

Collective self-deception, collective injustice: Consumption, sustainability and responsibility

Prepared for Presented at
The Rocky Mountain Ethics Congress
Center for Values and Social Policy
University of Colorado
August 8-10, 2008

ABSTRACT

Consumption in the United States has reached historic—and morally momentous—levels. According to Juliet Schor, "per capita, we're purchasing almost twice as many clothes as we did in 1991. The volume of furniture, measured in pounds, has more than doubled in just seven years. In fact, households are buying almost everything at rates far higher than a decade ago, from food to glassware to sporting goods."¹ Overall, according to Schor, real consumption expenditures per capita have doubled over the past thirty years.² Many of the goods we consume are produced by people enduring exploitive labor conditions, as well as, in ways that are environmentally destructive. Our consumption for the most part continues unabated, despite our being at least generally aware of the social and environmental ramifications of our hyper-consumptive practices. The failure to connect our own consumption patterns to these global problems facilitates our continuance in behaviors that perpetuate both injustice and environmental degradation.

Self-deception facilitates injustice in this case by insulating us from knowledge that would result in moral reflection and altered behavior. In sum, it provides the moral opacity needed to continue in practices we would deem deeply problematic if we could see them with unbiased eyes.³ Such self-deception is arguably collective in nature. Having roughly the same biases, we collectively deceive ourselves regarding our engagements and practices, mutually reinforcing the quieting moral ignorance that allows us to continue along the path we are taking. While self-deception at an individual level may be serious enough, collectively it takes on monstrous proportions—e.g., the catastrophic ecological effects and deeply exploitive social relations our current consumptive patterns underwrite. Not only can such collective self-deception have calamitous consequences, it also proves much more difficult to escape.

In this essay, I offer an analysis of the morality of both individual and collective self-deception using the example of self-deceptive consumption. Whether self-deceivers can be held morally responsible for their self-deception is largely a question of whether they have the requisite control over the acquisition and maintenance of their self-deceptive beliefs. Recent developments in the discussion of self-deception seem to suggest a lack of such control insofar as the psychological processes involved appear to operate without the agent's knowledge or intention.⁴ Such so-called 'deflationary' accounts seem to exculpate self-deceivers, since their failure to suspect the target belief is false or notice its moral significance appear to pose serious obstacles to their exerting the control over the formation and maintenance of such beliefs necessary for moral responsibility. For this reason, Neil Levy argues self-deceivers will often not be culpable for their self-deceptive beliefs. In this essay, I contend that contrary to Levy, a self-deceiver need not doubt the target belief nor recognize its moral importance to be held morally responsible.

Given the collective context, we face a further challenge since the unwitting effect of others harboring similar biases is to reinforce and further entrench one's own self-deceptive belief. In such an epistemically hostile environment, we might be inclined to think such a

person cannot be blamed for her failures. And yet, if her actions contribute to the serious harm of others—something which is a violation of her own principles, we might also think she has a positive obligation to know about this fact, especially when it would not be difficult for her to do so. Again, the question of responsibility hinges upon the self-deceiver's capacity to control the maintenance of her self-deceptive belief. I argue that self-deceivers even in the context of a similarly self-deceived collective may often have both an obligation to know proportionate to the moral gravity of the knowledge in question, and the control necessary to attain this knowledge. As such, they bear some morally responsible for their own self-deception. Finally, this essay explores strategies for overcoming this morally paralyzing self-deception both individually and collectively.

Self-Deception and Moral Well-Being:

We're not built for objectivity it seems. That self-partiality and the self-deception it often fuels is the rule not the exception has been noted as far back as Joseph Butler's well-known sermon "On Self-Deceit".⁵ It is common today for psychologists to discuss the salutary function of self-deception, its evolutionary and adaptive place in human psychology.⁶ Our penchant for distortion, they suggest, often protects us from painful truths and enables us to flourish when a clear-eyed view of things would send us into a spiral of despair or paralyzing anxiety. While there clearly seem to be areas in which self-deception may be beneficial, it is just as clear that it might prove a serious obstacle to individual and collective flourishing. Harboring false beliefs about morally significant matters is morally debilitating when it facilitates the continued participation in practices we would morally condemn and personally avoid if we had a more accurate view of the situation.⁷ Psychological happiness purchased at the price of moral self-knowledge is a threat to our flourishing insofar as it undermines our moral integrity by hindering us from applying our principles to ourselves.⁸ It also may pose a threat to our physical well-being by preventing us from taking actions necessary to avoid harm.⁹ Accordingly, we have good moral and prudential reasons for avoiding or escaping self-deception that poses such risks to our moral and physical health.

Self-deception is morally significant, when it acts as a barrier to living lives we would deem good by our own standards. The question I pursue here, then, is whether and under what conditions we can be held responsible for failing to avoid this sort of self-deception, particularly, when it occurs in a social context that supports it. I seek to establish both our control over such self-deception and our obligation to avoid it in the hope that we might be in a better position to resist its influence. Before we can begin to consider these questions, however, we need at least a rough idea of what self-deception, individual and collective, consists in.

Self-Deception: Individual and Collective

Virtually every aspect of the current philosophical discussion of self-deception is a matter of controversy including its definition and paradigmatic cases.¹⁰ However, in response to challenges to the notion that self-deception is intentional and requires contradictory beliefs, models treating self-deception as a species of motivated bias belief have gained ascendancy in recent years. On such so-called 'deflationary' accounts, anxiety, fear, or desire trigger psychological processes that produce bias in favor of the target belief with the result that self-deceivers acquire and retain false beliefs in the face of a preponderance of counter-evidence. Accordingly, we may say generally that self-deception is the acquisition and maintenance of a false belief in the face of strong evidence to the contrary caused by desires or emotions biasing one's handling of one's available evidence relevant to the belief.¹¹ Insofar as deflationary models pose the most serious challenge to moral responsibility and are likely the most common variety of self-deception, they will be the focus in this essay.¹² Let this suffice, then, for our characterization of self-deception of the individual variety.

Collective self-deception has received scant direct philosophical attention as compared with its individual counterpart. While collective self-deception might be understood as referring to self-deceptive belief held by collective entities, the sort involved in our beliefs about our consumption practices points to another sense of collective self-deception that is summative in nature, being constituted by all or most members of a collective holding some belief self-deceptively.¹³ With a deflationary account of self-deception in mind, we can say collective self-deception refers to a group of individuals that share similar biases and as a consequence form and maintain the same false belief in the face of strong evidence to the contrary possessed or easily available to each member of the collective. What distinguishes collective self-deception from solitary self-deception just is its social context, namely, that it occurs within a group that shares both the attitudes bringing about the false belief and the false belief itself. Self-deception within a collective, then, is both easier to foster and more difficult to escape, being abetted by the self-deceptive efforts of others within the group.

