, since SD does not carry this negative connotation, we see no difficulty in ascribing SD to people in cases of self-protection. Our emotional reactions express this difference clearly. In H, the deeper the pretence, the more anger we feel towards the hypocrite, while in SD, the deeper the deception, the more pity we feel for its subject, especially when the SD seems to us to harm the subject by making her behave in an irrational, irresponsible and stupid manner. We feel that the subject is trapped in a circle of SD from which she can hardly get out because any new evidence is interpreted so as to support the view already held.

5. *Voluntariness*

The reason for this pity is that subjects often seem to be trapped in their SD without being able to escape from it. Their perceived impotence is the cause of our feelings [5]. We sense that the subjects did not enter the circle of deception from choice and do not stay there voluntarily. In contrast, H involves a voluntary decision to deceive society with regard to the real intentions or beliefs of the subject.

6. *Rationality*

Some sort of irrationality is necessarily involved in SD. In the definition mentioned above, the irrationality is serious and is expressed in the fact that the subject holds

contradictory beliefs: he or she knows p but nevertheless believes $\text{not-}p$. This irrationality, according to different accounts, is expressed in the subject's refusal to see what is obvious and to make the right sense of the evidence which is just in front of his or her eyes. In Marcia Baron's terms, "the wrongness of SD turns out to be closer to the wrongness of refusing to think than to the wrongness of deceiving others" (1988, p. 444). No such irrationality on the subject's part is involved in H. On the contrary, hypocrites must be highly intelligent and rational to succeed in deceiving society without disclosing their real nature. Hypocrites must be well acquainted with the values they pretend to hold and with the modes of behavior that reflect these values (cf. McKinnon, 1991, p. 323). Hypocrites are akin to spies in this respect: the intelligence, originality, and improvisation, which are necessary traits of a good spy, are also necessary for the hypocrites' systematic and consistent deception. Yet, whereas spies use these talents to serve their country, hypocrites use them to enhance their personal interests.

7. *Awareness*

In SD, the subject cannot be fully aware of the deception that is going on, otherwise the deception would not work. This means that first-order SD (e.g. about the fact that John has cancer) typically involves second-order SD (about his being in [first-order] SD). By contrast, hypocrites are well aware of their intentions and of the deception they initiate. They believe that in order to gain certain benefits they must pretend to be other than they really are. They consciously and knowingly construct a mask and put it on whenever they interact with those people whose approbation they seek. Hence, while in SD awareness of one's real character, intentions and beliefs is necessarily absent, in H such awareness is essential. This means that H excludes SD or, to put it more moderately, H and SD stand in an opposite relation: the more hypocritical one is, the less self-deceived one can be (at least with respect to the area about which one is hypocritical) and vice versa; the more self-deceived one is, the less hypocritical one can be. I will call this view "The Dichotomous View [DV]".

DV, an intuitive view about the nature of H, is defended by several philosophers (see Hare, 1963, p. 77; Fingarette, 1969, p. 54; and, more recently, McKinnon, 1991). Among other things, it fits in well with our shared condemnation of hypocrites, who reject our values yet deliberately use them to enhance their own interests. The hypocrites of DV not only deceive us but, in doing so, demonstrate deep contempt and mock us.

I believe, however, that there are good reasons to reject this view, and to see SD and H as much closer than DV admits. I seek to establish this position in two ways. In the first, I point out some aspects of SD which bring it closer to H. In the second, I point to some aspects of H which bring it closer to SD. In other words, an adequate understanding of each of the phenomena under discussion shows that they are closely related to each other. I deal with SD in the next section, and with H in section III.

II. Why SD leads to H

According to DV, people in SD do not voluntarily enter into deception but are, in a (rather weak) sense, forced into it. This description, however, is exaggerated. Even if SD is not voluntary in the full sense of the term, it would be wrong to regard it as in—or non—voluntary. The very term ‘self-deception’ indicates this active aspect. It is also expressed in the way many writers describe self-deceived subjects as having clear-cut evidence just in front of their eyes but as, nevertheless, failing to take account of it. Since the evidence is so clear, the only explanation for this failure is that the subject had *decided* to ignore the evidence [6]. I do not wish to argue that the voluntariness is similar in all cases of SD, or in all stages of the deception, but it is much wider than DV seems to allow.

