



Self-Deception: A Comprehensive Analysis

**Psychology 430F
Wilson Hall 2006**

I knew that by universal conspiracy we agreed to deny the secret wickedness of every human being.

Hall, Donald (1996). From Willow Temple. *The Atlantic Monthly*, October, 85-102, p. 87.

TIME: 10:00-12:00 Wednesdays
LOCATION: Wilson Hall 2006
OFFICE HOURS: Monday 3:15-4:45 (sign up sheets located outside office 4046)
INSTRUCTOR: Dr. Jordan B. Peterson (4046 Sidney Smith Hall)
EMAIL ADDRESS: jordanbpeterson (at) yahoo.com

Course Home Page: <http://psych.utoronto.ca/~peterson/ps430syll.htm>

Home page: <http://psych.utoronto.ca/~peterson/welcome.htm>

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Abstract

The very existence of self-deception remains subject to debate, despite its apparently "normative" nature, and the immense effort devoted towards its explication. The consequences of self-deception, assuming its existence, appear no less ill-specified: classical theories of morality and personality place it at the very core of the process that generates psychopathology, while the increasingly mainstream view of social psychology appears to be that self-deception - at least in "optimal" doses - makes people happier, empathic, creative and more productive.

When an issue remains contentious, despite diligent efforts to address it, it is very likely that it has been poorly conceptualized - very likely that the spoken and unspoken presuppositions that underlie its current formulation are ill-defined or simply wrong.

We will, in consequence, lay out these presuppositions, alter them where necessary, and reformulate the idea of self-deception, using information derived from cybernetic theory and modern neuropsychology, buttressed by knowledge of relevant narrative, mythological, and philosophical thinking.

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Course Dates and Readings

PRINTING NOTE: Print these pdf files BEFORE you rotate them. If you rotate them (to view them properly on-screen) then they may not print properly.

| | Date | Titles |
|---|--------|---|
| 1 | Jan 12 | Introduction |
| 2 | Jan 19 | Ellenberger, H. (1970). Freud's work III (The theory of neuroses) - Freud's work VIII (Philosophy of religion, culture and literature). In Author, The discovery of the unconscious (pp. 480-534). New York: Basic Books. |

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| | | <p>Westen, D. (1998). The scientific legacy of Sigmund Freud: Towards a psychodynamically informed psychological science. Psychological Bulletin, 124, 333-371.</p> <p>Loftus, E. (1993). The reality of repressed memories. American Psychologist, 48, 518-537.</p> |
| 3 | Jan 26 | <p>Freud, S. (1928/1991). The future of an illusion. In Author, Civilization, society and religion (pp. 181-241). New York: Penguin.</p> <p>Becker, E. (1973). Human nature and the heroic; The terror of death; Human character as a vital lie. In The Denial of Death. (pp. 1-8; pp. 11-24; pp. 47-66). New York: Free Press.</p> |
| 4 | Feb 02 | <p>Taylor, S. E., & Brown, J. (1988). Illusion and well-being: A social psychological perspective on mental health. Psychological Bulletin, 103, 193-210.</p> <p>Colvin, C. R., & Block, J. (1994). Do positive illusions foster mental health? An examination of the Taylor and Brown formulation. Psychological Bulletin, 116, 3-20.</p> <p>Colvin, C. R., Block, J., & Funder, D. C. (1995). Overly positive self-evaluations and personality: Negative implications for mental health. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 68, 1152-1162.</p> |
| 5 | Feb 09 | <p>FIRST ESSAY DRAFT DUE 20%</p> <p>Shedler, J., Mayman, M., & Manis, M. (1993). The illusion of mental health. American Psychologist, 48, 1117-1131.</p> <p>Taylor, S. E., & Brown, J. D. (1994). Positive illusions and well-being revisited: Separating fact from fiction. Psychological Bulletin, 116, 21-27.</p> <p>Baumeister, R. F. (1989). The optimal margin of illusion. Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology, 8, 176-189.</p> <p>Smaller but lower resolution version</p> <p>Larger but higher resolution version</p> |
| 6 | Feb 16 | <p>Simon, H.A. (1955). A behavioral model of rational choice. Quarterly Journal of Economics, LXIX, 99-118 and Doyle, J. Bounded Rationality (pp. 92-93). In Wilson, R.A. & Keil, F. (Eds.), MIT Encyclopedia of Cognitive Sciences. Cambridge: MIT Press</p> <p>Miller, G.A. (1956). The magical number seven, plus or minus two: some limits on our capacity for processing information. Psychological Review, 63, 81-97.</p> <p>Medin, D.L. & Aguilar, C.M. (1999). Categorization (pp. 104-105). In Wilson, R.A. & Keil, F. (Eds.), MIT Encyclopedia of Cognitive Sciences. Cambridge: MIT Press.</p> |