Nearly every instance of self-deception has a social component, being wittingly or unwittingly supported by one's associates.¹⁴ In the case of collective self-deception, however, the social dimension comes to the fore, since each member of the collective unwittingly helps to sustain the self-deceptive belief of the others in the group. The beliefs that underwrite our consumption patterns offer an example of the sort of collective self-deception I have in mind. Many of the goods we consume are produced in ways we find morally problematic when we consider them; few of us find the labor conditions or environmental practices involved in the production of the items we

consume acceptable; few of us would consciously seek to support such exploitation and environmental degradation. And yet, despite our being at least generally aware of these social and environmental ramifications of our hyper-consumptive practices—despite our possession of or easy access to data supporting the belief that our consumption habits support such objectionable practices—we hold the overly optimistic beliefs that the world will be fine, that its peril is overstated, that the suffering caused by the exploitive and ecologically degrading practices are overblown, that our own consumption habits are unconnected to this suffering anyway, and the like.¹⁵ In short, motivated by our aversion to face the painful consequences of seeing ourselves as contributing to such serious ills, we treat our evidence in a bias manner, forming the self-deceptive belief that our consumption is benign and sustainable.¹⁶ Surrounded by similarly motivated and self-deceived peers such beliefs meet little resistance. Held collectively, these beliefs become entrenched and their consequences magnified.¹⁷ In the case of the self-deceptive beliefs underwriting our consumption practices, the consequences are global and potentially catastrophic, and as such these beliefs are pathological.¹⁸

The sub-intentional mechanisms of self-deception on deflationary models of self-deception pose an internal challenge to the self-deceiver's control of her belief formation and with it any attribution of responsibility. The social factors involved in collective self-deception pose an external challenge to such control by offering support and protection from without for the self-deceiver within such a group. Determining whether and under what conditions these internal and external challenges do erode or erase our control, then, is necessary for any assessment of our responsibility for self-deception. Let us turn first to the internal challenges faced by solitary self-deceivers, then we will consider the external challenges that arise for the self-deceiver within a collective of similarly self-deceived individuals.

Solitary Self-deception: Culpability and Control

Neil Levy argues for the following as necessary conditions for culpable self-deception: "(1) the subject matter of the belief is important (whether morally or in some other manner), and (2) that we are in some doubt about its truth (call these the importance and the doubt conditions)."¹⁹ When these conditions are met and a person deceives herself regarding the subject matter, she is guilty of knowing epistemic negligence;²⁰ she is culpably self-deceived.

Levy's argues, however, that on deflationary models of self-deception that have recently gained ascendancy—where the psychological processes that produce bias in favor of the target belief

operate without the self-deceiver's specific intention—self-deceivers will often fail to meet these conditions for culpable self-deception. A person self-deceived in this way typically doesn't *doubt* p , since the effect of her motivation just is the bias treatment of her evidence that prompts her to think it favors p over $\sim p$. And even if p is about something important, it isn't reasonable to expect a self-deceiver to scrutinize a belief about which she harbors no doubts. This is why Levy thinks importance alone is insufficient for culpability. Moreover, he notes that self-deceivers are often self-deceived regarding the importance of the matter at hand and so fail to meet the importance condition as well. Accordingly, Levy argues that many self-deceivers will not be morally responsible for their self-deceptive beliefs if deflationary models are accepted.

In the following, I contend that contrary to Levy, a self-deceiver need not doubt the target belief nor recognize its moral importance to be held morally responsible, since self-deceivers will generally have the capacity to resist the biasing influence of motivation and often have an obligation to do so.²¹

Before turning to my arguments, however, it is important to note that there is nothing in the deflationary accounts of self-deception ruling out the possibility that self-deceivers doubt the target belief or recognize its importance at some point.²² With respect to our beliefs regarding our consumption practices, for instance, many of us have recognized the importance of these beliefs, doubting keenly, even if briefly, whether our own habits of consumption contribute to practices we morally condemn. Such flickering doubts and fleeting recognition, however, fade away on deflationary accounts as a result of motivated bias.²³ We don't knowingly, or consciously, seek to stifle our doubts, so much as we allow the inertia of our tendency to form self-flattering and optimistic beliefs to replace them with more comforting convictions. Accordingly, even on deflationary models, it seems reasonable to think that Levy's conditions will sometimes be met. Nevertheless, deflationary accounts allow for cases that meet neither condition. To determine whether self-deceivers might be responsible even if they haven't harbored doubts about their morally important beliefs, nor recognized their importance, we need to consider whether failure to meet these conditions entails a failure to meet the minimal conditions for responsibility.

Doubt and Control

Levy's contention is that self-deceivers cannot be held responsible for their self-deception unless they have indirect control²⁴ over their acquisition and maintenance of their self-deceptive belief p , and they have such control only if they meet the importance and doubt conditions. If they lack

control over the activities that eventuate in their believing or continuing to believe p , such as the acts or omissions involved in the gathering of and attending to evidence regarding p , then they cannot be held responsible for their self-deceptive belief. Following Fischer and Ravizza, Levy argues that the control necessary for moral responsibility is guidance control.²⁵ A person has guidance control, according to Fischer and Ravizza, just in case the mechanism that operates in the actual sequence of events to produce the action or omission (and consequences) is moderately responsive to reasons. A person acts on moderately reasons-responsive mechanism if she is able in a suitable number of scenarios to recognize sufficient reasons (including moral reasons) to do otherwise and would act upon such a reason in at least one of these possible scenarios. In cases of self-deception, what we want to know is whether a given agent would recognize and react to sufficient reasons for exercising the sort of epistemic care that would result in her believing something other than the self-deceptive belief p ; would the self-deceiver recognize and react to sufficient reasons to exercise scrutiny regarding p with the consequence that she fails to believe p in at least one possible world? If it is possible for a self-deceiver to meet this condition for moral responsibility without meeting Levy's doubt and importance conditions, then, we must ask whether they are necessary conditions for culpable self-deception, even if they are sufficient ones.²⁶

To explore these questions let's consider an example that meets neither of Levy's conditions and see whether it meets the conditions for guidance control. I opened this essay with the example of the unbridled and largely unreflective consumption practices typical of many of us today. Take Cain, the doubtless consumer.²⁷

Through the many media sources he daily encounters, Cain has become aware of the enslavement and exploitation of workers in factories in the developing world, as well as the environmental damage such factories often wreak upon the environment. He finds these practices morally unacceptable and saddening. Cain would be horrified if he thought that he was contributing even minimal support to these practices.²⁸ But, when Cain goes shopping at his local mega-store, he thinks nothing of filling his cart with cheap goods made by factories of the sort he has heard so much about. He never doubts that the goods he purchases and his consumption practices generally are benign, both morally and environmentally. So, it is with a light heart and an easy conscience that Cain swipes his card, thinking to himself what a lot of money he has saved.