My next point about SD, which is central to the argument I shall develop, concerns the social context of H. I said earlier that while H necessarily presupposes such a context, SD is something that occurs within the individual. Yet this approach ignores the fact that in most cases SD is carried out with social support, and would often be impossible without this support. As William Ruddick puts it:

We surround ourselves with and choose the company of those whose views coincide with our own. Hence, our projects come to be questionable only from a perspective we are unlikely or even unable to take. Home remedies are unlikely to work. Even if we can “open our moral eyes”, it is unlikely that we will be able to see very much: our associates, out of sympathy or cowardice, tend to keep the lights turned down low. (1988, p. 383)

Thus, in most cases, believing p in spite of conclusive evidence to the contrary (conclusive, that is, both from a biased point of view, as well as from our own point of view had we not been self-deceived) is possible only because other people also believe p , or at least help us feel that our belief is reasonable and acceptable. My point is that not only do we need the support of others to succeed in our SD, but that in many cases these others are also self-deceived, the result being what Ruddick calls “joint SD”. In joint SD, each of the participants deceives herself about the same content, thereby strengthening the SD of the other participants, which in turn reinforces the confidence of the original self-deceiver in her beliefs or behavior [7].

Ruddick shows that participants in joint SD often use a special vocabulary (Ruddick, 1988, p. 384), a vocabulary which, if not euphemistic, blurs moral issues. For instance, people with a high moral self-image would find it hard to admit to themselves that in fact they are stealing somebody’s property when they pick up some apples from a person’s orchard during a tiring hike in the mountains. So instead of describing the act as “stealing”, they describe it as “borrowing”, thereby facilitating SD. Most concealing terms are helpful only if they are used by other people too, who need them to facilitate their own SD, in this case twofold, deception both as to their own misbehavior, as well as to the moral status of their friends. Concealing terms are often used within particular groups such as soldiers, doctors or gaolers, and also within an entire society with the result that the chances of becoming aware of the deception are quite small. Maybe a Robinson Crusoe could

deceive himself without the direct help of other people (though even Robinson's SD may involve thinking about what other people, far away at home, would say about his behavior or beliefs). But most people do not live alone on desert islands, and most people are in constant need of social recognition and support. Therefore, SD typically involves the support and collusion of other people (cf. Gilbert & Cooper, 1985; Harre, 1988; Rorty, 1994, pp. 215–216).

To conclude, deceiving oneself is closely connected to deceiving others, and since the deception of others is essential to H, the conclusion follows that H and SD are much closer than DV assumes.

III. Why H leads to SD

DV encourages the idea that hypocrites are consistent and sophisticated egoists who pretend to respect common values, while deep inside they are indifferent to them or, worse, feel contempt toward them. Indeed H seems to be a necessary concomitant of a consistently egoistical point of view; why should one be *genuinely* loyal to the moral or religious values of society, when one can get all the social benefits of these values by merely *pretending* to hold them?

This argument, however, ignores the fact that a consistent pretence about values and beliefs is difficult and requires a great effort of the kind involved in being a spy. As two writers describe it: "Deceiving is a lot of work. You always have to be on your toes and it is exhausting" (Werth & Flaherty, 1986, p. 303). This hard work is self-defeating with respect to the egoist's fundamental purpose. Through pretence, egoists wish to make life easier for themselves, yet the result is that they have to work much harder and with no real rest in order to deceive the members of their societies. Lies, by their nature, require more lies, and the more complex the net of lies and pretences, the more effort the part of the deceiver requires.

The conclusion we derive is that from an egoistic point of view the best policy for hypocrites would be to "forget" their real beliefs and values, and take the moral, or the religious game seriously. For actors to succeed, they must "get into" the character they portray and try to identify with it as much as they can. Similarly, for hypocrites to persuade us that they share our values, the best policy for them would be to adopt these values seriously. Their behavior will thus become more natural and credible, and hypocrites would not have to be on the constant guard which is typical of spies or undercover policemen. Therefore, precisely because H is motivated by egoism, we should expect that it leads to a kind of SD [8].

A further reason why H leads to SD is connected to a central motive of hypocrites. There are two sorts of benefits which hypocrites wish to gain by their hypocrisy. One is external benefits of the kind which accrue to one with a reputation as a respectable, moral or religious person, such as being offered a public position in the township, being looked upon as a desirable business associate, and so forth. The second benefit which is often overlooked in this context is the joy of being accepted, cared for, appreciated, and loved by other human beings. The desire for this last sort of benefit strikes me as quite a common motive in hypocrisy. The point

is that in these cases hypocrites are looking for genuine care and love; they want love and appreciation for their real selves, and not for the character they are pretending to be. They want to be loved for what they *are*, and not for what they are mistakenly thought to be. Thus, to achieve this goal, hypocrites would do best to internalize the character they are “playing”, thereby enabling themselves to enjoy what they conceive as the genuine care and love of other members in society. Once more, then, the hypocrite’s own ends will be best served by “internalizing” the pretended traits and by adopting them—i.e. *halfheartedly* adopting them—as part of one’s self.

