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THE SUBPERSONAL STRUGGLE BETWEEN ENLIGHTENMENT AND DISILLUSIONMENT

Abstract: An account of self-deception is proposed in the lines of an evolutionary explanation of belief and deception. The distinction between offensive and defensive deception is adopted in the context of the co-evolutionary struggle, referenced by Robert Trivers, John Krebs and Richard Dawkins. We argue that the latter is a sub-product of evolution while some instances of the former are genuine adaptations with specifiable benefits. The instances we endorse as authentic cases of self-deception are the ones which Ryan McKay and Daniel Dennett classify as positive illusions. The upshot will be an explanation of self-deception in terms of 'self-concealment' conceived within the context of the subpersonal struggle between enlightenment and disillusion.

Keywords: self-concealment, enlightenment, disillusion.

LA LUCHA SUBPERSONAL ENTRE LA ILUMINACIÓN Y LA DESILUSIÓN

Resumen: Se aborda el auto-engaño en las líneas evolutivas de la creencia y el engaño. Se adopta la distinción entre el *engaño ofensivo* y *defensivo,* en el contexto de la lucha co-evolutiva, referenciado por Robert Trivers, John Krebs y Richard Dawkins. Sostenemos que este último es un sub-producto de la evolución, mientras que, en algunos casos del primero, son adaptaciones genuinas con los beneficios que se pueden especificar. Los casos reconocidos como casos auténticos de auto-engaño son los que Ryan McKay y Daniel Dennett clasifican como *ilusiones positivas*. El resultado será una explicación de *autoengaño* en términos de *auto-ocultamiento*, concebido en el contexto de la lucha subper-

sonal entre la iluminación y la desilusión.

Palabras clave: auto-ocultamiento, iluminación, desilusión.

I. Introduction

Self-deception is a puzzling phenomenon that has caught the interest of contemporary authors from different disciplines. The puzzlement arises from the inherent difficulties of explaining how a person can succeed in deceiving herself if she already knows *somehow* that she is trying to do so. The question is how can a person be authentically self-deceived if she knows what her deception consists in. In other words, how could she be smart and dumb enough to be the executioner and the executed?

Contemporary discussions about cases of self-deception revolve around the question of how people can be self-deceived without being thereby self-deluded. 'Self-deception' refers to a wide range of phenomena that is not identified with delusion or outright lying. Assuming a distinction amongst orientations towards truth, falsity, deception, delusion, and uncertainty, the debated question is what it means exactly to be "self-deceived", and also, to what extent is self-deception a genuine adaptation. The existence of intuitive examples of self-deception constitutes our basis for analysis. We distinguish *two types* of cases of self-deception. The first type of cases is the one where denial has a prominent function, say, when an individual rejects the truth of a belief while professing a falsehood that she wants to believe. For example, consider a woman who suspects that her husband is being unfaithful but she does not entertain such a thought as she goes about pretending to have a faithful husband. The professed belief is used by the woman as an artifice for justifying the general outlook she has on vital factors determining her choices; she can thus explain away any anomaly in the way things occur (her husband repeatedly coming late from work, for example) as she simultaneously excludes the possibility of encountering proof of her husband's infidelity. Her choices are biased from the moment that she denies the possibility of her husband being adulterous. In this case, deception is a by-product, not an adaptation of evolution. Denial works as a defensive mechanism that enables the continuance of a current *status quo* by giving the self-denied a fal-

se sense of peace of mind. This is the traditional passive conception of self-deception conceived as a defensive mechanism that individuals employ to cope with hurtful truths that need to be hidden from their consciousness. On the other side, there is a second type of cases where self-deception operates as an offensive mechanism. We defend the thesis whereby there is an offensive mechanism of self-deception that can be adequately conceived as an adaptation of evolution.

The upshot of this paper will be that positive illusions play a fundamental role in the success of individuals' adaptations. The scope of our argument is the cases that fall under the second type of self-deception. We first restrict our inquiry to interpersonal deception. We approach the co-evolutionary struggle that takes place between deceiver and deceived. Given this scenario, we then advance an account of self-deception in terms of self-concealment understood as an offensive trait of evolution. We argue that self-deception is not a by-product but a primary function selected for, although there is basic difficulty in responding to the question of how profoundly we are self-deceived.

