The Therapeutic Value of Intellectual Virtue

Mark Young *
mark.young@rdc.ab.ca

ABSTRACT

The focus of this article is to offer an account of how the development of one's intellectual character has therapeutic value in the attempt to overcome self-deception. Even stronger, the development of intellectual character has necessary therapeutic value in regard to self-deception. This account proceeds by first consulting the predominant psychological theory of virtuous character offered by contemporary virtue ethicists and virtue epistemologists. A motivational/dispositional account of self-deception is then offered and connected to the former account of intellectual character. By connecting these two sets of literature the therapeutic value of intellectual virtue is displayed. The problem of self-diagnosis is then presented as well as intellectual character as a necessary therapeutic measure to assure agents that they are not self-deceived.

1. Introduction

To display the therapeutic value of intellectual virtue the first step will be to become familiar with the predominant neo-Aristotelian theory of virtuous character. After this has been presented a motivational/dispositional account of self-deception, which is congruent with virtue psychology, will be offered. These two sets of literature then will be explicitly connected in order to display the therapeutic value of intellectual virtue. Finally, an argument will be offered for the claim that intellectual virtue has necessary therapeutic value in the attempt to overcome self-deception.

* Red Deer College, Alberta, Canada.

2. The Psychology of Virtuous Character

The goal of this section is to become familiar with the predominant psychological theory of virtuous character offered by contemporary virtue theorists, which is based on Aristotle's notion of virtuous character.[1] Such familiarity is indispensable to ultimately understanding the therapeutic value of intellectual character in the attempt to overcome self-deception.

The first point to note about virtuous character is that the virtues entail attempts to correct certain natural shortcomings. To be virtuous entails a conscientious effort to overcome excessive or deficient psychological motivations and dispositions, or to regulate personal desires, that are held to lead to inappropriate behaviour. For example, to be courageous the agent must overcome unwarranted contrary desires for safety, and to be temperate an agent must overcome an excessive desire for pleasure.[2] The types of psychological dispositions identified for correction by virtue theorists are often understood to be selfish desires, but this is not always the case; for to be virtuous can also entail the correction, or altering, of the influence of positive and altruistic desires, since an agent can be altruistic to her own detriment and the detriment of others.[3] In regard to the intellectual virtues it is claimed that agents are susceptible to cognitive excesses and deficiencies, i.e., intellectual vices, which must be replaced and corrected by the appropriate character traits deemed intellectual virtues.[4]

The virtues are also typically held to be motives that contain at least some emotive content, and it is this emotive content that is held to initiate activity toward specific ends.[5] Since the virtues do not simply involve acting through the influence of one's emotions, but instead through the influence of those emotions deemed worthwhile, these emotive states are connected to the fulfillment of specific values. For example, a compassionate individual has certain feelings associated with compassion, such as love and sympathy, which then initiates compassionate activity.[6] The virtues, as motivations for action,

[1] See Aristotle 1993, pp. 19–20; Axtell 1997, pp. 2, 14; Hursthouse 1999, pp. 8–12, 15–16; Merritt 2000, pp. 367, 374–376; Sherman & White 2003, pp. 39, 42.
[2] See Foot 1997, pp. 169–170.
[3] See Irwin 1996, pp. 48–49.
[4] See Montmarquet 1993, p. 23; Zagzebski 1996, pp. 105, 152–153. Axtell 1997, p. 14; Axtell 1998, p. 495; Sherman and White 2003, p. 42; Fairweather 2001, pp. 67–70.
[5] See Zagzebski 1996, p. 131–132; Hursthouse 1999, pp. 99–100, 108.
[6] See Zagzebski 1996, pp. 131–132; Hursthouse 1999, pp. 99–100.

are also held to be persistent. Virtue theorists recognize that some motives are episodic since they only occur at particular times, but it is also proposed that certain motivations are persistent and therefore dispositional. That is, individuals possess certain motivations which are enduring and initiate behavior consistently and are therefore considered to be dispositions.[7] This is an important aspect of virtue psychology that has been part of the tradition at least since Aristotle,[8] which is the idea of the motivational self-sufficiency of virtuous character. What this entails is that the virtues, when they become integrated into agents, become robust character traits that dispose agents to act in certain ways regardless of external conditions. So, for example, if an agent is generous she will remain such even if resources are scarce. Agents may need to rely on social conditions to initiate the development of virtuous character traits, such as educational institutions and the family, but once the virtues are fully integrated into the character of an agent that agent will possess enduring dispositions that acts as impetuses for action.[9] In fact, once a virtue has become fully integrated it is held that counter inclinations, such as fear, do not exercise any influence. Such inclinations do not simply compete with virtuous motives to determine action in the fully virtuous agent, but instead are completely silenced by the relevant virtue, or virtues.[10] The virtues therefore enable agents to act consistently, and to adopt the necessary skills needed to act in accord with various virtues.[11] For example, the agent who possesses the intellectual virtue of intellectual conscientiousness, or, as it is sometimes referred to, the love of truth, will develop those skills that will enable her to better achieve true beliefs. Thus, it is generally held by virtue theorists that the virtues tend to have motivational components, which are emotive, dispositional, robust and consistent.

Besides motivational and dispositional impetuses for action the virtues are also held to influence an agent's perception and reasoning.[12] Focusing first on perception it is proposed that the virtuous agent does not simply want the right things, through being motivated or disposed by the virtues, but is also able to apprehend the "salient aspects of the relevant situation" through the influence

[7] See Zagzebski 1996, p. 132; McDowell 2003, p. 134.
[8] See Aristotle, *NE*, 1100b, 1105a.
[9] See Merritt 2000, pp. 366–368, 374–376; Hursthouse 1999, p. 123. McKinnon 1999, p. 29.
[10] See McDowell 2003, p. 125.
[11] SeeZagzebski 1996, p. 133.
[12] See Louden 1997, p. 206.

of the virtues.[13] This occurs because the virtues constitute the agent in a particular way. We have already seen this in regard to the idea that the virtues act as motivations and dispositions for agents, and therefore influence the agent's choices and actions. Since the virtues can influence the agent in this way they can also influence how agents perceive and think.[14] In order to display how the latter is the case we will focus on one particular moral virtue, i.e., courage, and then generalize these remarks to other virtues.