An interesting experiment by Essock-Vitale and McGuire (1985) lends some support to these ideas. A random group of 300 women from more or less similar background in terms of age, socio-economic status, etc. was asked to answer questionnaires concerning altruistic behavior. They were asked who offered different kinds of help (parents, siblings, friends), when, and how. Then they were asked the same questions about their own altruistic behavior, namely, under what circumstances they offered help, what kind of help, and so forth. The results indicated that most women regarded themselves more as offering help than as receiving it. This altruistic self-image emerged from an analysis of the answers to three questions. First, subjects reported on far more incidents (a total of 1429) where they helped others than incidents where they received help from others (a total of only 1060). Second, when the subjects were explicitly asked about their “balance of payments” with the major helping partners they identified, 63.5% of the subjects reported that they had been more helpful, i.e. that it was the other party who owed them. Third, in response to questions about the chances of paying back help in cases where the balance was not equal, the women answered that they were significantly more likely to pay back than to be paid back.

Since we are talking of a random group, it is rather hard to believe that these self-reports adequately reflect the altruistic nature of these women. Hence, we must conclude that at least some of these women were misdescribing their past interactions with other people, or, put simply, were lying. That they did so deliberately seems to me rather unreasonable. A more plausible explanation is that though they were not as altruistic as they believed themselves to be, they sincerely believed that they were. On this explanation, we are often self-deceived about our altruistic nature. Though our behavior is motivated to a large extent by egoistic motives (for instance, we help friends more than strangers, we help when we can expect recompense and so forth), we deceive ourselves and see ourselves as altruistic characters, who help without expectation of any reward and who render help to others much more often and generously than others help us [9].

The theoretical framework that Essock *et al.* (1986) propose to explain this phenomenon is evolutionary. Human beings, by their very nature, really care only about their own existence and interests. Since these interests will only be achieved through social cooperation, egoistic individuals must join society. To be accepted by society and enjoy its benefits, they must conceal their egoistic character. But, and here comes the premise I used earlier, this concealment or pretence will be much more successful if individuals come to believe it is true, that is, if they come to believe that they are not egoists but kind altruists [10]. SD is thus a sophisticated

evolutionary mechanism that is essential to the development of the human race (for a similar argument see Wright, 1994, ch. 13). To quote Essock *et al.*, “deceit and self-deception work hand-in-hand in helping individuals accomplish the critical task of becoming socially acceptable, thereby enhancing the likelihood of reproduction” (p. 208) [11].

That H leads to SD is connected to a broader thesis which argues that liars often come to believe in their own lies. As Hannah Arendt put it, “the more successful a liar is, the more people he has convinced, the more likely it is that he will end by believing his own lies” [12]. A common explanation of this phenomenon is cognitive dissonance. When we lie, a dissonance is created between this fact and our recognition that we have behaved wrongly. To reduce the dissonance, we simply bring ourselves to believe what we have said. Various experiments by Festinger, Aronson, and others have shown that when people are manipulated into supporting positions in which they do not really believe, they tend to change their attitudes to be more positive about these positions (see Aronson, 1968; Festinger & Carlsmith, 1959; and Nel *et al.*, 1969). Recent research has indicated that by creating dissonance not only can we change the subjects’ positions, but we can also strengthen them in the positions they already hold. These experiments are directly relevant to their present study, since the dissonance they create is explicitly connected to hypocrisy. A good example is the research done by Stone *et al.* (1994), the object of which was “Inducing hypocrisy as a means of encouraging young adults to use condoms.”

In this research, college students were asked to help prepare an educational program for the prevention of AIDS, to be used in high schools. Half of the subjects, those in the *commitment* condition, were asked to develop a persuasive speech about safer sex and deliver it in front of a video camera. They were (falsely) told that research had proved that college students have a better chance of influencing the sexual behavior of high school students than famous movie stars, and were led to believe that the video tapes they prepared would be used in educational programs in high schools. The other half of the subjects, the *no commitment* group, were induced to develop a persuasive message using the same menu of information, but without delivering the speech in front of a video camera. After completing their respective levels of commitment, subjects were introduced to the *mindful manipulation*, the purpose of which was to remind the subjects that they had not been living up to their beliefs, thereby making it hard for them to overlook, or deny, their hypocrisy. To achieve this purpose, subjects in the mindful condition were told that to make the program effective, it would be helpful to know more about why condoms are difficult for most people to use. They were given a list of “some circumstances that we came up with that might make it difficult to use condoms”, and were asked to go carefully through this list, and make a separate list of the circumstances surrounding their own past failures to use condoms. By doing so, the subjects were systematically reminded about their past failures to practise safe sex. Subjects in the unmindful condition were not exposed to this manipulation. The experiment thus compared mainly three groups: the committed and mindful, regarded by Stone *et al.* as being in the *hypocrisy condition*, commitment only, and mindful only.