II. *The co-evolutionary struggle between deceiver and deceived*

One of Robert Trivers' main claims in *The Folly of Fools* is that deception and self-deception are primarily offensive in function[1]. This is due to the fact that, according to him, we deceive ourselves to better deceive others[2]. He talks about a co-evolutionary struggle into which deceiver and deceived are locked. Given that the interests of deceiver and deceived are "[…] almost always contrary […] a struggle (over evolutionary time) takes place in which genetic improvements on one side favor improvements on the other"[3]. Trivers conceives of the deceiver and the deceived as roles that all of us eventually play[4]. He notices that an individual can be both deceiver and deceived depending on the context, such that these roles are "[…] locked into a cyclic relationship, in the sense that neither can drive the other extinct. Over time the relative frequencies of deceiver and deceived oscillate,

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1   Cf. Trivers, R., *The Folly of Fools*, USA, Basics Books, 2011, p. 3.
2   Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 2.
3   *Ibid.*, p. 30.
4   *Idem.*

but they do so within bounds that prevent either from disappearing"[5]. These roles are frequency-dependent: a deceiver succeeds perpetrating a falsehood when it is told infrequently, because if the lie is spread too frequently it will be less effective. In "The Evolution and Psychology of Self-Deception", William von Hippel and Trivers argue that the deceptive practices that individuals deploy to gain resources instigate "[…] a co-evolutionary struggle, because selection favors the deceived evolving new means of detection and the deceiver evolving new means of deception"[6]. In this article, the basic claim is that self-deception plays an important role in this evolutionary struggle as it provides tactics for the deceivers to avoid giving themselves away by factors such as nervousness, suppression, and cognitive load[7]. John Krebs and Richard Dawkins also discuss an evolutionary arms race in which different roles are locked together[8]. These roles are the manipulator and the victim of manipulation, although no two individuals have respectively these roles in any permanent way[9]. Krebs and Dawkins claim that individuals inherit the manipulative and 'mind-reading' tendencies from their ancestors. Manipulators exert manipulations, and victims of manipulation use 'mind-reading' to spot deception. According to them, these roles –which, given the adequate context, any individual can play at any time– "[…] are intimately locked together… mind-reading is a prerequisite for the evolution of manipulation. Manipulation evolves as an evolutionary response to mind-reading. Mind-reading and manipulation co-evolve."[10].

The unwilling victim of manipulation takes countermeasures against the manipulator once she has mind-read her deceptive intentions. By knowing how she is supposed to be deceived, she can design a way to counter-deceive. It is in this sense that manipulator and victim are

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5   *Idem.*
6   Von Hippel, W., and Trivers, R., "The Evolution and Psychology of Self-Deception", *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, USA, Cambridge University Press, pp. 1-56, 2011, p. 2.
7   Cf. *Idem.*
8   Cf. Krebs, J., and Dawkins, R., "Animal Signals: Mind-Reading and Manipulation", *Behavioral Ecology*, in Krebs, J., and Davies, N., (Ed.), pp. 380-403, United Kingdom, Blackwell Scientific Publications, 1978, p. 389.
9   Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 384.
10   *Ibid.*, p. 389.

locked in an arms race from which they can never depart: one cannot extinguish the other because one *becomes* the other. The victim becomes the manipulator as it can predict the behavior of the original manipulator and lead her into a trap. Krebs and Dawkins refer to the case of 'concealment' as a type of counterespionage: "Concealment consists in making it difficult for the enemy to gain any information at all as to the nations or the company's true intentions: the equivalent at the individual level is the *poker face*"[11] . While the victim conceals knowledge about the intentions to manipulate her, there are many strategies that she can adopt to counterattack and become the manipulator, and this fact:

> […] leads us right back to manipulation and our questions about the origins and evolution of manipulation techniques. The victim of mind-reading might exploit the fact its mind is being read, in order to manipulate the behavior of the mind-reader[12].