Following Mele's deflationary model,²⁹ imagine that Cain's belief that his purchases are morally and environmentally benign is motivated by his strong aversion to bearing the personal and economic

costs entailed by believing they are not. He assesses the cost of falsely believing his purchases are malign as exceedingly high, since it will be costly in terms of time and money to seek out benign alternatives, or, if he chooses not to seek out such alternatives, Cain faces the psychological cost of thinking ill of himself and his practices. His aversion to falsely believing his purchases malign leads him to have a significantly higher acceptance threshold for this belief than for the belief that they are benign. That is, it takes a great deal more evidence to persuade him that his purchases are malign than it does to believe the contrary. This asymmetry in acceptance thresholds explains the biased way in which he treats his evidence. At no point in this process, does he suspect his purchases contribute to degradation and exploitation. And, while he might see that it would be an important thing to consider if his purchases did so contribute, he doesn't stop to consider this belief, since he has no doubt that they do not. So, he never suspects bias is at play in his belief formation process. In the end, he is in the possession of a comfortable conviction that his purchases in no way support or sustain practices morally disturbing to his conscience, and this conviction has at no point been clouded by the unhappy thoughts that doubts might raise in his mind.

On Levy's account, Cain's self-deception isn't culpable, because he fails to doubt the benignity of his purchases.³⁰ So, even though this belief is false, and his purchases do, in fact, contribute to the exploitation of workers and the degradation of ecosystems, and the evidence available to Cain does not warrant his belief in the benignity of his purchases, he is excused, because lacking doubt he had no reason, and hence diminished ability to exercise the care necessary to ensure accurate belief. Does his failure to doubt imply that Cain lacks guidance control over his belief formation? If not, then failure to doubt will not necessarily excuse self-deception.

This question, it seems, is largely a question of whether the desire or emotion causing the bias so incapacitates Cain that he could neither recognize nor act on sufficient reasons to exercise the care necessary to avoid self-deception. But, as even cursory reflection suggests, Cain's motivations do not appear to make it impossible for him to recognize reasons to ensure an accurate judgment.³¹ Our desires and emotions do not generally incapacitate us, even if they do represent obstacles. More to the point, the presence of motivation does not seem to entail that someone like Cain could not recognize sufficient reasons to exert epistemic care and react to such reasons in at least one possible scenario. Even if Cain would exercise only if he thought the cost of false belief to be the significant risk of brain damage by lead paint to his only daughter that would be enough that would suffice to show he has guidance control.³²

Mele's own model suggests that the biasing mechanism itself would be sensitive to such changes in the Cain's estimation of the cost of false belief, raising or lowering the belief threshold accordingly.³³ If Cain estimates the cost of false belief to be serious harm to his daughter, then he might not be bias in his treatment of his evidence *despite* having strong motivation favoring the false belief.³⁴ That is, in such circumstances, Cain would both recognize and act upon reasons to exercise care in forming this belief.³⁵ For our purposes, the selectivity of self-deception reveals a sensitivity that amounts to the reasons responsiveness Fischer and Ravizza require, and suggests self-deceivers may regularly meet the minimal conditions for guidance control, even when they do not doubt the target belief.

Moral Negligence and Self-Deception:

Our examination so far suggests that self-deceivers will often have the control necessary for moral responsibility, but there remains the lingering worry that failure to recognize the moral import of one's belief—failure even to doubt its truth in the actual sequence—militates against moral responsibility and is thus exculpatory. In this section, I argue that self-deceivers like Cain are apt targets for blame even when they fail to recognize the moral importance of their beliefs, because they have some obligation to exercise the care necessary to tell whether their practices violate their own moral principles. Failing to make such efforts, self-deceivers are morally negligent.

Moral negligence, according to Ronald Milo,³⁶ is a violation of a duty to ensure that we are not doing something we would deem to be morally wrong.³⁷ This duty is implied by a commitment to act morally. I cannot act morally if I lack the relevant knowledge regarding the circumstances of that action. As Elizabeth Linehan explains "the basic moral imperative to *avoid evil* sometimes obliges us to *seek* knowledge; knowledge of the moral law, knowledge of the particular circumstances, knowledge of ourselves. The greater the possible harm, the more stringent the obligation."³⁸ In cases of moral negligence, a person fails to meet this obligation to know the moral significance of her action by not taking adequate care to consider the relevant circumstances or consequences. Accordingly, Cain's negligence consists precisely in his failure adequately to consider the circumstances (the nature of the production of the goods he purchases) or the consequences (the active support of conditions he would not want to endure). Cain's failure to take care in forming his belief regarding the nature of the production of the items in his cart, then, is a failure to acquire the knowledge necessary to ensure his action is good, not evil.

The main objection to thinking Cain is negligent, on Levy's account, is that his negligence is unknowing or inadvertent, since he simply omits any effort to take care to resist bias in forming his beliefs about his purchases.³⁹ The key question here, then, is whether it is reasonable to expect him to take the precautions necessary to fulfill this duty to know, since he seems never to think about the moral importance of the belief in question.⁴⁰

Milo's account of *inadvertent* negligence is instructive. Inadvertent negligence consists of a failure to recognize that one's action is in violation of one's principles that occurs through an unconscious omission of careful deliberation regarding the nature of the act, its circumstances, and likely consequences. Cain's seems to be a case of just this sort, since his failure ever to scrutinize his evidence for believing the products in his cart benign leads him to fail to recognize that his purchasing these items violates his principles. His neglect here is inadvertent, unthinking, and careless, but culpably so on Milo's account since his circumstances called for the exercise of scrutiny.

To avoid false belief, according to Milo, the inadvertently negligent "need to take care not to be blinded or distracted by anger, greed, lust, ambition, sorrow, disappointment, the desire to impress others, etc. . . . [They] must learn to how to control [their] desires and feelings, and this involves learning what measures or steps [they] can take to prevent them from unduly influencing [their] judgments about what [they] ought (or ought not) to do".⁴¹ We might think of this as an obligation to ensure the realization of the conditions necessary for moral action. Linehan construes this as an obligation minimally not "to so undermine the conditions for moral agency that we can commit significant evils unknowingly".⁴² The self-deceiver who fails to recognize the importance of some matter fails to meet this obligation, because she fails to control the influence of her motivations on her belief formation. In Cain's case, he fails to reign in his desire for cheap goods, his desire to see himself and his practices as morally good, and his aversion to the personal and economic costs of seeking fair-trade alternatives.⁴³