After the above manipulations, the subjects were asked two interview questions, one about their past use of condoms, the other about their future intent to use condoms. Then they were left alone in a room to fill in some forms, and they were told by the experimenter that if they wished, they could purchase condoms at a cheap rate from a package on the table and put the money in a small basket, or they could take pamphlets about safe sex which were also on the table. When the subjects got up to leave, the experimenter came back in the room and pretended to have forgotten to ask the subjects to fill out a questionnaire about their sexual habits. The subjects answered this questionnaire, which reaffirmed the well-known fact that most college students do not use condoms.

The results of this sophisticated experiment indicate a significant difference between the hypocrisy group, namely the students who went through both the commitment manipulation and through the mindfulness manipulation and all other groups, with regard to buying condoms and taking pamphlets. The explanation of these results offered by Stone *et al.* is that those subjects who preached to others the importance of safe sex, while systematically being reminded that they themselves did not do so, sensed troubling feelings of hypocrisy, which created a dissonance between their self-image as people of integrity and the painful discovery of hypocrisy. To reduce this dissonance, the subjects bought condoms, thereby "proving" to themselves that indeed they practise what they preach [13].

We can learn from this research that for most people the recognition of their own hypocrisy is painful and that they do their best to escape it, or minimize its significance. Methods of SD are often helpful here, which is evident from the difference between the committed-and-mindful group and the committed-only group. The signs of their hypocrisy were right in front of the students' eyes in the committed-only group, but nevertheless they failed to notice them, or, at any rate, did not become fully aware of them. As in typical cases of SD, they managed to push these signs aside. Only when the students were forced to face their past behavior through the mindfulness manipulation, in a way that made further SD almost impossible, hypocrisy was admitted, and a different way was chosen to escape it—the purchase of condoms and the picking up of pamphlets. Another important aspect of SD in this research is related to self-reports of past condom use which were examined twice, before the stage of condom purchase, and at the completion of the experiment. The results in the first case indicate that subjects in the hypocrisy condition reported a higher level of past condom use than subjects in the other groups (Stone *et al.*, 1994, p. 123). This "selective" memory of past events helped them to grapple with their perceived hypocrisy. The results of the other survey, however, the one carried out after the buying of condoms, were interestingly different. This time, the self-reports about past condom use by those in the hypocrisy condition were lower than those in the commitment-only condition, the explanation being that after having faced their hypocrisy head-on and having reduced dissonance through buying condoms, there was no longer any pressing need for the hypocritical subjects to reconstruct their memories of past behavior (Stone *et al.*, 1994, p. 124).

This research is one of the rare occasions in psychological research in which the term 'hypocrisy' plays a significant role, though its exact meaning is not clarified by

the writers of this study. Furthermore, they seem to be using ‘hypocrisy’ to denote two different situations: that of the subjects prior to the experiment (in which they believed they should have used condoms but actually did not, *ibid.*, p. 117) and the situation created by the experiment, namely, preaching to others to do what the subjects did not do themselves. The first meaning is, of course, especially interesting for the present investigation, and I will return to it later.

Are there any empirical tools we could use to examine directly the question of the relation between H and SD? One might suggest we use the questionnaires of self-deception (SDQ) and those of other-deception (ODQ), as developed, for instance, by Sackeim and Gur (1978, 1979). The SDQ includes questions concerning some of the thoughts or wishes that cross the minds of almost all human beings, such as: “Have you ever wanted to rape or be raped by someone?”, or: “Have you ever thought of committing suicide to get back at somebody?”. Subjects who tend to answer in the negative to these questions, are believed to express a high degree of SD. The second questionnaire, that of other-deception, includes questions concerning social behavior, such as, “Do you always throw litter into waste baskets on the street?”, or, “When you take sick-leave from work or school, are you as sick as you say you are?”. Again, it is assumed, for instance, that most people do not always throw litter into baskets and thus too many positive answers indicate an attempt by the subjects to create a better image than they deserve. Through such answers, the subjects try to improve their image in the eyes of others, or, in other words, they try to deceive others about their real character. A different expression used by psychologists in this context is “impression management [IM]” [14]. The crucial difference between IM and SD is that “in SD, the respondent actually believes his or her positive self-reports; in IM the respondent does not” (Booth-Kewley *et al.*, 1992, p. 324. Cf. Gudjonsson, 1990, p. 224). Thus interpreted, IM would appear to be nothing other than hypocrisy. Therefore, to return to our present concern, in order to examine the relation between hypocrisy and SD, all we need to do is compare the scoring on the above two questionnaires.