Thus, the victim shifts to the role of manipulator when she is aware of the fact that her mind is being read and employs this fact against the original manipulator. She can also deliberately feed the manipulator with misleading information, which is another type of counterespionage classified by Krebs and Dawkins as 'active deception', while concealment is thought of as a 'passive deception'[13].

Through concealment victims can collect useful information that can be used against their manipulators without giving any cues away. We argue that concealment, understood as passive deception, constitutes a pathway to the increment of the victim's intelligence as she can turn her luck around by recognizing that she is been manipulated without letting the manipulator know that she is aware of this much. Under the veil of concealment, new counterattacks can be engineered by the victim and not executed until the original manipulator is in her most vulnerable state. Thus, the co-evolutionary struggle compensates the victim with this initial passive deception that serves by itself as a preliminary basis for the articulation of new counterattacking measures of deception. Conversely, when the manipulator acknowledges

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11   *Idem.*
12   *Idem.*
13   Cf. *Idem.*

that she is a victim of the original victim, the novelty aspect of the co-evolutionary struggle comes again into play as the ridiculed manipulator is in need of creating new strategies to deceive the original victim.

According to Trivers, the selection for deception is identified with the development of abilities that rely on novelty[14]. This is, the capacity of creating and deploying new deceitful strategies in less frequent occasions, while abilities to detect deceit are as well selected for the deceit-spotters in favor of the usage of their own aptitudes. The ability to deceive originates from creativeness and intelligence understood as faculties for developing (new) deceptive strategies which are in turn counterbalanced by (better) abilities to detect deception. Thus, for Trivers intelligence develops –in large part– for the sake of deception. He argues that, "as children mature, they become increasingly intelligent and increasingly deceptive"[15]. This correlation, he says, "[…] is not an accident. The maturing capacity that gives them general intelligence also gives them greater ability to suppress behavior and create novel behavior"[16]. This point of view leaves room for a relatively guilt-free scope for children to acquire and enhance abilities for deceiving others. Therefore, assuming that there is a strong correlation between intelligence and deception, we argue that, while the manipulator's success relies in inventing new methods for deceiving, the success of the victim consists in developing better methods for concealing her sources for spotting deception. A reliable and prudent method for spotting deception comes under the guise of controlled behavior, since voluntary disposition to actively *pretend* a given behavior is riskier in terms of costs. Trivers acknowledges that suppression of facial expressions in children and adults seems more effective than the actual invention of novel ones, as evidence shows that "when inventing faces, people of all ages tend to exaggerate, while suppression is archived more exactly"[17].

An interesting aspect of suppression of behavior is that it provides the victim of manipulation with collections of information that are useful for inventing counterattacking strategies without thereby prepa-

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14　Cf. Trivers., *The folly of…*, cit., p. 31.
15　*Ibid.*, p. 90.
16　*Idem.*
17　*Ibid.*, p. 91.

ring the manipulator for them. For example, think of the case where a woman has found out that her husband is cheating on her but decides not to let him know that she knows. She may play along the role of the victim while creating awkward situations to destabilize the husband's deceptive strategies. Perhaps the woman uses disinformation about the person with whom the husband is cheating on her; she might comment to him that that person carries a given STD. Thus, the deceived wife becomes the deceiver, while the husband suffers the pains of a victim.

III. Self-concealment

At the subpersonal level, concealment mirrors interpersonal deception. Self-concealment is the reverse image of interpersonal concealment. Still, what is mirrored in the subpersonal level is not exactly the same as interpersonal concealment, given the obvious fact that there is no one except ourselves to mind-read our intentions. Mind-reading in the subpersonal level has no function, although a variety of concealment plays an indispensible part in our evolution. What we mean by 'self-concealment' is not exactly what Krebs and Dennett associate with interpersonal concealment; rather, it is something like an 'inwards' poker-face employed in solitaire. In these cases there is a sense in which we are figuratively playing with our selves. In the context of real-life instances, the equivalent would be to silently adopt an expressionless poise with the ultimate goal of tricking ourselves into believing whatever we need to believe (that we are fitter, stronger, etc.) if we are to win, for example, a given game where effective suppression of behavior makes the difference. We can do this much because suppression of behavior has positive effects: the adoption of such a strategy is less difficult than creating guidelines to pretend a certain behavior, since we only need to linger on our reactions in the face of others' pressure without giving away the fact that we are trying to fool ourselves into believing that we have a winning hand. The poker-face has similar effects when it is directed toward third-parties as for those who know how to employ such a tactic for their own consequences irrespective of the presence of third parties, i.e., with the intention of making themselves appear to themselves better suited in the face of any possible adversity (whether coming from the self or from anyone else).