A common claim among virtue theorists is that a virtue is a psychological disposition which is itself a mean between two extremes.[15] These extremes tend to be inappropriate ways of feeling, desires or motivations, which can then obscure agent perception. In the case of courage the two extremes are cowardice and rashness. The coward is overcome with inappropriate fear, and/or desire to save himself, and this then causes him to perceive the particular situation as more dangerous than it actually is. The rash agent, on the other hand, is overconfident. Such an agent perceives the situation as less dangerous than it actually is, and in this way does not perceive the situation accurately. The courageous agent, though, is held to perceive the situation accurately, and therefore will act appropriately. Such an individual has silenced the influence of irrational fears, and therefore does not give inappropriate weight either to his personal safety or to the dangers involved in a situation. The courageous agent is also aware of his own limitations, and hence what his actual options are in the situation. For example, it is generally held that courageous actions entail facing an immediate danger, but this is not always the case. It could be that in a particular situation the courageous act entails retreating from immediate danger. The agent who possesses the virtue of courage knows whether it is better to retreat or to face the immediate danger since the psychological disposition associated with courage enables such an agent to recognize considerations that either warrant retreat or making a stand.[16] Courage is therefore held to enable the agent to perceive whether there is a genuine threat that cannot be overcome, or whether, through personal effort, the threat can be overcome.

The general psychological theory that underlies this description of the influence of courage on human perception is that the agent's affective and

[13] See Annas 1998, p. 40; Hursthouse 1999, pp. 207–208; Sherman & White 2003, p. 36.
[14] See McKinnon 1999, pp. 29–30.
[15] See Aristotle, *NE*, 1106b; Zagzebski 1996, pp. 96–97.
[16] See Adams 2000, pp. 39–40; Irwin 1996, pp. 45–46; Wallace 1973, pp. 64–66.

motivational states influence her cognitions. That is, the virtue theorist ascribes to a psychological theory which proposes that psychological states such as desires, passions, motivations and dispositions, and not merely the agent's various beliefs, influence human cognition. The vices are those affective states that detrimentally affect agent perception since they disable the ability to perceive accurately. This is exemplified in the perceptions of the rash agent as well as the coward. Such agents perceive the same situation differently from the courageous agent, and this is explained due to their divergent psychological constitutions. That is, the virtues constitute the agent in a particular way, which in turn produces accurate perceptions and choices. The virtues therefore make agents sensitive to particular aspects of situations, as well as specific warranted expectations, by constituting the agent in specific ways. They shape and order the agent's concerns and interests. They cause agents to be concerned with courageous, benevolent, fair, charitable acts, and so on, and in this way influence agent perceptions in particular situations. Thus the virtues do not simply remove vicious obstacles, but they also provide a type of knowledge, or understanding, that guides the agent in her various perceptions.[17]

Since the virtues cause agents to perceive in specific ways they also cause agents to reason in specific ways by influencing their perceptions of facts, situations, principles and so on. For example, for the courageous agent certain aspects of situations will appear salient, and decisions made are based on the agent's perception of those salient aspects. So, the virtues do provide an impetus for action by being motivational and dispositional, but they also fulfill a role in the reasoning process of agents when reasoning does occur. That is, there are instances when little to no reasoning occurs, and the relevant virtue, or virtues, shapes perception and a virtuous action results without deliberation.[18] In other situations, though, deliberation occurs before the virtuous action results, and such deliberation is also guided by the virtuous, or vicious, state of the agent. For example, an agent who possesses the virtue of charity reasons through its influence in various ways to bring about charitable acts. In such situations the impetus for an action is not simply a virtue acting as a motivational or dispositional state, but rather the agent acts because of specific reasons and such reasons appear warranted, or appropriate, due to her

[17] See Irwin 1996, pp. 40, 48–49, 53; McKinnon 1999, pp. 32–33; McDowell 2003, pp. 122–127, 135–137, 140; Hursthouse 1999, pp. 11–12, 111, 129–131, 207–208.
[18] See Hookway 2003, p. 184.

virtuous perceptions. The agent does not have to be aware that she is acting from some general impetus for behaviour, such as charity, but instead may mention more situation specific reasons. For example, the agent does not have to say "I did act X because it was courageous," but rather can cite reasons such as "Someone had to save him," or "I knew that I could save him if I tried." The significant point is simply that it is through the influence of a virtue, or virtues, that the agent recognizes such reasons as warranted and compelling. Once the virtues are fully inculcated into the character of the virtuous agent such an agent does not always have to be cognizant that she is reasoning due to the influence of a virtuous disposition. The virtue in question instead simply constitutes the agent in a particular way to shape her understanding and then this understanding is applied to specific situations. The virtues therefore first facilitate appropriate perception, and then, in turn, facilitate appropriate reasoning based on those perceptions.[19]

It is also generally held that the virtues not only enable agents to reason correctly, but also enable such an agent to act in accord with appropriate reasoning. The idea is that the virtues remove, or replace, inappropriate psychological mechanisms, i.e., the vices, from having a deleterious influence on motivations and perceptions, and this includes the reasons for which the agent acts. This means that the virtuous agent will also act in accord with the outcome of her virtuous deliberations. That is, the virtuous agent first deliberates through the cognitive filter of the virtues to come to specific conclusions, and then she is able to act in accord with the conclusions of virtuous deliberation through the motivational/dispositional capacity provided by the relevant virtue, or virtues.[20] This claim is significant for later attempts to refine the specific contribution of the intellectual virtues. For it will entail not simply that such virtues enable agents to perceive and reason correctly when it comes to assessing whether some belief is true, but also to believe in accord with those perceptions and virtuous deliberations. Thus, the intellectual

[19] See Irwin 1996, pp. 48–50. Watson 2003, p. 234; Crisp 1996, p. 17; Pence 1984, pp. 287, 289; MacIntyre 1981, pp. 161–162; McKinnon 1999, pp. 29–30, 34, 44; McDowell 2003, pp. 133–136; Hursthouse 1999, pp. 108, 111, 123–129, 136, 145.