Yet the distinction between SD and OD here is not so simple. Assuming that the questionnaires are anonymous, it is hard to see why subjects would deliberately lie only in ODQ but not in SDQ, because there is nothing to be gained by doing so that would not equally apply to SDQ (where it is assumed that people do *not* deliberately lie). Therefore, I find it more reasonable to assume that in ODQ too, the subjects do not often deliberately lie, but sincerely believe, or want to believe, their answers [15]. IM then appears to be just another case of SD. Thus understood, the distinction between the above two questionnaires would not be one between SD and OD, but rather between two sorts of SD; deception about thoughts, wishes etc. which can be known only to the subject, and deception about aspects of the self that have a behavioral dimension and thus might be known to others too. To be sure, people who are especially concerned about the way others see them, and therefore deceive themselves about their real character in ODQ, might do so in real life too, and in real life be hypocritical. It is hard, however, on the basis of the empirical data available to us to determine the exact relation between SD, IM, and real-life pretence and hypocrisy with all of their subtleties. To understand real-life IM and

hypocrisy we need far more research in the field rather than in laboratories. That such research is most needed to understand lies in general is argued by John Barnes in his recent book *A pack of lies: towards a sociology of lying* (1994). Barnes sums up the current situation of the empirical research as follows:

Most psychologists prefer to work in laboratories rather than in the field ... Regrettably, but understandably, psychologists have been reluctant to venture into these muddy fields ... Surprisingly, anthropologists ... have also neglected to study the process of socialization into lying, even though it is they who have given us the best accounts of lying by adults. Psychologists, sociologists and anthropologists alike seem to have neglected an important area of study. (Barnes, 1994, p. 9)

Even if SDQ and ODQ examine different sorts of SD, they might still be referring to different aspects of SD and thus be independent of each other. Indeed the correlation of SD (as measured by SDQ) to other behaviors is different from that which obtains between OD (as measured by ODQ) and these behaviors. This was established by a few research studies in recent years (e.g. Gudjonsson, 1989; Paulhus & Reid, 1991), one of which is especially relevant to our present concern. Tomaka *et al.* (1992) compared the effect of SD and of social desirability on people's reactions to stress situations. They conducted the following experiment: subjects first filled out the SDQ and the ODQ. Then they were led into a big room and were asked to call out solutions to exercises in math which were read by the moderator. They were asked to answer as fast as possible. During this "test" in math, various instruments were attached to the heads and bodies of the subjects to measure the physiological symptoms of their stress. The results show that SD was related to a reduced physiological response to the stress, while social desirability produced a strong physiological reaction. This means that carrying out such tasks is especially difficult for people who are concerned about their social image. These people suffer from double stress; from the task itself, and from the difficulty of maintaining the image of themselves that they want to project in the eyes of other people in the course of the task (see Tomaka *et al.*, p. 622).

This research can teach us something about people who are bothered by their social image and therefore tend, in varying degrees of awareness, to present a false image of themselves. It shows that being bothered in this way is unpleasant and damages one's ability to function. Those who are less concerned about what others think of them can function better than those who keep worrying about how others evaluate them. And since presenting a false image is part of H, the conclusion is that in many cases H does not result from a cynical plan to manipulate others in order to improve one's situation, but from a problematic need for social desirability [16]. Hence, if H is a tendency to present a false image of oneself to others, then, contrary to DV, this is a property that people might indeed regret. Furthermore, people might even have guilt feelings about their hypocrisy (cf. Martin, 1986, pp. 47–48), both because of a recognition that they are not "authentic", and also because of their recognition of the evil done to others by their deceiving them. Often then, hypocrites are not cynical villains, but people whose lack of integrity disturbs them and harms

their functioning, but who, nevertheless, find it hard to take off their “masks” and present their real image. Among other things, this is because, as a result of SD, they can no longer say what their genuine self is, and what is mere pretence.

Let me summarize the main conclusions of this long discussion:

1. Typically, adopting a hypocritical policy defeats egoistic interests because of the great efforts such a policy involves.
2. The best way for us to create a certain image in the eyes of others is to believe this image ourselves. For their deception to be most effective, hypocrites should believe their deception, i.e. be in SD with regard to their real nature.
3. In many cases, people are hypocritical because they want the social approbation and recognition that they (believe they) cannot get otherwise. As they want to be appreciated and loved for what they genuinely are, again H leads to SD.
4. The awareness of being a hypocrite is often uncomfortable and creates cognitive dissonance. A useful way to reduce this dissonance is by using various methods of SD, through which people manage to evade the thought that they are hypocrites.