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| | | Barsalou, L.W. (1983). Ad hoc categories . Memory & Cognition, 11, 211-227. |
| 7 | Mar 01 | <p>LeDoux, J.E. (1995). Chapter 3: Blood, sweat and tears; Chapter 6: A few degrees of separation. In Author, The emotional brain (pp. 42-72; pp. 138-178). New York: Simon & Schuster.</p> <p>Gray, J.A. (1995). A model of the limbic system and basal ganglia: applications to anxiety and schizophrenia. In Gazzaniga, M.S. The Cognitive Neurosciences (pp. 1165-1176). Cambridge: MIT Press.</p> <p>Carver, C. S., & Scheier, M. F. (1998). Chapter 2: Principles of feedback control; Chapter 3: Discrepancy-reducing feedback processes in behavior; Chapter 4: Discrepancy-enlarging loops, and three further issues; Chapter 5: Goals and behavior. In Authors, On the self-regulation of behavior (pp. 10-82). Selected Readings. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.</p> |
| 8 | Mar 08 | <p>Goldberg, E., Podell, K., and Lovell, M. (1994). Lateralization of frontal lobe functions and cognitive novelty. Journal of Neuropsychiatry and Clinical Neuroscience, 6, 371-378.</p> <p>Ramachandran, V. S. (1996). The evolutionary biology of self-deception, laughter, dreaming and depression. Medical Hypotheses, 47, 347-362..</p> <p>Tomarken, A. J., & Davidson, R. J. (1994). Frontal brain activation in repressors and nonrepressors. Journal of Abnormal Psychology, 103, 339-349.</p> <p>Brown, L. L., Tomarken, A. J., Orth, D.N., Loosen, P.T., Kalin, N.H. & Davidson, R.J. (1996). Individual differences in repressive-defensiveness predict basal salivary cortisol levels. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 70, 2, 362-371.</p> |
| 9 | Mar 15 | <p>SECOND ESSAY DRAFT DUE 35%</p> <p>Kunda, Z. (1990). The case for motivated reasoning. Psychological Bulletin, 108, 480-90.</p> <p>Greenwald, A. G. (1980). The totalitarian ego: Fabrication and revision of personal history. American Psychologist, 7, 603-618.</p> <p>McFarland, S.G., Ageyev, V.S. & Abalakina-Papp, M.A. (1992). Authoritarianism in the former Soviet Union. Journal of Personality & Social Psychology, 63, 1004-1010.</p> <p>Goleman, D.J. (1989). What is negative about positive illusions? When benefits for the individual harm the collective. Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology, 49, 273-280.</p> <p>Solzhenitsyn, A. (1974). Part IV, Ch. 1-4: The soul and barbed wire. NOTE: TWO PARTS: Part ONE. Part TWO. In Author, The Gulag Archipelago II. (pp. 595-672.). New York: Harper and Row.</p> |