The idea that we can exercise control over the influence of desire and emotion in the way Milo suggests is one shared by Alfred Mele, the architect of one of the most influential deflationary models of self-deception. While Mele acknowledges that the *extent* of our control over bias is matter of controversy in social psychology, "that we do have some control over the influence of emotions and motivation on our beliefs is . . . indisputable; and that control is a resource for combating self-deception."⁴⁴ In Mele's view, the desires and emotions need not render one an automaton. Although he stops short of saying that a minimal degree of control over the desires or emotions that trigger and sustain self-deceptive belief is a necessary condition for self-deception, it is clear that in many

cases self-deceivers will have the capacity for such control.⁴⁵ What Mele's comments suggest with respect to the question of inadvertent negligence is that it is reasonable to expect self-deceivers to be capable of exerting some control over the influence of their desires and emotions on their beliefs. Such control, he suggests is both possible and necessary to combat self-deception.⁴⁶

What Milo's account and Linehan's principle suggest is that we have an obligation to be on the lookout for morally important matters and to actively seek to create conditions that will make us sensitive to such things, and this obligation requires us to look for and resist conditions that might prompt bias. Accordingly, Milo's account suggests a self-deceiver may be culpable even if she fails to meet the importance condition, because she is obligated to meet it in morally important matters.

It appears, therefore, that someone like Cain can fail to meet Levy's conditions and nevertheless have guidance control over the failure to exercise care along with an obligation to exercise that care. So, Levy's conditions while sufficient for culpable self-deception are not necessary conditions for it. Consequently, morally significant self-deception will not usually release one from blame. I have argued instead that self-deception is morally culpable when it serves to facilitate moral wrongdoing,⁴⁷ with the degree of culpability varying depending on the seriousness of the moral wrong and the effort required of the self-deceiver to avoid the self-deception in question. This latter condition has to do with how difficult it would be for the self-deceiver to have resisted the motivation or emotion biasing her belief.⁴⁸ Thus, this sort of motivated bias represents a real but not insurmountable obstacle to an accurate assessment of one's moral engagements. In view of these considerations, we can see that self-deception regarding matters of moral import to us may be culpable more often than we usually think, and though it can mitigate moral responsibility, it typically won't exculpate.

Collective Self-Deception and Moral Responsibility

When we consider the social context of self-deception, in particular, when we consider self-deception that occurs within a collective of similarly self-deceived individuals, we encounter another, this time, external obstacle to our taking proper care in the formation of our beliefs about matters of moral significance for us. In this section, I argue that the obstacle posed by the collective context cannot be insurmountable without at the same time transforming the individual's false belief into something other than self-deception. Accordingly, the principles governing individual responsibility for self-deception in morally important matters apply in the collective context as well. Nevertheless,

the individual within such a collective has a comparatively greater barrier to both entering and escaping self-deception than her counterpart in an unsupportive social context.⁴⁹

In cases of collective self-deception, the collective entrenches self-deceptive beliefs by providing one with the positive reinforcement by others sharing the same false belief, and by insulating one from evidence that would destabilize the target belief. There are, however, limits to how entrenched such beliefs can become and remain self-deceptive. The social support cannot be the sole or primary cause of the self-deceptive belief, for then the belief would simply be the result of unwitting interpersonal deception and not the biased belief formation process characteristic of self-deception. Motivated bias, not simple lack of evidence, must be the engine driving both the acquisition and maintenance of the self-deceptive belief. Moreover, if the environment becomes so epistemically contaminated as to make counter-evidence *inaccessible* to the agent, then we have a case of false belief, not self-deception. Consequently, we might say that even within a collective a person is self-deceived just in case she would not hold her false belief if she did not possess the motivation biasing her belief formation process.⁵⁰

With these limits in mind, we can see that self-deception may be harder to avoid and escape in the collective context, but self-deceivers will bear responsibility under the same conditions any individual would. As I argued above, the culpability one bears for self-deception varies according to the effort required to avoid the self-deceptive belief. When the social context is taken into consideration, this condition is meant to be sensitive to the varying strength of support one's environment might offer. If the support makes counter-evidence inaccessible or becomes the primary source of one's false belief, then one is no longer self-deceived.⁵¹ And as such, one cannot be culpable for one's *self-deception*.⁵² However, even when one is self-deceived, the influence of others can present significant obstacles both to avoiding and escaping self-deception, and, as a consequence, it can diminish one's culpability for it. But, to the degree that one retains the capacity to control one's belief formation and retention, possesses evidence that one's belief is unwarranted, and is capable of recognizing the significance of one's beliefs, such factors will rarely exculpate.

Even if our culpability for morally significant self-deception is minimal, our interest in avoiding it is great, since it poses a serious threat to our ability to live lives we find morally acceptable, and collectively, it has the potential to be monstrously destructive. This brings us to the question of paths of escape and resistance.

Paths of Resistance and Routes of Escape

I have sought to establish responsibility for self-deception in the hope that where there is control enough for responsibility, there is control enough for change. Accordingly, let us briefly consider measures that we might take to avoid, detect, and escape morally significant self-deception.⁵³

In his sermon on the self-deceit of the biblical king David, Joseph Butler proposes three methods for overcoming self-deception that warrant our consideration.⁵⁴ His first counsel is to take for granted that one harbors many self-deceptive beliefs, "till, from the strictest observation upon himself, he finds particular reason to think otherwise."⁵⁵ As I noted at the beginning, empirical psychology and our own experience suggests self-partiality and the self-deception it spawns are the rule, not the exception, in human belief formation, particularly when these beliefs impinge on our estimation of ourselves. Assuming ourselves to be biased with respect to evaluations of our practices, and recognizing the possibility that we may hold false beliefs that facilitate our participation in practices we abhor, constitutes a standing reason for the stringent examination of our engagements, and for taking care to combat such bias in the formation of future beliefs having to do with them. Sounding like Butler, Kathie Jenni contends that "most of us know at least some of our own traits that distort our vision: . . . desires to avoid discomfort, self-absorption, impatience, and so on. We also know what we must do in order to see things more clearly: we must, at least, attempt to focus on them—not look away, and not allow distractions to divert us."⁵⁶ Simple awareness of the likelihood of bias, then, puts us on the path to resisting its influence. Even if it doesn't suggest particular methods of resistance, such surveillance of our selves is a necessary first step.

Butler goes on to offer two specific ways of combating our tendency toward overly optimistic evaluation of our selves and our engagements, which might be termed the hypothetical slander and the golden-rule test respectively.⁵⁷ The former asks us to imagine what someone bent on disparaging our character would pick out for scrutiny, the latter asks us to take the point of view of those affected by our actions. Both tests require our active reflection on our practices: to think how others would view them, to think how they might affect other people, and how those affected by them would feel. The efforts involved in such scrutiny combined with a general awareness of our tendency to downplay the sufferings of others in the service of preserving a positive view of our selves would seem to go a long way toward combating self-deception. In Cain's case, he precisely doesn't think about the plight of those producing the goods he so happily purchases for so little. Butler's claim is that if he would but think of these others, put himself in their shoes—not just the shoes they have made—he might see his consumption practices violate his own standards. Accordingly, Cain's negligence consists precisely in his failure adequately to consider the

circumstances (the nature of the production of the goods he purchases) or the consequences (the active support of conditions he would not want to endure).