[20] See MacIntyre 1981, p. 162; Irwin 1996, pp. 46, 49–50; Annas 1998, p. 40; Hursthouse 1999, pp. 11–12, 92, 102–103, 108–109, 123–125, 129–130, 136. McKinnon 1999, pp. 29–31, 34, 44; Annas 2003, p. 289.

virtues will dispose agents to not only reason and perceive in certain ways, but also to believe in certain ways.[21]

Having become familiar with how the virtues influence the psychology of agents we must briefly become familiar with one final claim concerning virtuous character. This is the claim that the virtues are teleological. To say that the virtues are teleological means that the virtues possess a particular *telos*, or end, to which they are directed. Broadly speaking, the particular end of the moral virtues is proposed to be the "good," and that of the intellectual virtues is the "true."[22] The claim that the virtues are teleological deserves mentioning since, in what follows, a description of intellectual character is offered where the specific *telos* of such character is true belief and the relationship to this end is instrumental. That is, it is argued that the intellectual virtues fulfill an instrumental role in enabling agents to obtain and sustain true beliefs, and it is for this reason that such virtues can act as a therapeutic means to overcome self-deception. Before this claim can be made, though, familiarity with a specific theory of self-deception is required. So, in the next section, a motivational/dispositional account of self-deception is summarized and then connected to the theory of virtuous character outlined in this section.

3. The Motivational/Dispositional Account of Self-Deception

The focus of this section is set out a theory of self-deception that coheres with the theory of virtuous character outlined in the previous section. It is a theory that ascribes a causal role to motivations and dispositions in occurrences of self-deception. Two general ways in which motivations and dispositions can fulfill a causal role in self-deception are identified. First, agents can be motivated, or disposed, to favor a particular belief, or set of beliefs, and this then causes the agent to gather evidence in a way that will either confirm, or conform to, that cherished belief, or set of beliefs. Second, motivations, or dispositions, can cause agents to miss disconfirming evidence altogether. With the latter situation evidence is not reinterpreted to either conform to, or confirm, some cherished belief or set of beliefs, but instead disconfirming

[21] See Montmarquet 1987, pp. 486–487; Montmarquet 1993, pp. 43, 65; Axtell 1998, pp. 498–499; Zagzebski 1996, p. 149; Fairweather 2001, pp. 67–69; Hookway 2003, p. 188.
[22] See Watson 2003, pp. 230, 241; Annas 2003, pp. 21–22.

evidence is ignored altogether.[23] Consideration of these two ways in which motivations and dispositions can initiate self-deception will then facilitate appreciation of how intellectual character can act as a therapeutic means to overcome it.

We will begin by focusing on the first way in which motivations and dispositions can initiate self-deception, and specifically consult two explanations of self-deception offered by Alfred Mele and Herbert Fingarette. According to Mele, an agent's desire for some belief, or set of beliefs, can cause that agent to engage in acts of both negative and positive misinterpretation. Negative misinterpretation occurs when the agent's desire leads that agent to misinterpret evidence as not disconfirming a particular belief, or set of beliefs, although, in the absence of such a desire, the evidence would easily disconfirm the agent's belief or beliefs. For example, an agent could have evidence that his partner does not love him and yet his desire for his partner's love could cause him to ignore such evidence in order to maintain a belief that she does. Positive misinterpretation occurs when the agent interprets evidence, through the influence of some desire or motivation, as counting in favor of her belief when in fact it does not.[24] For example, an agent who wants to maintain a view of himself as generous will misinterpret his actions in specific situations as conforming to this virtue. This will occur even if there are significant reasons to believe that the agent is not generous.[25] Hence, what the agent does in such situations is provide an explanation to himself that makes the evidence fit together so as to confirm, and conform to, his desires or motivations.

Fingarette's explanation of self-deception focuses more on the motivation to maintain a complex web of beliefs, which he refers to as a specific "cover-story." According to Fingarette, in cases of self-deception agents possesses a cover story to which facts are bent so as to confirm the cover story. The agent skillfully interprets aspects of his engagement in the world in order to maintain the plausibility of the cover story and make it as natural and internally consistent as possible even when the evidence continues to mount against this story. This is accomplished by engaging in inventive acts of rationalization in order to fill in the gaps of the cover story not confirmed by the evidence to

[23] See Sanford 1988, pp. 161–162, 169; Johnston 1988, p. 75; McLaughlin 1988, pp. 39, 52–53; Audi 1988, pp. 97–99, 101–105, 107–108; Mele 2001, p. 29–30.
[24] See Audi 1988, pp. 97–99, 103–105, 107–108; Mele 2001, pp. 26–27.
[25] See Mele 2001, p. 11.

which the agent is exposed.[26] Fingarette is not alone in advocating such an explanation of self-deception, for psychologists who conduct research on self-deception offer a similar explanation. For example, Shelly Taylor proposes that the belief formation of agents is often influenced by the attempt to maintain a self-schema. A self-schema is an organized sets of beliefs about an agent's personal traits and role in the world. Agents attempt to maintain beliefs associated with their self-schemas, for example that they are witty or kind, and this causes them to form false beliefs in specific situations. The self-schema therefore acts as a filter through which specific information is interpreted. If incoming evidence does not conform with the self-schema, then it is either modified or ignored.[27] Agents desire to see themselves, as well as loved ones and cherished beliefs, in a positive light, and attempt to avoid the anxiety that could arise if they were confronted with a belief they do not want to be true. It is therefore a general desire, in this case the desire to maintain a favoured cover-story, or self-schema that is the impetus for specific acts of self-deception.[28]