Therefore, if self-concealment can be appropriately identified with a specific bend or twist to intelligence as it emerges from the context of the co-evolutionary struggle, then this form of self-deception is an authentic adaptation. If this is correct, then a proper justification for the claim that deception is not merely a by-product can be successfully adjusted to the parameters of a reasonable evolutionary explanation about the primary part that self-deception plays in the adaptation of individuals.

Self-deception, conceived as an offensive mechanism in the face of misfortunes, is not merely a theoretical possibility. Individuals are self-deceived when they have enough resources to outsmart themselves, even more if they know by experience how they are specifically prone to react given possible circumstances. As we grow up, we increasingly understand ourselves by learning how to predict our own behavior in many possible scenarios, and thus, we can stop our probable reactions from taking place in any given incarnation of those scenarios. We can, thus, use behavior barriers to better appease the constant demands of the world. The methods individuals adopt to impose these barriers are varied because they engineer them to suit their own specific desires, goals, and tendencies.

IV. Perplexity about self-deception

Now, an issue that rises with our argument is this: how can we ever know (with certainty) that we are not, still, being self-deceived about not being self-deceived? In the face of this skeptical perplexity, we can begin by accepting that we know ourselves to a large extent. We can predict much of our behavior, since we recognize ourselves as distinguishable continuities among diverse times. But it is not obvious that we can know how deep our self-deceptions –offensive and defensive– are built into our cognitive systems. Given the conjecture that we are effective 'concealers', we can presumably outsmart others to a given point, e.g., where we do not give away cues about the fact that we are not self-deceived although we do not know with certainty to what degree are we still self-deceived. Nevertheless, in these cases the self-deceived can use this apparent deficiency in her favor. Self-concealment enables us to refuse at least part of the type of radical

skepticism that would drive our quest about how deep are we offensively and defensively self-deceived towards an unwanted or absurd outcome. The result of such an inquiry would be unwanted when the skeptic obfuscates in such a way about her potential self-deceptions that she loses her balanced general outlook, which in turn could make her collapse into depression and/or anxiety. On the other hand, the outcome would be absurd when the radical skeptic gets trapped into the illusion that she does not really know herself, and thus, her steam of thoughts may idly circulate around 'existential' intrigues with no fruitful consequences. Hence, by rejecting radical skepticism, the self-deceived conceals to her consciousness several prejudicial beliefs amongst which she nurtures the belief that she is not fully aware about how deeply is she self-deceived. There are multiple gains for those who conceal from themselves multiple noxious beliefs, including the belief of not being self-deceived. By self-concealing these beliefs, people can attain sense of purpose and worthiness that are valuable stimuli that move them into persevering in their existence. To just as the belief that a competitor is about to outrun us may lead us increment our speed and thus determine the place we ultimately reach in a foot race, by way of attaching value to our own faculties, attributes, etc., we can fuel the interest in improving our own form of life. Even more, we can thereby eventually succeed by systematically depriving ourselves from a more complete reflection that includes many deficiencies that are also inherent to us. It is true, though, that self-concealment operates in individuals at a profound level. It possesses the therapeutic function of a borderline that stops people from losing a general positive attitude towards life. Nonetheless, even if individuals actually notice that they are self-deceived about something, they can never be sure –i.e., with certainty– about what else are they self-deceived. That is, precisely, the reason why self-concealment is an offensive function: although we cannot know to what extent we are self-deceived, this fact by itself *does not* paralyze us. Self-concealment is an evolutionary reaction to extreme apathy or depression since it sets the necessary background for the adoption of sense of purpose and meaning that will better move us into achieving our objectives.