William Ruddick is skeptical that self-deceivers will be capable of adequately taking this third-person perspective on their actions, particularly, when they are surrounded by peers who support their self-deception. "Our projects," he writes, "come to be questioned only from a perspective we are unlikely or even unable to take. Home remedies are unlikely to work."⁵⁸ Ruddick's main reason for thinking it unlikely that we will adopt such perspectives is that we typically surround ourselves with like-minded individuals, and even the perspectives we are likely to imaginatively conjure will gaze generously on our deeds. In the case King David, whose self-deceit is the subject of Butler's discussion, it takes an outsider to David's courts, the prophet Nathan, to facilitate David's recognition of his self-deception—no one on the inside is willing to shine the lights David's self-deception.⁵⁹

Ruddick is clearly correct to see that so long as David looks only to those inclined to support him, or those holding similar biases, he is unlikely to find any help in the detection of his own self-deception. And, it may well be that the imagination of self-deceivers is too impoverished to provide a perspective from which such self-deception would be apparent. We might take Butler, however, as advising us precisely to look *beyond* such familiar circles for the prophetic voices of outsiders by whatever means are available to us. Specifically, looking to those outside our collective, those who are unlikely to share the same biases regarding our practices, those who are most affected by them.⁶⁰ In Cain's case, those who bear the brunt of the costs of his consumption and their advocates will be most likely to supply him with the perspective he needs to detect self-deceptive beliefs regarding his practices. Given the readily accessible and vivid information available about our consumption practices and their consequences on others, someone like Cain wouldn't need to work very hard to imagine—he wouldn't have to imagine at all—the plight of those affected by his consumption decisions and the beliefs that underwrite them. Even minimal effort to look at such suffering would likely prompt him to doubt his belief that his consumption is generally benign.⁶¹

While such efforts cannot guarantee that we will detect, avoid and escape our every morally significant self-deceptive belief, they will free us from any charge of negligence and have the potential to free us from many such beliefs. All this suggests that avoiding, detecting and escaping morally significant self-deception will require a good deal of often painful scrutiny of our selves and our engagements. But this is the price of gaining a life worth living. As no less a moral philosopher than Socrates thought,

There is nothing worse than self-deception—when the deceiver is always at home and always with you—it is quite terrible, and therefore I ought often to retrace my steps . . .⁶²

It isn't an exaggeration to say that the examined life Socrates so vigorously defends is aimed at exposing just these sorts of self-deceptive beliefs—beliefs that obscure our moral identity from us. To avoid this sort of self-scrutiny is to run the risk that one isn't leading a morally worthy life, even by one's own standards. Insofar as seeing, acknowledging what is the case, overwhelming as it may be, is necessary if we are ever going to change anything about our selves or the conditions of the world we live in, such efforts offer us the best hope and are neglected at our peril.

¹ Schor, Juliet. Interview. Marketplace. November 13, 2007. February 27, 2008

<http://marketplace.publicradio.org/display/web/2007/11/13/consumed4_pm_2/>

² Schor, Juliet "The (Even More) Overworked American" *Take Back Your Time: Fighting Overwork and Time Poverty in America*. John de Graaf, ed. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2003, p. 10.

³ My focus here is on cases where one's self-deceptive beliefs keep one from seeing the practices one is engaged in as violations of one's own moral principles. Regarding attitudes of Americans toward damaging and exploitive practices, a number of polls show widespread concern to minimize both. For instance, polls conducted by Program on International Policy Attitudes from 1999, 2004, and 2005 consistently show that Americans recognize the potential for global trade to harm foreign workers, and a large majority—some 74 percent—feel a moral obligation to make efforts to ensure that those making products for our consumption do not endure abusive labor conditions [http://americans-world.org/digest/global_issues/intertrade/laborstandards.cfm]. In the case of consumption, then, I will be assuming that taking care in the formation of one's beliefs about one's consumption practices would make it apparent that such practices likely violate one's moral principles. Having this awareness, the agent would see such practices as morally salient and potentially problematic, whereas in the self-deceived state, she doesn't think they warrant her moral attention.

⁴ Alfred Mele's account is the most prominent version of this approach, see for example *Self-Deception Unmasked*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), Annette Barne's *Seeing through Self-Deception* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997) is another prominent example. For the most part I will be working on the assumption that Mele's jointly-sufficient conditions for the most common variety of self-deception is correct. Insofar as this model requires neither intention nor contradictory belief on the part of the self-deceiver, responsibility will be more difficult to establish. Accordingly, if we can establish responsibility on the deflationary account, then we should be able to do so easily with accounts that require intentions and the like.

⁵ Butler, "On Self-Deceit" in *The Works of Joseph Butler: Containing The Analogy of Religion, and Sixteen Celebrated Sermons*. Ed. William Tegg (Chestnut Hill, MA: Elibron Classics, 1867/2000). Leonard Newman summarizing the findings of several studies of motivated cognition notes that these studies add to our understanding of the 'pervasive' nature of such cognition ["Motivated Cognition and Self-Deception". *Psychological Inquiry*, 1999 10/1].

⁶ See for example, Michele K. Surbey, "Self-deception: Helping and hindering personal and public decision making." In Charles Crawford and Catherine Salmon Eds. *Evolutionary Psychology, Public Policy and Personal Decisions*. (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Earlbaum Associates, 2004). Shelly Taylor's work has shown the beneficial affects of positive illusion for those facing serious illnesses [see for example,

Shelley Taylor and Jonathan Brown, Positive Illusion and Well-Being: A Social Psychological Perspective on Mental Health," *Psychology Bulletin* 103/2 (1988). 193-210; Shelley E. Taylor, "Healthy Illusions," *Daedalus* 134/1 (2005), 133-5].

⁷ To be precise, self-deception is morally harmful just in case it keeps one from living according to one's own morally justified principles. We can, of course, imagine the odd case of a person whose self-deception keeps them from living according to some pernicious principle that they wrongly take as normative; hence, the qualification that the moral principle be justified in some broadly acceptable sense.

⁸ Kathy Jenni, for example, argues that the inattention that is sometimes involved in self-deceptive belief formation is morally problematic, because it undermines autonomy, threatens integrity, among other things ["Vices of Inattention" *Journal of Applied Philosophy* 20/3 (2003), 281-287].