The second way in which motivations can initiate instances of self-deception, as mentioned, is by simply causing agents to miss disconfirming evidence in the first place. No positive or negative misinterpretation occurs in such situations, but instead disconfirming evidence is ignored altogether. Through the influence of one's motivations an agent either evades an issue altogether or the agent engages in selective attention and evidence gathering. For example, the agent will be hypersensitive to evidence that confirms what the agent is motivated to believe, so that her attention is constantly focused on confirming evidence and fails to acknowledge evidence that would disconfirm a cherished belief. In situations of evasion and selective attention no misinterpretation occurs, since the evidence is never acknowledged. The agent simply ignores the evidence due to the influence of a desire to maintain some belief, cover story or self-schema. For such an agent only specific aspects of situations, i.e., those aspects which confirm, and conform to, the agent's motivations, are perceived as salient, and this is directly the result of the agent's specific desires or motivations. For example, an agent who wants to

[26] See Fingarette 2000, pp. 34, 37–40, 46, 48–49, 52, 61–63, 69–71.
[27] See Taylor 1989, pp. 13–15, 154–155.
[28] See Audi 1988, pp. 97, 101–102, 105, 107–108; Johnston 1988, p. 66, 73, 86; Taylor 1989, pp. 8–45; Sanford 1988, pp. 157–159; Fingarette 2000, pp. 65–69, 86, 139, 142, 145; Asendorpf & Ostendorf 1998, pp. 961–962; Anderson, Srivastava, Beer, Spataro, & Chatman 2006, p. 1095.

believe that her husband is faithful, and is strongly motivated to maintain this belief, ignores evidence that attests to his infidelity while focusing on the evidence that attests to his devotion even when this evidence is minimal. Through the influence of specific desires or motivations, then, agents either evade disturbing evidence altogether or engage in selective evidence gathering, so that it is only the evidence that confirms the motivationally biased belief that is recognized while evidence that disconfirms such belief is not even acknowledged.[29]

Another aspect of the motivational/dispositional account of self-deception that deserves mentioning is that the motivations which initiate self-deception tend to be self-serving. It is a desire to see oneself, as well as loved ones and cherished beliefs, in a positive light, or to remove the anxiety that could arise if the agent were confronted with a belief that she either did, or did not, want to be true that causes specific instances of self-deception. The agent desires to see herself as a person of a particular type, or to maintain the truth of some favoured explanation or theory, and this then initiates either misinterpretation or selective attention. In such situations the agent is not concerned with the truth of her beliefs about her own character, the character of loved ones, nor about the truth of some cherished belief or set of beliefs. Instead, it is the maintenance of what is favoured, often to remove anxiety and maintain psychological well-being, that motivates the gathering of evidence as well as the explanations provided.[30] Thus, self-serving desires and motivations are often the cause of self-deception and, in turn, false belief. Also, the influence of those desires which initiate self-deception are unconscious. The agent who engages in self-deception is not aware that the process is occurring, and this lack of awareness is indispensable for the success of self-deception. If the agent were to become aware of the fact that she was influenced by specific desires, and therefore was motivated to believe in specific ways, then such desires would no longer be efficacious. This is because the agent would then be aware that her beliefs were the result not of evidence, but rather her own biased psychological states. The agent would thus realize that she was duped by her

[29] See McLaughlin 1988, pp. 42–43; Johnston 1988, pp. 67–68, 75, 87; Audi 1988, p. 105; Taylor 1989, pp. 146, 147; Fingarette 2000, pp. 38–40, 46, 167–169, Mele 2001, pp. 26–27, 51–52; Baier 1996, pp. 53–55; Oksenberg Rorty 1988, pp. 11, 18; Oksenberg Rorty 1996, pp. 77–79.

[30] See Johnston 1988, pp. 66, 73, 86; Audi 1988, p. 97, 101–102, 105, 107–108; Taylor 1989, 8–45; Sanford 1988, pp. 157–159; Oksenberg Rorty 1996, p. 77; Baier 1996, p. 55; Asendorpf & Ostendorf 1998, pp. 961–962; Fingarette 2000, pp. 65–69, 86, 139, 142, 145; Anderson et al. 2006, p. 1095; Deutsch 1996, p. 316; de Sousa 1988, p. 327; van Fraassen 1988, p. 145.

own motivational structure, and would, in turn, no longer be taken in by it. Hence, the agent must be oblivious to the influence of specific desires, or motivations, in order for self-deception to occur.[31]

Finally, the influence of motivations that can cause self-deception are generally not episodic, and hence the dispositional nature of self-deception. That is, agents typically maintain the specific motivations that can initiate occurrences of self-deception so that perceiving, reasoning, and ultimately believing through their influence is dispositional. The agent does not adopt a particular motivation, cover story or self schema, for only a moment, but instead has long-term commitments to them. For example, the agent who desires to see herself as courageous does not do such only momentarily but instead is committed to this belief. This is not to deny that the motivations which initiate self-deception cannot be held only episodically, but rather the point is that typically they are not. Agents can be quite committed to maintaining specific motivations, cover-stories and self-schemas, and will therefore continue to be influenced by them when forming new beliefs. In such situations these patterns of entrenched doxastic behaviour act as an "automatic filtering process" through which evidence and reasons are considered, so that those beliefs that serve the agent's interests, by conforming to what the agent desires, are maintained. Consequently, the psychological mechanisms which cause occurrences of self-deception represent enduring psychological stratagems of the agent, or, more simply, dispositions.[32]

To sum up, then, according to the motivational/dispositional account of self-deception it is the desires of the agent that initiate instances of self-deception. These motivations cause agents to form false beliefs by either

[31] See Johnston 1988, pp. 65–66, 70–76, 78, 87; Audi 1988, p. 94, 102–105, 109; Baier 1996, pp. 54–55; Deutsch 1996, p. 317; Fingarette 2000, pp. 46–49, 60–61, 65–66, 78, 98–99. Another possible impetus for self-deception could be akrasia; i.e., the agent does not believe on the basis of reasons she is aware of. One could easily imagine that motivations/dispositions could also fulfill a role here, as the agent does not believe as she should because she is disposed to maintaining some favourable cover-story. If akrasia can be an impetus for self-deception then there could be instances where the agent is self-deceived and in some way aware that she is. It may be questionable, though, whether self-deception can occur due to akrasia. This is because when an agent is suffering from akrasia she is well aware that some claim is true but does not act on it. Hence, to be self-deceived via akrasia means that the agent holds that some belief is true but then does not believe it. It seems impossible that one could believe and not believe some claim simultaneously, and the account of self-deception offered in this article has avoided this possibility so far.