IV. A non-dichotomous view

Proponents of DV would probably reply that nothing in the previous discussion argues against them, unless we beg the question in favor of the alternative view. From their point of view, when the deception of others is no longer conscious, it is simply not hypocrisy any more. If one is not consciously trying to deceive others and manipulate them, one is simply not a hypocrite. How can we decide between these two views of hypocrisy? I believe two considerations can help us here. First, if indeed there is an internal tendency to move from H to SD, as I tried to show in the last section, then in real life there would be hardly any hypocrites of the kind described by DV, and the notion of H would hardly have application. Second, I think that the non-dichotomous view fits better the way most people use the term ‘hypocrisy’, when they use it unreflectively and not during a seminar in philosophy. For example, we would sense nothing conceptually unusual if a friend were to say to us, “I suddenly feel that I have been a hypocrite all my life, and I have decided to change now”. And this would not sound odd, though the hypocrisy referred to was certainly unconscious. The friend might go on to say, “I really don’t know why I was such a hypocrite”, and this statement too would not strike us as confused. It is indeed often the case that we do not know why we behave hypocritically [17].

Such broad use of the term ‘hypocrisy’ characterizes not only its daily unreflective use, but the academic and supposedly more reflective use as well. I have already mentioned that in Stone *et al.* the authors use ‘hypocrisy’ to describe the condition of their subjects prior to the experiment, namely, “the fact that most college students believe they should systematically use condoms to prevent AIDS but do not always behave according to this belief” (1994, p. 117), though this is certainly not a case of conscious deception.

A similar use can be found in articles dealing with the supposed hypocrisy of

white liberals toward black people. Apparently, many black people feel that white liberals are hypocrites [18], and laboratory research conducted by Weitz (1972) seeks to provide empirical support for this feeling [19]. Yet surely Weitz and others who hold this belief do not contend that the hypocrisy under discussion is conscious and deliberate, that is, that white liberals are really dangerous racists hiding behind a mask of liberalism. A more plausible interpretation of their complaint would be that white liberals do not really believe in equal rights for the blacks, though they are not fully aware of their attitude, and would very much like to see themselves (undeservedly) as liberals [20].

To conclude then, DV is incompatible with most of the common uses of the term 'hypocrisy', and leaves too few cases in which the term would properly apply. Assuming that the role of ethics is to provide us with tools to judge characters in real life and not only "possible" characters, we have a strong reason to opt for the non-dichotomous view.

In light of the close connection between H and SD which was established in the previous sections, one naturally asks, "Is there any longer a clear distinction between them?". At this stage of the argument, my reply to this question will not come as a surprise. Indeed, in many cases (though not in all of them), a clear distinction is hard to make, which, in effect, means that a certain behavior could often be described as an instance of H, and just as easily be described as a case of SD. The person who discovers that she was a hypocrite until a certain point in time could make the same point by saying that she was self-deceived. Her earlier condition consisted not only of deceiving others, but also—and mainly—of deceiving herself (what Butler called "inner hypocrisy"), of *not being able to admit to herself what she really was*.

This conclusion is supported by my previous claim about the essential social context of SD and the phenomenon of joint SD. When we claim that some society is hypocritical (the Victorian society is the standard example), this surely does not mean that each of the members in this society, or most of them, deliberately intends to deceive the other members. (It is indeed hard to see how DV would account for such claims.) Rather, it means that the members of society behave contrary to what they deeply believe—though most of them are not aware of this fact. As a property of societies, H is thus best analysed in terms of joint SD, as follows: most individuals in society pretend they hold certain beliefs, though they are not fully aware of the pretence. Since almost everybody behaves this way, individuals get support in their SD, and SD increases [21]. The result is a large project of joint SD which can go on for quite a long time [22].

If in many cases (although not in all of them) 'hypocrisy' and 'self-deception' can be used interchangeably, why do we sometimes choose the former, and other times prefer the latter? The answer to this question depends on the strong negative connotation of 'hypocrisy'. As many writers have noted, saying that some people are hypocritical is not merely to describe them, but to condemn strongly their character and behavior (cf. Martin, 1986, p. 45; Szabados, 1979, p. 197). Thus, when we wish to express such condemnation we prefer the term 'hypocrisy', while when we have a more lenient view of the person in question, we use 'self-deception'. Among other

things, this explains why we tend not to ascribe H to our friends and relatives [23]. Even if we become aware of a discrepancy between their behavior and their declared beliefs and attitudes, we tend to regard it as a case of SD rather than of H. This discrimination in ascribing hypocrisy is itself a result of SD, namely, the fact we are aware of this discrimination but choose to ignore it. (Or, if you wish, it is a result of our hypocrisy, namely, our pretending to be sensitive to morality and integrity, while really we are not.)