⁹ A person who is self-deceived regarding her health, for instance, might misrepresent her condition to her physician, reject her physician's diagnosis, fail to take prescribed medications etc. with the result that her health steadily deteriorates. Collectively, a society of people self-deceived regarding the sustainability of their consumption practices might fail to make changes necessary to avoid catastrophic ecological damage. In both cases, self-deception has negative utility regardless of whether it violates any moral principles of the individuals involved, which it often will. My focus in this essay is on self-deception that poses an obstacle to moral integrity and autonomy by keeping us from living according to our own moral lights.

¹⁰ I offer a detailed overview of the contemporary discussion in my entry on self-deception in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* [<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/self-deception/>].

¹¹ Mele offers a more detailed set of jointly sufficient conditions (cf. 50-56). My purpose here, however, isn't to analyze Mele's position, so much as to ask whether someone who is biased in the way models like Mele's suggest might be held responsible for failing to resist their bias and the false belief it causes.

¹² There seem to be a wide variety of self-deceptions, some of which may involve the intention to deceive oneself, contradictory beliefs and the like, but as Mele argues the most common, garden-variety self-deceptions are likely to be the less exotic deflationary sort. There has been considerable work done on self-deception and moral responsibility, however, most of it focuses with non-deflationary models of self-deception [Mike Martin's *Self-Deception and Morality*, Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1986] is the most prominent and extensive treatment of the topic.].

¹³ Collective self-deception is ambiguous with respect to whether it refers simply to a collection of similarly self-deceived individuals or to self-deceptive belief held by a collective taken as a whole. Social epistemologists clarify this ambiguity in group-attribution of attitudes by distinguishing between summative and non-summative understandings of group attitudes (e.g., Philip Pettit, ["Groups with Minds of Their Own," in *Socializing Metaphysics*, ed. F. Schmitt, Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003] who cites Anthony Quinton's "Social Objects" [*Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 75 (1976), 1-27] as the source of this distinction. Pettit himself argues for the possibility of a non-summative sense of group attributions of psychological attitudes). On a summative understanding, only individuals within a group are apt targets for the attribution of beliefs, desires, and other like attitudes. Accordingly, a group holds believes *p* just in case all or most of its members believe *p*. On a non-summative understanding, groups exist in their own right over and above the individuals comprising them, and as such, are themselves apt targets for attributions of psychological properties. Depending upon the structure of the group, the beliefs of members or subgroups may diverge from those of the group. In this non-summative sense, then, all or most members holding some belief *p* will be neither necessary nor sufficient for the group holding *p* (See for example, Margaret Gilbert, "Corporate Misbehavior and Collective Values," *Brooklyn Law Review*

70/4 (2005), 1369-80. Following this distinction, collective self-deception may be understood in a summative or non-summative sense. In the non-summative sense, collective self-deception refers to a collective-self and not simply the sum of the individuals within a collective. In this case, both the belief in question and the self-deception are understood as attributes of the collective and not primarily of the individuals within it. We might call this *collective-self*-deception. In the summative sense, which will be the focus of this essay, collective self-deception refers to a group of individuals that share similar motivated biases and as a consequence form and maintain the same false belief in the face of strong evidence to the contrary. We might call this self-deception *across* a collective.

¹⁴ See William Ruddick, "Social Self-deceptions", in *Perspectives on Self-Deception*, Eds., B. McLaughlin and A. O. Rorty (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988).

¹⁵ Cf. D. J. Goleman "What is negative about positive illusions?: When benefits for the individual harm the collective." *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology* 8 (1989), 190-197. Goleman's argument in this essay is that when a collective has similar self-deceptive motives and forms similar positive illusions, the consequences can be catastrophic for the collective. In such situations, Goleman sees our tendency to form positive illusions as pathological. He doesn't question whether there is an individual psychological benefit gained by such illusions; they do buy individuals a degree of psychological comfort they would not have if they had a less distorted view of their engagements and their consequences.

¹⁶ Goleman argues that we are apt to form comforting positive illusions in situations we consider to be overwhelmingly threatening and beyond our control to affect (Cf. *Ibid.*, 195-6). It is easy to see how the belief that one might be lending support to the sorts of serious harms involved in the production of many consumer goods might be deeply threatening to one's self-esteem. If one doesn't see an easy way to alter one's behavior, if one thinks that it is practically inevitable that one's consumption will support such objectionable practices, or if one doesn't think one has the time or money necessary to extricate oneself from such practices, one has a strong motivation in favor of the comforting belief that one's consumption is essentially benign.

¹⁷ Michele K. Surbey, "Self-deception: Helping and hindering personal and public decision making." In Charles Crawford and Catherine Salmon Eds. *Evolutionary psychology, public policy and personal decisions*. (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2004), p. 138.

¹⁸ Goleman, 196. Goleman argues that they are pathological in the sense that they lack collective utility. My contention is that insofar as such self-deceptions keep us from living by our own moral lights, the psychological benefits they have for individuals are themselves largely illusory.

¹⁹ Neil Levy, "Self-Deception and Moral Responsibility", *Ratio (New Series)*, XVII (2004), 305-6. The importance condition as stated is ambiguous regarding whether the agent recognizes the importance of the subject matter, but it seems clear from what Levy says elsewhere that the importance condition includes such recognition. We might, therefore, restate it as follows:

(1') The agent *recognizes* the subject matter of the belief is important (morally or in some other way).

In Levy's view, failure to meet (1') is exculpatory. If I don't know the subject matter is important, I have no reason to take special care in forming my belief about it.

²⁰ Levy argues that in general blame for false beliefs is appropriate when they can be traced back to knowing acts or omissions that constitute knowing epistemic negligence [304]. He offers the example of a person knowingly consulting an out-of-date reference. Such a person's act of consulting such a reference and her omission of consulting an up-to-date one are negligent and the agent knows they are. Below, following Ronald Milo's account of negligence, I suggest that there may be cases of inadvertent epistemic negligence for which an agent is responsible. The idea that

one can be culpable only for *knowing* epistemic negligence is, in part, why the doubt and importance conditions appear to be necessary for such culpability.

²¹ I offer a more detailed defense of this position in my "Taking Care: Self-Deception, Culpability and Control", *Teorema* XXVI/3 (2007), 161-176.

²² Such accounts simply do not require to doubt or recognize the importance of the target belief. Whether garden-variety self-deceivers typically do doubt the target belief at some point before or during their self-deception regarding that belief is an empirical question, but is perfectly coherent to imagine a person suspecting $\sim p$ at time₁, having a strong motivation favoring p , and coming to believe p at time₂, without ever actively intending to form this belief. The self-deceptive belief is formed via the same processes whether one antecedently doubts it or not.

²³ Bias belief formation will sometimes be itself triggered by anxiety on the part of the self-deceiver that some threatening belief might be true. I am anxious that $\sim p$ just in case I do not desire $\sim p$ and am uncertain whether p or $\sim p$.