[32] See McLaughlin 1988, pp. 43–44; Johnston 1988, pp. 66, 87; Oksenberg Rorty 1988, p. 18–19. Taylor 1989, pp. 227–228; Oksenberg Rorty 1996, p. 76–78; Fingarette 2000, pp. 46–47.

causing the agent misinterpret evidence or engage in selective attention and rationalization. The motivations which initiate self-deception are also both self-serving and unconscious. The agent is attempting to maintain some cherished belief, cover-story or self schema, and in order for this process to be effective the agent must be unaware that it is occurring. Finally, the motivation to maintain some cherished belief, or set of beliefs, is not episodic, but instead represent certain habits of the mind and are therefore dispositional in nature.

4. The Mitigating Influence of Intellectual Character

Having achieved a basic understanding of the motivational/dispositional account of self-deception attention can now turn to how the development of one's intellectual character can act as a therapeutic means to overcome self-deception. This account relies significantly on the theory of virtuous character outlined in the first section, as well as some new sources.

The first thing to recall is that the intellectual virtues also involve a motivational component. Specifically, they involve a general desire for true belief as well as a variety of specific motivations, such as a motivation to be open-minded, intellectually humble, intellectually courageous, and so on.[33] Since it is the case that motivations fulfill a role in self-deception it is possible that the motivations associated with intellectual character could act as a means to overcome self-deception. According to the motivational/dispositional account of self-deception when agents form their beliefs they do not simply have to be exposed to the appropriate evidence in order to avoid possessing false beliefs. They also must be motivated in the right way toward that evidence. If agents are motivated to reinterpret evidence in a self-serving manner they will come to believe as they want to believe and not as the evidence suggests. What seems to be required, then, to overcome self-deception is not simply to re-expose agents to the evidence, or to even expose them to further evidence, since such evidence will be filtered through their motivational structure. Instead, in order to enable agents to obtain true beliefs in such situations it appears that it is their motivation structure that must be altered. A possible way to overcome self-deception, then, is to replace the self-serving motivations associated with self-deception with motivations focused on obtaining true

[33] See Johnston 1988, pp. 68–69; Fairweather 2001, pp. 68–69.

beliefs. The virtues of intellectual character provide such a motivational structure, and therefore seem to be what is required to obtain true beliefs.[34]

That it is the motivational structure of intellectual character that is required to overcome self-deception is further confirmed when we revisit other aspects of virtuous character outlined in the first section and then compare this to what was proposed in the previous section concerning self-deception. Recall first the claim that the virtues entail attempts to overcome natural shortcomings and personal desires that can exercise an inappropriate influence on agents.[35] For example, to become temperate the agent must overcome a strong desire for pleasure. This appears similar to what occurs with the motivations and dispositions that lead to self-deception, and therefore lends support to the claim that the intellectual virtues could act as a means to overcome self-deception. For, as stated in the previous section, agents who engage in acts of self-deception are typically motivated by self-serving desires. The agent wants to maintain specific beliefs about herself, and others, or to simply maintain some meaningful belief, in order to avoid the anxiety that could result if their falsity were exposed.[36] From the perspective of the intellectually virtuous agent such desires, or motivations, are inappropriate and must be overcome. They are inappropriate from such a perspective, for what matters to the intellectually virtuous agent is to obtain true beliefs. In such a situation the intellectually virtuous agent attempts to mold her motivational structure so as to not be subject to inappropriate motivations, or dispositions, that could lead to false beliefs. The types of motivations and dispositions to be thwarted include the very general self-serving dispositions outlined above, but also very specific motivations and dispositions. Examples include: a tendency to believe too easily, i.e., credulity; fear of questioning one's beliefs; being dogmatic; being diffident in regard to one's beliefs and intellectual abilities; being overconfident; being concerned with status as opposed to truth, and so on.[37]

The motivational/dispositional account of self-deception therefore corresponds to the explanation of human psychology advocated within the virtue perspective. Agents are influenced by natural but inappropriate shortcomings which can be overcome through the influence of the virtues. In this case the natural shortcomings pertain to the beliefs of the agent, and the

[34] See Fairweather 2001, pp. 69–71, 78; Leon 2002, p. 423.
[35] See Roberts & Wood 2003, pp. 261, 263.
[36] See Code 1984, p. 42; Gouinlock 1993, p. 300.
[37] See Sherman & White 2003, p. 42; Roberts & Wood 2003, p. 263.

attempt to maintain desirable yet unwarranted beliefs. The intellectual virtues therefore become correctives to such dispositions because they are directed toward obtaining true beliefs, but also because they are specific motivational/dispositional components that can answer to the motivational/dispositional components that lead to self-deception. Instead of being disposed to sustain and obtain beliefs that confirm, and conform to, self-serving desires the agent is disposed to have beliefs that are true. The possession of a general disposition towards true beliefs, as well as the other more specific dispositions of intellectual character, then influence how the agent forms beliefs just as the self-serving motivational/dispositional structure influenced belief formation to cause self-deception. In this situation, though, since the agent is focused on truth, or obtaining true beliefs, it will be this disposition that will be fulfilled as opposed to the self-serving disposition.[38]

So far, then, we have a fairly good understanding of why intellectual character is therapeutically relevant for overcoming self-deception. Intellectual character is relevant since obtaining true beliefs is not merely a matter of exposure to the appropriate evidence, but also a matter of the motivational, and/or dispositional, structure of the agent. Agents can be influenced in their belief formation by self-serving motivations and dispositions, and the intellectual virtues can act as correctives to these natural short-comings in order to facilitate true beliefs. The next aspect of intellectual character to be explored to display its therapeutic value for overcoming self-deception is the effect of such character on the perceptual and rational capacities of the agent.