Individuals do not perceive the fact that they are self-deceived precisely because they cannot easily distinguish where is the boundary that divides misbelief and uncertainty. Even more, they do not want to find that borderline because they tacitly know that, if they found it, then apparent cases of uncertainty would turn to palpable instances of misbeliefs and, therefore, they would have to accept that they are self-deceived. It seems, thus, more convenient to elude systematically the confrontation of what one cannot know with certainty. What is interesting, nonetheless, is how an individual, for her own peace of mind, can bring to a stop a detrimental train of thoughts. Self-concealment operates here as a therapeutic strategy: people put a stop to potentially harmful thoughts that could shake a set of current interconnected beliefs which rely on a given misbelief. In any event, misbelief overlaps with uncertainty when people restrain their quests for the truth[18]. Thus, the self-deceived can argue that she cannot know some things which will always be one step ahead of her. In a sense, indeed, they are self-deceived because their strategies (*obfuscating* the line that separates misbelief from uncertainty) presupposes that they cannot know the truth of some beliefs (when in fact they could in many instances), since it is costless to think of some given belief as indeterminate and leave it aside than inquiry into its truth-value. For example, we conceal from ourselves, on behalf of our peace of mind, the parts of our personal history which we do not want to be reminded. We can dissimulate to our self whatever we do not wish to know because we can control to a degree the course or tone of our soliloquy. Therefore, we can bring our train of thought to an end, when we suspect that if continue digging we may probably encounter evidence that could compromise the truth of some of our core beliefs about ourselves.

V. Self-concealment and positive illusions

Our thesis is that self-concealment goes hand in hand with positive illusions, as they are both adaptations. Positive illusions[19] are 'concealed' to the sight of who self-deceives because they have be-

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18   Cf. Von Hippel, W., and Trivers, R., "The Evolution and…", cit., p. 8.
19   Cf. McKay, R., and Dennett, D., "The Evolution of Misbelief", *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, USA, Cambridge University Press, 2009, pp. 493-561, p. 505.

come part of the backdrop of the network of the individual's core beliefs. Positive illusions are authentic selections as "[…] they may lead us to undertake adaptive actions; or they may more directly sustain and enhance health, or physical fitness in the everyday sense"[20]. When positive illusions are challenged, the disadvantage is for the individual who cannot arise from her skepticism and thereby is paralyzed by the lack of sense in her life. But self-concealment counteracts the skeptic's obfuscation about self-deception, since it is an evolutionary response involving the adoption of new positive illusions (e.g., about prolonging our life after our expected expiration date). In this case, the disillusioned manipulated individual ceases to play the role of a skeptic and instead counterattacks by putting herself one step ahead of the manipulator and becoming a manipulator. The role of manipulating the subpersonal victim is performed by the enlightened, this is, an offensive role that incorporates new positive illusions in the background of the skeptic view and, thereby, offers a new basis on which other positive beliefs are supported. We change characters when we conceal or repress the 'true' beliefs about our insignificant and futile existences and adopt an offensive behavior towards life. This 'new' behavior shows nothing except a shadow to ourselves and others about our past skeptic side. Now, if these nihilist gaps are not concealed well enough, they may rapidly lead again to the disillusioned, victim role.

Anyhow, the difference with interpersonal deception is that, in the subpersonal struggle, it is a disadvantage to be aware of the fact that we act on the base of positive illusions. On the other hand, it is to our benefit to neglect the fact that many of our basic beliefs about our self-worth and us are positive illusions. These positive illusions function as incentives that enable us to respond to our skeptic victimized role. It is, thus, the pragmatic aspect of these illusions that count for the self-deceived's interests: once they stop working for us we are required to find new ones. Therefore, it is not pragmatic to know too much about how it is that we succeed in believing positive illusions. From a pragmatist point of view, efficient positive illusions are not aimed to merely making a fool of us by presenting us with false beliefs. Rather, they are directed to exert specific functions as incentivizing us to achieve our

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20   *Ibid.*, p. 505.

goals. In contrast, being disillusioned is detrimental to individuals. A pragmatist would tackle disillusion as a necessary evil which must be periodically defeated. The subpersonal struggle, then, restarts when the victim adopts an offensive role and transforms into a manipulator. She has arrived to the conclusion that it is not affordable to stay disillusioned and, therefore, looks for some other positive illusions to fulfill the enlightened role that she needs to perform in order to overcome her skepticism.