²⁴ While Levy's focus is indirect control, that is, I control my belief just insofar as I control acts that affect my belief, which itself is not a voluntary action. Whether we can be responsible for our attitudes and whether they are themselves voluntary is an area of significant controversy, which I cannot adjudicate here. Any account of epistemic responsibility must determine whether failure to doubt or recognize the importance of the target belief represents an excusing obstacle to discharging one's epistemic responsibilities. For the purposes of this analysis, I follow Levy's assumption that we have, at least, indirect control over our belief formation.

²⁵ This account of moral responsibility laid out and defended in J. M. Fischer and M. Ravizza *Responsibility and Control* (New York, Cambridge University Press, 1999).

²⁶ A person who doubts whether p or $\sim p$, which she recognizes as morally important, recognizes a sufficient reason to exercise care in her belief formation. And, since there is little reasons to suppose there isn't a possible world in which she responds to this reason with the result that she does not hold the false belief p , such a person meets Fischer and Ravizza's conditions for moderate reasons responsiveness and guidance control. Doubt and importance, then, seem to be sufficient conditions for moral responsibility.

²⁷ This example vastly simplifies the extremely complex set of beliefs involved in our consumption practices. Nevertheless, Cain does reflect attitudes held by many Americans today (see note 3).

²⁸ In a focus group conducted by PIPA, one person said, "I don't want to think that some child put together, under abusive situations, many of my belongings in my home. I would hate to think of my children being put in that position" [http://americans-world.org/digest/global_issues/intertrade/reservations_trade.cfm]. Cain, like this person, wouldn't want to think such a thing, and this aversion is, in part, responsible for his not thinking it.

²⁹ Mele, 31-46.

³⁰ He also seems to fail to meet the importance condition, if that requires recognition of moral import. Failure to meet the doubt conditions in this way often implies a failure to meet the importance condition.

³¹ Cain's belief that it is wrong to contribute support to the exploitation of others or the environment when one can avoid doing so is itself a sufficient reasons for ensuring the accuracy of his beliefs about the nature of the production of the items in his cart. It isn't too difficult to imagine a world in which he recognizes this reason and acts upon it. Additionally, Cain might think his failure to form an accurate belief would prompt the derision of those whom he respects, 'How could you believe that?!', they might say, or he might think failure to form accurate beliefs in this case poses a danger to his own well-being insofar as he believes contributing to these practices threatens his own environment and working conditions. There is little reason to suppose that Cain cannot

recognize sufficient reasons of these sorts to exercise care in forming his belief, even if he does not consider or act on them in the actual sequence.

³² The route to this reason may be circuitous. Among the malign practices Cain would condemn is that of making and distributing goods that pose a serious and known risk to others. Fear that items made in this sort of way pose a danger to his daughter's health would significantly lower the threshold for not believing an item to be benign. Reports of lead-tainted-toys from China, for instance, might lead Cain to carefully inspect the label of all toys he considers buying. He might only believe a toy to be benign that has a seal showing it has met the stringent European safety standards for toys (EN71), and been produced in a country that actively enforces these standards. The point here is that Cain would make a serious effort to avoid falsely believing a toy to be the product of benign practices, because his desire for his daughter's safety greatly outweighs the personal and economic costs involved in ensuring benignity in this case. Aside from this belief about the threat of lead-tainted-toys, Cain has all the same attitudes that bias his belief formation in the actual sequence. What this shows is that his bias is governable; his attitudes do not inevitably and irrevocably lead him to hold the self-deceptive belief.

³³ These costs can include both moral and non-moral components.

³⁴ It should be noted that while the recognition of costs of this sort might imply that the importance condition is met, it does not require the doubt condition to be met. Importance alone can demand scrutiny. Even if I am certain that I have entered my students' grades correctly, I double-check them. Past experience shows that this extra care is called for. Do I doubt they are correct? In my view, one cannot be said to seriously doubt p unless one thinks the probability that p is less than half. If the doubt condition is met whenever one believes the probability of p is less than one, then this condition is met a great deal of the time even by the self-deceived. My point is that in matters of great importance even if I think the probability that p is very high, I will still have a reason to scrutinize whether p . And, unless doubt is taken to be anything less than full confidence, it isn't necessary to doubt p to see a reason to scrutinize it.

³⁵ Mele proposes this model to explain among other things the perplexity that strong desire or emotion does not always lead to self-deception, what Bermúdez ["Defending Intentionalist Accounts of Self-Deception, *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 20 (1997) 107-8] calls the selectivity problem. Why isn't it the case that similarly strong motivations do not always result in self-deceptive bias? Mele's answer is that bias is sensitive to the agent's estimation regarding the relative costs of erroneously believing the target belief. Insofar as we exercise some control over such estimates, we exercise some control over the power of our motivation to bias our belief formation.

³⁶ Milo's account is elaborated in his *Immorality* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1984), 82-114. Milo addresses self-deception in his account of moral negligence, but analyzes it as a case of willful negligence, since he assumes self-deception is intentional and involves knowledge at some level that the target belief is false. In what follows, I apply his account of inadvertent negligence to the deflationary accounts of self-deception, and argue that it shows we can be culpable for self-deception on such accounts.

³⁷ Milo, 84. Milo defines moral negligence this way: "a culpable failure to take those precautions necessary to assure oneself, before acting, that what one proposes to do is not in violation of one's moral principles" [Milo (1984), p. 84]. In cases of self-deceptive belief regarding the moral propriety of one's engagements, this ignorance that one is violating one's standards is facilitated by the self-deceptive belief. For Cain, the belief that his consumption is benign ensures his ignorance that his consumption violates his own moral standards.

³⁸ Linehan, "Ignorance, Self-deception, and Moral Responsibility", *Journal of Value Inquiry*, 16 (1982), 104.

³⁹ Cain doesn't consciously seek out bias information regarding the nature of goods in his cart, he doesn't feel the flickering worry that he should scrutinize his beliefs, and consciously divert his attention away. His negligence is not willful or knowing in these ways.

⁴⁰ It should be noticed that Cain might well think it is important to avoid purchasing things produced in ways he finds abhorrent. If you asked Cain whether he thought it was acceptable to buy goods made by slaves, he would say no. If you asked him whether he thought it was acceptable for factories to discharge pollutants into the water in quantities known to cause cancer, he would say no. If you asking whether funding such factories even minimally was something he would want to do, he would say no. So, Cain, like many of us, understands the importance of the subject matter in a broad way, he just does not think of it when he is shopping.

⁴¹ Milo, 87.

⁴² Linehan, *ibid.*, 109. If this counts as undermining agency, then what Milo is saying is that we are responsible for this undermining. I am culpable for diminishing my capacity for agency. So, rather than being excused for lacking agency, I am blamed for the negligence that led to it.