In the first section significant attention was given to the idea that virtuous character can influence an agent's perceptions and rational capacities. Inappropriate motivations and dispositions were said to obscure, or contaminate, agent perception, while the virtues were proposed to mitigate this influence to enable the agent to perceive accurately. This explanation of the role of virtuous character is congruent with the explanation of occurrences of self-deception considered in the previous section. Recall that the perceptual capacities of agents who engage in acts of self-deception are significantly influenced by their motivations and dispositions. The agent perceives situations in a way that either confirms, or conforms to, what is desired which then influences the beliefs formed. Intellectual character can mitigate this perceptual influence by replacing self-serving dispositions with dispositions

[38] Zagzebski 1996, pp. 146–147, 154; Fairweather 2001, p. 72.

for true beliefs.[39] For example, an agent who wants to maintain some cherished belief will overestimate the evidence in its favour, and avoids being cognizant of evidence that disconfirms his belief.[40] If the agent were instead constituted by the motivational/dispositional structure of intellectual character, then the evidence would not be overlooked. The agent would be disposed to maintaining beliefs only if they are true, since he would be guided by a general desire for true beliefs as well as other more specific dispositions. Thus the agent would be open to both confirming and disconfirming evidence for his beliefs, and would perceive this evidence as salient due to the influence of his intellectual character.[41]

This influence of intellectual character on agent perception also means that the virtues influence agent reasoning. In the first section it was proposed that the virtues cause agents to perceive in specific ways and therefore also cause agents to reason in specific ways. This occurs by influencing the agent's perception of evidence in particular situations, and therefore the content of the agent's deliberations. Through causing appropriate perceptions the virtues ensure that the evidence the agent relies on in her deliberations is accurate. The intellectually virtuous agent does not reason based on a self-serving interpretation of the evidence, but instead based on an interpretation of the evidence that is directed at achieving true beliefs. This influence of intellectual character is therefore similar to the role of the self-serving motivations and dispositions that lead to self-deception. Self-serving motivations can initiate a rationalization process so that the beliefs formed conform to the content of these motivations. Intellectual character mitigates the possibility of false beliefs by replacing the latter impetuses for rationalization with a disposition toward true belief. Instead of desiring to maintain some cherished belief, and having her perceptions and deliberations influenced by such a desire, the intellectually virtuous agent is motivated to obtain true beliefs and this, in turn, influences both her perceptions and deliberations and therefore disposes her to obtain and sustain true beliefs.[42]

Another aspect of intellectual character must be dwelt on to strengthen the connection between occurrences of self-deception and the mitigating influence of intellectual character. Recall that it was proposed that not only do

[39] See Sherman & White 2003, p. 36.
[40] See McLaughlin 1988, p. 43.
[41] See Fairweather 2001, p. 71.
[42] See Hookway 2001, pp. 190–192; Reed 2001, p. 517.

the virtues clear away inappropriate motivations so that agents can perceive accurately aspects of various situations, but also that the virtues provide a type of understanding for the agent. This occurs partly through constituting the agent's concerns and interests in specific ways, for example by providing a concern for true believing, but also because the virtues are held to be instructive concerning how the agent should think and act in particular situations. Consider, for example, intellectual virtues such as open-mindedness and intellectual humility. The agent who is intellectually humble realizes that some of her beliefs, if not all, could be false, and that she can always learn from others. The agent who is open-minded is not simply willing to listen to the positions of others, but admits to himself that such positions could actually be true while his own beliefs could be false. Other general influences of intellectual character include causing the agent to carefully scrutinize the evidence, to consider alternative explanations and arguments, and to be thorough in her inquiries.[43] With such virtues, as well as others, the agent who possesses intellectual character therefore possesses a certain type understanding of her current beliefs and how she should interact with others when forming new beliefs. With such an understanding in hand she is then willing to question the beliefs she has and is well aware that they could be false. She is therefore less susceptible to the motivations and dispositions that could lead her to self-deception. For example, instead of being motivated to maintain a belief of oneself that one charitable, which can then lead to instances of self-deception, the agent is willing to admit that such a belief could be wrong; especially if this is pointed out to her by someone else. Thus, the virtues of intellectual character can also help to overcome self-deception by providing a certain type of understanding for the agent.

Another way in which the psychology of self-deception lines up with the psychology of intellectual character, which also displays how the latter can mitigate the possibility of the former, is the fact that neither is considered episodic. In the last section it was pointed out that the desires which lead to self-deception represent enduring psychological stratagems of the agent and are therefore dispositional in nature. As such these habits of the mind act as an "automatic filtering process" through which evidence and reasons are considered, so that those beliefs that serve the agent's interests, by conforming

[43] See Fairweather 2001, p. 73; Hookway 2001, p. 194.

to desires, are maintained.[44] A similar role was also ascribed to virtuous character in the first section. It was proposed that once the agent has fully integrated the virtues he achieves a firm and unchangeable character so that virtuous behavior follows naturally and without effort. His perceptions, deliberations and choices are a consequence of his enduring virtuous character and not situational factors. In fact, this occurs to such an extent that virtuous perceptions, deliberations and choices often occur automatically and unconsciously.[45] To acquire the virtues, and this includes the intellectual virtues, the agent must do such consciously and conscientiously, but once they are fully integrated they also become an automatic filtering process through which beliefs are formed.[46] For example, an agent will at first often have to make an effort to be open-minded, but through diligent effort and attempts to be open-minded this intellectual virtue will become fully integrated into his character. Once the virtue of open-mindedness becomes fully integrated the agent will be open to the claims of others so that the beliefs he does form will be automatically and unconsciously influenced by this intellectual virtue. The psychological mechanisms of intellectual character therefore mirror the psychological mechanisms of self-deception. The intellectual virtues also represent enduring "habits of the mind" that influence the agent in her belief formation typically, although not always, at an unconscious level.[47] The difference between the psychological mechanisms of self-deception and the intellectual virtues is that the former lead to false beliefs while the latter lead to true beliefs.