VI. The subpersonal struggle between enlightened and disillusioned

When we project the inter-personal struggle between manipulator and victim onto the subpersonal level, we encounter two roles that one and the same individual can play. We use the phraseology of enlightened-disillusioned. Self-deception is possible because it is not viable to men to fix themselves permanently in either one of these roles that take place in the subpersonal struggle. When the shift towards the disillusioned role has taken place, the narrative assimilates a grim tone. Taking skepticism to its ultimate consequences, the shadow of the disillusioned's speech captures the foundations of her general outlook. But there is a point when the disillusioned crosses a border that compromises the soundness of her stance. In these cases, one begins to form negative illusions in the vein of a radical skepticism which is practically unsustainable. This is an inconceivable position because we cannot test our complete conceptual framework of beliefs at once[21]. In order to doubt something, we must first take something for granted. Therefore, radical skepticism is untenable. We can intuitively arrive to the equivalent of this conclusion when we realize that there is no point in continuing disillusioned (or disappointed) about every positive illusion. This case is sometimes exemplified in people who choose to leave aside their existential issues and recurrent pessimism in order to give themselves the chance of heading towards wherever resides their desired destination. We called this attitude or role 'enlightened' because in some sense we start afresh. Indeed, we begin to think there may be some illusions that could have positive effects in us. This first step of

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21   Cf. Quine, W., *Word and Object*, USA, The MIT Press, 1960, p. 4.

the disillusioned victim towards becoming a manipulator is, therefore, a sort of loosening in our rigid contemplation of the harsh conditions of life. We cannot undermine every positive illusion because some of them must really be valuable for our adaptation. Thus, the first step towards enlightenment is when the disillusioned realizes that her disappointment is useless to the extent that it provides her with no benefit. Rather, it is costly to cope with the type of negative illusions that radical skepticism offers to those who choose to embrace them.

Self-deception is a complex phenomenon involving at least two elements that are interlocked in constant struggle. The enlightened is the individual who is under the spell of positive illusions, and the disillusioned is the one who radically denies the effect of such a spell in her. But as the disillusioned can never totally wash out his deep-down positive illusions –unless she does not choose to live and decides to land and stay in rock bottom–, she will eventually return to enlightenment through self-concealment.
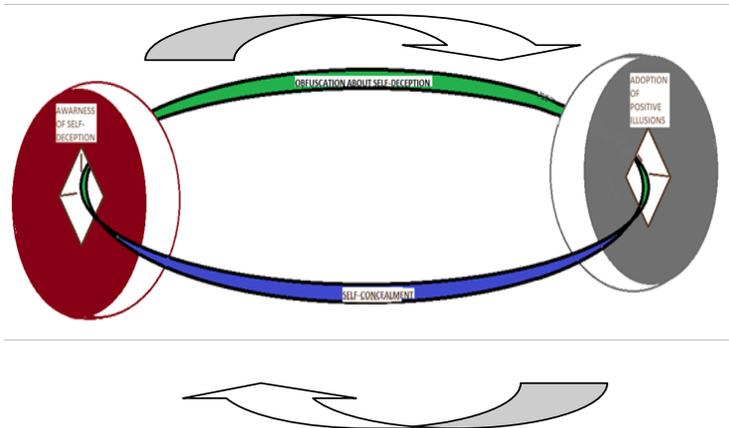
Consider the following figure:

Figure 1.