⁴³ While some forms of bias are not particularly easy to identify or predict, that we are partial to ourselves when we consider our engagements is at least predicable, and as such, it isn't unreasonable to expect a person to look for its influence.

⁴⁴ Mele, *Self-Deception Unmasked*, 103.

⁴⁵ It bears investigating whether it makes sense to say a person is 'self-deceived' if a desire or emotion, which is beyond her control, leads her ineluctably to believe p in the face of evidence that provides greater warrant for $\sim p$. Such a person might better be identified as 'helplessly biased' or 'deluded' and not 'self-deceived', but we cannot pursue this questions further here.

⁴⁶ In the previous section, I have argued that self-deceivers generally have guidance control over the formation and retention of their self-deceptive beliefs and that Mele's own model helps us to see reasons responsiveness of self-deceptive mechanisms. Mele's comments here may be seen as offering further support for this claim.

⁴⁷ In the case, we have been discussing the wrongdoing is something one would recognize if one didn't hold the self-deceptive belief. In Cain's case, he would see his consumption practices as morally wrong if he believed them to be supporting exploitation and environmental degradation. The morally significant self-deception I have in mind typically involves beliefs that keep us from applying standards we hold. Clearly, there are other forms of self-deception that are morally significant, but they are not the focus of this essay.

⁴⁸ This condition is meant to be sensitive to fact that biasing desires vary in both strength and detectability. In cases at the extremes, it seems possible for a person to do their epistemic best and yet be unable to avoid false belief. In such extreme cases, a person can be non-negligently hold a self-deceptive belief. But, as I have argued, such cases should be rare.

⁴⁹ As I mentioned at the beginning, collective self-deception also poses a greater danger, since its consequences can have global dimensions. This seems to give us a very strong reason to seek to escape and avoid self-deception and to help our peers to overcome it as well.

⁵⁰ It is, of course, possible for a person to hold a belief in a motivated way even in a context in which she couldn't access the relevant evidence or avoid the false belief even if she resisted her motivation. A person of this sort would hold her belief even if she did possess or have easy access to counter-evidence. Such a person's belief is motivated to be sure, but not self-deceived, since she doesn't actually possess strong evidence against he belief, which is a necessary condition for even deflationary accounts of self-deception.

⁵¹ It seems that the actual context of our beliefs regarding our consumption involve others who are self-deceived, offering unwitting support to our self-deception, as well as agents that wittingly seek

to abet our false beliefs regarding our consumption. Nevertheless, it seems most of us possess or have easy access to evidence showing our belief in the benignity of our consumption practices is unwarranted.

⁵² Whether there is something else for which one is culpable is an important question, which we can address here.

⁵³ Consideration of these paths of resistance adds plausibility to the claim that we do often have control over the formation and retention of self-deceptive beliefs. Notice also that detection is not itself necessary for avoidance or escape. If I make general efforts to resist partiality, I may avoid or escape self-deceptive bias without ever specifically identifying it.

⁵⁴ Butler, "On Self-Deceit" in *The Works of Joseph Butler: Containing The Analogy of Religion, and Sixteen Celebrated Sermons*. Ed. William Tegg (Chestnut Hill, MA: Elibron Classics, 1867/2000) Self-deceit as Butler understands it is properly modeled on interpersonal intentional self-deception. Accordingly, he takes self-deceit to be willful or intentional in a way that deflationary models do not.

Nevertheless, I argue his proposed methods of resistance offer helpful guidance.

⁵⁵ Butler, 111.

⁵⁶ "Vices of Inattention" 291. Jenni is commenting on Margaret Holland's use of Simone Weil's concept of attention, not Butler's counsel, in this context. Holland argues for a two-fold effort of attention, namely, resistance to internal distortion, such as biasing motivations, and positive effort to ascertain the nature of the circumstances relevant to one's evaluation. Butler's counsel is directed toward the internal sources of distortion. In the collective context, there will also be external sources, which we must identify and look beyond. Butler's other two counsels, I think, give us some guidance in this effort.

⁵⁷ I owe these titles to William Ruddick, "Social Self-Deceptions", 382.

⁵⁸ Ruddick, "Social Self-Deceptions", 383. I have sought to establish that self-deceivers are typically able to take such a perspective. However, the likelihood that they will is certainly reduced by the internal obstacle bias poses and the external obstacle represented by social support for self-deceptive beliefs.

⁵⁹ That David responds to Nathan is significant. It shows both that David is capable of recognizing and responding to reasons to examine his own beliefs, and that such efforts may succeed in overturning self-deception. We also see here the important role prophetic voices play in combating self-deception. Precisely what our obligations are to bearing witness to the self-deceived is not a topic we can pursue here, but it seems clear that such efforts play an essential role in the overcoming of self-deception. Al Gore's film *An Inconvenient Truth*, for example, operated much like Nathan's parable for many viewers, helping them to see more clearly what bias and self-deception had long made murky for them. For the self-deceiver, then, taking care to listen to such prophetic voices is an important strategy for combating self-deception.

⁶⁰ In view of the worry that one's peers, one's collective, may well deepen one's self-deception, Amelie Rorty suggests we "be very careful about the company we keep," though she is dubious about our abilities to determine which peers afford us the greatest protection from self-deception" [User Friendly Self-Deception," *Philosophy* 69 (1997), 227]. What I am arguing is that it is reasonable to think that looking outside one's collective to see the conditions and hear the testimony of those who bear the effects of our practices very likely will afford us protection from self-deception. Our ability to shape our social environment in this way suggests another way in which we can resist the current of self-deception within our society.

⁶¹ Kathie Jenni, again sounding much like Butler, writes "because self-knowledge and empirical psychology reveal pervasive tendencies to deny suffering, the virtuous will seek ways to combat

those tendencies. One of the most powerful strategies is to *look* at suffering" ["The Power of the Visual," *Animal Liberation Philosophy and Policy Journal* 2/4 (2005), 16 (emphasis mine).] Jenni argues that this is one of the most effective strategies for avoiding the morally deadening self-deceptions that tend to occlude our view of how our practices affect others. Because our tendency to self-deceptive illusions is a constant force ebbing away at our moral awareness, we need to be vigilant in our efforts to maintain appropriate awareness, if we want to live by our best moral lights.

⁶² Plato, *Cratylus* 428d from *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, eds. E. Hamilton and H. Cairns (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963). Mike Martin, *Self-Deception and Morality*, (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1986), 32. Martin points out that the self-deception to which Socrates refers in the *Cratylus* quotation is unintentional or non-willing false belief about one's moral self. Socrates, therefore, thought that even self-deception that is not a result of our willful or intentional actions presents a serious obstacle to gaining a life worth living.