5. The Necessity of Intellectual Character in the Attempt to Overcome Self-Deception

By combining literature on self-deception with virtue psychology literature an understanding of how intellectual character can act as a therapeutic means to overcome self-deception has emerged. Through the development of one's intellectual character an agent can mitigate the influence of motivations and dispositions that lead to instances of self-deception to obtain and sustain true

[44] See Oksenberg Rorty 1996, p. 78.
[45] See Johnston 1988, p. 88; Sherman & White 2003, p. 36; Foley 2001, p. 224.
[46] See Sherman & White 2003, p. 43; Hookway 2003, p. 184; Hookway 2000, pp. 152–153, 155–156.
[47] See Hookway 2000, pp. 150, 152, 155–156; Audi 2001, p. 83.

beliefs. I want to now argue for a stronger claim: that the development of intellectual character fulfills a necessary therapeutic role in the attempt to overcome self-deception. This necessary therapeutic role is that intellectual character is required to assure agents that they are not self-deceived. If such a claim can be established, then the intellectual virtues would fulfill an indispensable role in any attempt to overcome self-deception.

The reason for the claim that intellectual virtue fulfills a necessary therapeutic role in any attempt to overcome self-deception is due to the nature of self-deception itself. Any agent who suffers from self-deception takes her beliefs to be true just as the agent who does not suffer from self-deception. Both can even cite reasons for their respective beliefs, even though one agent's set of reasons are false, or insufficient, while the other's are true. This is because, as touched on earlier, those agents who suffer from self-deception often rationalize the false beliefs they have. The problem that arises is that through mere introspection the agent can be duped by her own assessments and the reasons offered for her beliefs. There is always the possibility that when an agent says to herself "My belief is true because I can see that it is so, and because I can offer reasons for this claim," that she is in fact self-deceived. This is because introspectively things seem the same to both the self-deceived agent and the non-self-deceived agent.[48] The self-deceived agent is as convinced as the intellectually virtuous agent that her assessments of her beliefs are accurate and, ultimately, her beliefs are true. Consider the example, proposed by Hillary Kornblith, of Jack who is self-deceived in regard to his own mental states and how they influence his beliefs. Jack is paranoid and insecure, which often causes him to react with anger toward others. Upon introspection, though, Jack is unaware of his own anger, and how his insecurity and paranoia influence him to obtain and sustain false beliefs concerning what others think of him. If Jack engaged in introspective assessment of the mechanisms which influence his beliefs, and whether his beliefs concerning others are true or not, he would not be able to discern that his beliefs are false or that they were formed through misleading mechanisms. This is because Jack would continue to be influenced by self-deceptive mechanisms that lead him to believe that his beliefs concerning both others and his own mental states are true while they are not. Jack would continue to believe that he is not paranoid, insecure and angry, and that others speak negatively about him even though they do not. He would be

[48] See van Fraassen 1988, pp. 123–135.

just as convinced, upon introspective assessment, of the truth of his beliefs as the intellectually virtuous agent even though his beliefs are false and the mechanisms that lead to them are misleading.[49]

Since it is the case that from the introspective point of view the phenomenal experience of the self-deceived agent is indistinguishable from the phenomenal experience of the agent with true beliefs intellectual character becomes an indispensable therapeutic measure to overcome self-deception. More specifically, intellectual character is necessary to assure agents that they are not self-deceived. Through mere introspection an agent can be duped by her own assessments and not be able to detect that her beliefs are false and that she is self-deceived. Hence, she cannot rely on introspective assessment in order to determine whether her beliefs are true or not. Rather, she must rely on psychological dispositions that have been identified as truth-conducive. This is especially the case since self-deception occurs unconsciously. That is, not only is self-deception undetectable from an introspective point of view, but the mechanisms which lead to self-deception operate without the agent being aware of them. In fact, as previously pointed out, self-deceptive mechanisms have to be unconscious in order to be effective, for if the agent is aware of them she will ultimately not be duped.[50] It is due to these two reasons, then, that intellectual character is necessary to assure the agent that her beliefs are true. For if it is the case that agents can never distinguish between instances where they are self-deceived and instances where they are not then the only assurance, or guarantee, they can have that they are not self-deceived is that they have attempted to secure true beliefs, and avoid self-deception, through an attempt to be intellectually virtuous. As pointed out in the previous section, how agents can attempt to avoid self-deception is through developing their intellectual character. The motivations and dispositions identified as intellectual virtues not only compel agents to be careful and thorough when forming beliefs, they also replace those motivations and dispositions that lead to instances of self-deception. It is therefore only through developing one's intellectual character that an agent can assure herself that her beliefs are not the result of self-deceptive mechanisms. The virtues of intellectual character therefore offer the best protection against the imperceptible mechanisms that lead to self-deception, which means that intellectual character is necessary to

[49] See Kornblith 1998, pp. 50–52; van Fraassen 1988, pp. 123–135, 140, 144–145.
[50] Johnston 1988, p. 65–66, 70–76, 78, 87; Audi 1988, p. 94, 102–105, 109; Baier 1996, pp. 54–55; Deutsch 1996, p. 317; Fingarette 2000, pp. 46–49, 60–61, 65–66, 78, 98–99.

assure agents that their beliefs are true. Intellectual character is not always causally necessary to obtain and sustain true beliefs because non-intellectual preferences do not always exert their influence. This will become even more apparent with the next paragraph. Nonetheless, intellectual character still fulfills a necessary role in the attempt to acquire true beliefs, since it provides a guarantee for the agent that her beliefs have not been the result self-deceptive mechanisms.[51]

By claiming that the intellectual virtues are necessary to assure agents that their beliefs are not the result of self-deceptive mechanisms it must be made clear that the claim is not that the intellectual virtues ensure, or make certain, that the agent's beliefs are true. The intellectual virtues do not infallibly produce true beliefs. It is always possible that an agent could be completely intellectually virtuous and still not obtain true beliefs. The agent could be immersed in a misleading environment which could then make the acquisition of true beliefs impossible even if the agent is completely intellectually virtuous. Hence, the intellectual virtues cannot ensure, or make certain, that the agent's beliefs are true. What is meant, then, by proposing that the intellectual virtues provide a guarantee for the agent that her beliefs are true is that they guarantee that the agent's beliefs are not the result of self-deceptive mechanisms that could lead to false belief. The guarantee that intellectual character provides is therefore not infallible. Nonetheless, it is a guarantee that intellectual character