Since moral condemnation is built into the term ‘hypocrisy’, this term might not be a very helpful one for a social scientist or an historian who seeks to understand and describe some phenomenon in a more or less objective way. Saying, for instance, that most people in the Victorian society were hypocrites might, in fact, interfere in constructing a realistic picture of that society. According to Peter Gay, the generally-accepted hypocrisy of the Victorian society was really a “cultural defense mechanism in a time of upheaval, a search for safety” (1984, p. 420), and not an intentional pretence. Thus, the historian “must wonder how useful ‘hypocrisy’ can be as a diagnostic instrument for understanding any culture, including the nineteenth-century middle classes” (Gay, 1984). When we release ourselves from this term and its moral implications, we are able to make more detached and more adequate observations, which will teach us the following about the alleged hypocritical behavior of the Victorian age:

Certainly many educated and influential nineteenth-century bourgeois sincerely believed, on what seemed to them sound theological grounds, that sensuality was wicked, and, on the best psychological evidence available to them, that erotic paintings served to seduce the innocent.... Not even those bourgeois who indulged self-serving cant ... not even those who espoused doctrinaire purist views on sexuality while keeping a mistress or resorting to prostitutes, were necessarily untroubled frauds. They were, more often than not, at war with themselves. Hobson was right: an authentic hypocrite is a rare animal, more common perhaps in the bourgeois century than at other times, but rare enough even then. (Gay, 1984, p. 421)

Nothing in what I have said in this essay denies the possible existence of the cynical, manipulative, and calculated hypocrite of DV. But, as Mike Martin nicely argues, this figure mainly inhabits novels and plays. Real-life hypocrites are much more complex characters than the cynical egoist of DV, and far less aware of the pretence they are involved in. In contrast to DV, H and SD are not separate and mutually-exclusive phenomena but should rather be seen as belonging to the same complex continuum. At the one end of the continuum we find extreme SD which involves no (or hardly any) deception of others, while at the other end resides the cynical and calculated hypocrite who is fully aware of his deception. In between we find most human beings, with varying degrees and modes of self- and other-deception, and with different levels of awareness of this deception [24].

At the outset I said that establishing a close connection between H and SD would lead to a gentler judgment of the former. One could, of course, draw the opposite conclusion from this connection and say that instead of reducing our

strongly negative attitude toward H to fit our relatively mild moral condemnation of SD, we should rather increase our condemnation of SD, to fit our strongly negative attitude toward H. Yet I think most readers would not opt for this option. SD is such a widespread (see Baron, 1988, p. 441, and Rorty, 1994, p. 212), and often innocent, phenomenon that it just does not deserve the sort of moral denunciation we thunder against H. Therefore, we must take the other route, namely, being more cautious in ascribing H, and more moderate in the moral condemnation we express by it [25].

This normative conclusion raises troubling questions concerning the notions of accountability and evil. If the great manipulators sincerely believe what they say, to what extent can we hold them accountable for their behavior? Can we still regard them as *genuinely* evil? According to the recent view of Hitler's biographer Alan Bullock, Hitler began with a cynical calculation but what followed was a process "whereby the actor-deceiver becomes carried away, becomes a believer in his own deception—possessed by himself" (Rosenbaum, 1995, p. 67). Does this fact (assuming it is a fact) about Hitler make his evil less genuine? Even worse? Does it show—as, indeed, the thesis presented here might suggest—that evil is "banal"? These problems lie beyond the scope of the present study.

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Notes

- [1] According to Judith Shklar of all vices, hypocrisy alone is considered "inexcusable" (1984, p. 45).
- [2] For a survey of the main positions, see Mele (1987).
- [3] Apparently more by psychologists than by philosophers. See, for example, the works of Quattrone and of Twersky discussed by Mele (1987).
- [4] Amelie Rorty pointed out to me that though the protective aspect is characteristic to many cases of SD, it is not essential to all cases. See also Rorty (1994, p. 217, points (5)–(6)).
- [5] Pity, unlike compassion, is directed at agents regarded as unable to escape from their misfortune. Cf. Ben-Ze'ev (1990).
- [6] That SD involves a free choice by the subject is a central theme in Sartre's writings. See, for example, Sartre (1956, pp 59–60). For an analysis of Sartre's view on SD, see Catalano (1990).
- [7] I take the notion of joint SD to be close to, yet weaker than what Bailey calls 'collusive lying'; it occurs "when two parties, knowing full well that what they are saying or doing is false, collude in ignoring the falsity" (Bailey, 1991, p. 35).