Both poles represent the two sides of the battery that constitutes the subpersonal phenomenon we classify as self-deception. These po-

les symbolize the basis for engaging in the roles that are involved in the subpersonal struggle between enlightenment –i.e., the attitude of embracing positive illusions and displaying a biased disposition towards attending evidence that runs against these illusions– and, in the other hand, disillusion —i.e., the disappointed point of view of the victim of enlightenment (which involves, to some degree, the sort of shame which one feels by realizing that one has been fooled by oneself). Now, the ribbon passing through the poles represents our personal film or narrative. In the down side of it is the vivid image provided by the adoption of positive illusions. We find ourselves staring only at the colorful side of our film. The perspective of self-concealment has taken over. When we passed through the right pole (*Adoption of positive illusions*), our viewpoint changes imperceptibly: we start acting on the base of positive illusions and, in order to do this, it is essential for us to conceal from ourselves the fact that there is another side to the film. Conversely, when our interpretation of the sequence of the film arrives at the left pole (*Awareness of self-deception*), we are left with no direct perspective of positive illusions. Instead, we view positive illusions as something that we need to purge. The roles have changed since the individual no longer self-conceals, and thus, denies the worthiness of any kind of positive illusions. We suddenly become aware that we were deceived by ourselves (and maybe by others too, to the extent that they knew we where deceiving ourselves and went along with it). By being aware of our self-deception, we think that we are now free of self-deceptions as we continuously reproach to ourselves the fact that we were self-deceived. This reproach, however, eventually distorts our view of what we take reality to be; after all, we are only looking at the negative side of our own film. But when this attitude is taken too far and the extreme disappointment and skepticism seems disproportionate (and even absurd), we realize that something is wrong with our general perspective. We notice that the absorption of radical disillusion no longer works for us since, if there are no more positive illusions to drain, what is the point of the continuous purge? We begin to think, then, that our general outlook is obfuscated. We might still be self-deceived and may never be aware of how much. Therefore, when we see that there are some things which are useful to believe in (e.g. positive

illusions), it does not make sense to keep staring at the negative side of our film: we need to switch our perspective and role, and the way to do this is by adopting new positive illusions. As long as we embrace positive illusions, we reject any evidence that can count against them.

Yet, awareness of self-deception occurs when positive illusions are held too long, or when striking evidence makes our general positive attitude shift towards skepticism. But, conversely, the pressures involving the full adoption of the disillusioned stance costs are excessively high to bear. We cannot purge away all of our positive illusions, e.g., the most basic ones about our self-worth, our place in the universe, our usefulness, and so on. We are, thereby, repelled from the pole of awareness of self-deception and become increasingly closer to the opposite pole which is expecting us with positive illusions to adopt. Therefore, while disillusion is a requisite for enlightenment, enlightenment is an evolutionary response to disillusion.

Conclusions

We argue that Trivers is right in his claim that we deceive ourselves to better deceive others[22]. Self-deception is offensive in function[23] since it constitutes a response to disillusion through the adoption of positive illusions. Lying is potentially too expensive (if caught, it conduces to reprehension). Unlike outright lying, self-deception for the sake of successful interpersonal deception involves less retaliation because the self-deceived has plausible deniability. The fact that people are self-deceived makes them invulnerable to the charge of lying; they are, thus, free to deceive others without being blamable for it. Self-deception conceived as self-concealment is cheaper because it is an offensive mechanism in charge of responding to our obfuscation about potential self-deceptions.

Self-deception differs from outright lying since it is not truth-aimed. The aim of self-concealment is the adoption of positive illusions for successful flourishing. Our thesis is that self-deception is not a completely bewildering phenomenon when it is considered from a dynamic perspective (see figure 1). As rational but finite beings with

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22   Cf. Trivers., *The Folly of…*, cit., p. 2.
23   Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 3.

specific desires and goals, we cannot tell with certainty to what point are we self-deceived. We are self-deceived about non-trivial matters: people attribute transcendent meaning to their lives by adopting positive illusions to find tolerable harsh truths. We appear to be naive about the fact that we are largely insignificant and unoriginal. Our gullible outlook is a positive illusion working massively in humans. We have the capacity to assign meaning to our lives in order to orient ourselves throughout life.

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