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| 10 | Mar 22 | <p>Swann, W. B., Wenzlaff, R. M., Krull, D. S., Pelham, B. W. (1992). Allure of negative feedback: Self-verification strivings among depressed persons. <i>Journal of Abnormal Psychology</i>, 101, 293-306.</p> <p>Elliot, A. J & Devine, P. G. (1994). On the motivational nature of cognitive dissonance: Dissonance as psychological discomfort. <i>Journal of Personality & Social Psychology</i>, 67, 382-394.</p> <p>Pyszczynski, T., Greenberg, J., & Solomon, S., (1999). A dual process model of defense against conscious and unconscious death-related thoughts. <i>Psychological Review</i>, 106, 835-845.</p> |
| 11 | Mar 29 | <p>Hare, R. D., Hart, S. D., & Harpur, T. J. (1991). Psychopathy and the DSM-IV criteria for Antisocial Personality Disorder. <i>Journal of Abnormal Psychology</i>, 100, 391-398.</p> <p>Jaycox, L.H., Foa, E.B., Morral, A.R. (1998). Influence of emotional engagement and habituation on therapy for PTSD. <i>Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology</i>, 66, 185-192.</p> <p>Petrie, K.J., Booth, R. J. & Pennebaker, J.W. (1998). The immunological effects of thought suppression. <i>Journal of Personality & Social Psychology</i>, 75, 1264-1272.</p> <p>Mar, R. & Peterson, J.B. (unpublished summary). The benefits of writing: health and productivity.</p> |
| 12 | Apr 05 | <p>FINAL ESSAY DRAFT DUE 45%</p> <p>Peterson, J.B. & Djikic, M. (in press). You can neither forget nor remember what you don't understand. <i>Religion & Public Life</i>, 33, XX-XX.</p> <p>Peterson, J.B. & Flanders, J. (in press) Complexity management theory: motivation for ideological rigidity and social conflict. <i>Cortex</i>, 38, 429-458</p> |

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Assignments and Due Dates

A four page essay will be required according to the due dates listed above. I would like the essay to be cumulative (so the first essay will be four pages, the second essay a rewrite of those four plus four more, etc.). Your final grade will be the average of all your percentages. Pick something meaningful and important, but make sure that it is related in some manner to the course material. This relation can be implicit. Take a risk.

Please submit your essay electronically.

Use lastnamefirstname and the essay number as a file name (e.g., petersonjordan1.doc).

Make sure that your essay is four pages, double-spaced, 12 point, Times New Roman. Make sure that it has been outlined at least once. Make sure it has a title page, with your name, the course name, the assignment number, the due date and your email address on it. Make sure it is not a first draft (a third draft would be better).

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Criteria for Evaluation of Brief Essays

The following sequence of steps is useful for generating a good essay. First, understand what you are doing. Adopt an aesthetic and intellectual attitude, as well as an appropriate technical approach.

Aesthetic Considerations

Try to create something elegant and concise. Consider, as well, that an essay succeeds or fails at three fundamental levels of analysis: that of the sentence, paragraph and essay as a whole. Remember to write and edit at each level: (1) are your sentences elegant and careful? Have you chosen each word properly? Does the sentence say what it is supposed to say? (2) Do your paragraphs constitute the elaboration of a single idea? Are they sufficiently comprehensive and concise? (3) Does the essay succeed as a unit? Does it make an identifiable and intelligent statement.

Technical Considerations

First, write a seven to ten sentence summary. Each sentence should carry enough conceptual weight to withstand elaboration into a paragraph. Second, write the paragraphs. Put the essay aside. After a delay (a day or more is optimal, as it is worthwhile to sleep at least once in the interim), write another outline, without referring to your first draft. This forces you to reconceptualize your ideas, at the paragraph level of analysis. Then return to the first draft. Reorganize it according to your new outline. Do not be afraid to throw out ideas that now seem superfluous.

This process can be repeated, as necessary, and constitutes an intelligent approach to editing. One additional repetition is usually sufficient to produce a decent essay.

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