- [8] Cf. the general claim that “happiness is likely to be better attained if the extent to which we set ourselves consciously to aim at it be carefully restricted” (Sidgwick, 1966, p. 405).
- [9] That most people dramatically overestimate themselves across a wide variety of situations has been established by Taylor & Brown (1988).
- [10] A natural objection to this conclusion is that since the study includes only women and since, as a matter of fact, women tend to be more care-giving than men (especially in their thirties), the self-reports of the subjects are accurate and reliable. For the response of Essock *et al.* to this objection, see Essock *et al.* (1986, p. 209). The egoistic nature of our deeds expresses itself not only in the amount of giving-acts but in the circumstances of the giving too. For instance, subjects were more likely to give to wealthier relatives than to poor ones.
- [11] Cf. Freud’s claim that “a certain measure of cultural hypocrisy is indispensable for the maintenance of civilization,” quoted by Gay (1984, p. 418). As Gay makes clear, ‘hypocrisy’ here is much closer to ‘self-deception’, which is evident from the fact that Freud explicitly says that H can be unconscious. Like Essock *et al.*, Freud thus does not hold that people in civilization deliberately pretend and deceive, but rather that they unconsciously adopt attitudes and patterns of behavior they do not really identify with.
- [12] Arendt (1972, p. 34), quoted by Barnes (1994, p. 93). Cf. also Rosenwald (1985, p. 687), and Dickerson *et al.* (1992, p. 843).
- [13] Stone *et al.* believe that this method of fighting AIDS is more effective than the usual methods, which are based on attempts to create fear among young students by showing the terrible results of AIDS. It is hard, however, to estimate how effective Stone’s method is in the long run. As Stone rightly notes, we cannot crawl into the beds of the subjects and see whether this experiment really made a change in their sexual behavior (Stone *et al.*, pp. 117–118). Moreover, follow-up interviews three months after the experiment “provided very little indication that subjects in the hypocrisy condition were using condoms more regularly than subjects in the control conditions” (Stone *et al.*, 1994, p. 125).
For a similar experiment, using dissonance to encourage saving water in swimming pool showers, see Dickerson *et al.* (1992). The element of hypocrisy is less evident in this experiment.
- [14] The expressions ‘other-deception’ and ‘impression-management’ are often used interchangeably. Cf. the note made by Flett (1988, p. 69).
- [15] Cf. Flett (1988, p. 69, note), who says that IM might have different forms, “and it need not always be the case that IM involves an attempt to deceive another person”.
- [16] Hanlon (1976) asked people about their hypocritical behavior in the past, and they all reported that they had felt that this behavior was forced upon them. I refer to Hanlon’s research as reported by Rosenwald (1985, p. 688).
- [17] Cf. Rosenwald (1985, p. 690). For the claim that in general people have a rather limited understanding of the real factors that motivate them, see Rosenwald, 1985, p. 685, who refers to Nisbet & Wilson (1977).
- [18] See, for instance, Wojniusz (1979). According to her survey, 90% of the blacks in Chicago and its vicinity hold that “a lot talk in favor of equal rights for blacks, but don’t really believe it” (p. 47).
- [19] For an important criticism of her conclusions, see Poskocil (1977), whose discussion has important implications for understanding the phenomenon of hypocrisy in general.
- [20] For unconscious H see also Mebane & Ridley (1988, p. 335), who contend that many people in the church are not aware of their H, because “there may be no corporate challenge to their inconsistency”—the same phenomenon I alluded to earlier when I introduced Ruddick’s notion of joint SD.
- [21] The notion of joint SD might be helpful in understanding the idea of ideology, especially in its pejorative sense. See, for instance, Geuss (1981, pp. 12–22).
- [22] Fascinating examples for joint SD can be found in the political sphere, where allegations of hypocrisy are most often heard. There is a wide tendency almost to identify politics with H and deceit, mainly because of the connection between deceit and power. Yet, as Bailey rightly observes, “before concluding that politicians are crooked and the rest of us are not, we should

remember that the word *politics* means more than the people who govern countries or cities: power is everywhere—in the family, in the classroom, in university administrations, in hospitals, in sport, in marriage, even in friendships and (sad to say) loving” (1991, p. xvii).

- [23] I thank Del Paulhus for making this point to me in correspondence.
- [24] DV is also rejected by Szabados (1979), Newman (1986), Martin (1986), and Crisp and Cowton (1994).
- [25] It is noteworthy that in spite of the strong condemnation of the Church against H, the *Catholic Encyclopedia* argues that H is seldom realized in the form of a person who “wishes to seem, but not to be, virtuous”. More common is the hypocrite “who does have some appreciation for virtue and religion, and perhaps for this very reason simulates a degree of goodness or holiness beyond what is actually his” (Parmisano, 1967, p. 305).

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