[51] Of course, a possible objection at this point is how do we reliably discover what character traits are intellectual virtues if self-deception is always a possible undetectable threat. Could we not also be deceived when identifying the intellectual virtues? If so, then it would seem that the intellectual virtues may provide very little assurance against self-deception. A complete response to such an objection cannot be achieved in the context of this article, but an outline of a response I developed elsewhere can be offered. There are two aspects of this response that are intimately connected. First, to reinforce the claim that the intellectual virtues are merely necessary to assure agents their beliefs are true and second to rely on a doxastic community in the identification of the intellectual virtues. In regard to the latter, the claim is that in order to identify the intellectual virtues one will have to rely on various legitimate epistemological methods established by the community. This is meant to solve problems with identifying the intellectual virtues, since one is not relying merely on introspection to identify the virtues. Hence, one does not have worry about how via introspection self-deception is undetectable. The question that then emerges is why must we rely on the intellectual virtues to assure us our beliefs are true if we ultimately rely on the community when identifying the virtues? This is where the claim that the intellectual virtues are merely necessary to assure us our beliefs are true and not sufficient becomes relevant. They are necessary for the reasons presented in this article; i.e., our beliefs are shaped by motivations/disposition and we therefore require truth-conducive motivations/dispositions to overcome them. But the intellectual virtues are not sufficient, since other epistemological practices also have to be reliable to secure true beliefs.

is necessary for since self-deception is undetectable from the introspective point of view. The agent cannot discern whether she is self-deceived via introspection, and therefore must be intellectually virtuous to assure herself that he beliefs are true.

It may be objected that intellectual character is not always necessary to assure agents that their beliefs are true for two reasons. First, it is likely the case that we can identify situations where self-deceptive mechanisms will not exert any influence and therefore intellectual virtue will not be required to overcome their influence. For example, when an agent forms the belief "There is a cat on the mat" based on immediate perceptions it does not seem that self-deception is a valid concern because misleading motivations and dispositions will likely not exercise their influence. Second, it could be proposed that a guarantee that one's beliefs are not the result of self-deceptive mechanisms could be provided via interaction with others. For example, if I want to discover if I am self-deceived in some particular situation all I may have to do is consult some other agent to aid in the identification of the truth-value of my beliefs. Both of these possible objections do not lessen the therapeutic value of intellectual virtue in many instances where self-deception is possible, but they nonetheless appear to display that intellectual virtue is not necessary to assure agents that their beliefs are true. In order to make this stronger claim, then, both of these possible objections must be addressed.

Beginning with the first objection, it is true that even the perceptions of agents can be shaped by self-deceptive mechanisms, but the above example appears to provide a clear-cut case where such mechanisms likely would not fulfill a role in belief formation. Consequently, the claim that intellectual character is necessary to assure agents that their beliefs are not the result of self-deception must be limited to situations where the latter is a valid concern. Fortunately, given what has been claimed concerning self-deception, such situations are easy to identify. Self-deception is a valid concern whenever it is possible for motivations and dispositions to influence belief formation, since the former are the impetuses of self-deception. When it comes to beliefs such as "A cat is on the mat" it is highly unlikely that any agent could be misled by her own motivations or dispositions, and therefore self-deception is not a valid concern and intellectual character is not required to overcome it. Nonetheless, the misleading influence of motivations and dispositions is a valid concern in many situations, and intellectual character would be necessary in such situations to assure agents that their beliefs are true due to the imperceptible

influence of such mechanisms. No attempt will be made to demarcate the possible situations where motivations and dispositions can influence the belief formation of agents, since such demarcation is not required. Rather, the following simple principle can be offered. Intellectual character is necessary to assure agents that their beliefs are true in all situations where it is possible for motivations and dispositions to mislead agents. By offering such a principle all possible situations where the misleading mechanisms of self-deception can exercise their influence are covered without having to engage in the task of identifying them specifically.

In regard to the objection that intellectual character is not necessary to assure agents that they are self-deceived, since consultation with others could also provide a guarantee, we have to keep in mind that the agent has to respond to the insights of others. That is, when confronted by a claim by some other that one is self-deceived the agent in question will have to accept the claims of others and especially accept them as true over his, or her, own introspective assessments. Now, whether an agent would accept the claims of another over his, or her, own introspective assessments, can really only determined empirically. We would have to investigate agents to see whether they would acquiesce in the judgments of others or not. Nonetheless, it does seem warranted to claim that intellectual character is still required in these situations to overcome self-deception, and this is again due to the nature of self-deception itself. Recall that the self-deceived agent is convinced by his own reasoning processes that certain things are true, and the fact that he is self-deceived is undetectable. When confronted by some other who claims that the agent is actually self-deceived the self-deceived agent will have to trust in the claims of this other over his own assessments. This means that the self-deceived agent will have to be more concerned with getting at the truth than confirmation of his own reasoning processes. The agent will have to be either motivated to get at the truth, or disposed toward the truth. Otherwise the agent will just trust in his own assessments and dismiss the comments of this other. If the agent lacked a concern for the truth, then he, or she, would still be more concerned to maintain the particular cover-story which is the impetus for his, or her, self-deception. For example, if Jack were confronted by one of his coworkers who attempted to tell Jack that he was insecure, or even paranoid, it is doubtful that Jack would be open to such remarks, and this is because Jack would be convinced by his own reasoning processes over the suggestions of others. Consequently, in order to even be open to the insights of others and

agent must be intellectually virtuous. Hence, intellectual character still would be necessary in such situations.

6. Conclusion

The goal of this article was to set out a therapeutic means that agents could employ to overcome self-deception. The therapeutic means advocated was the development of one's intellectual character. The case for intellectual character was made by first setting out the standard psychological theory of virtuous character. This theory was then connected to literature on self-deception and the intellectual virtues. What emerged was a description of how the intellectual virtues could act as a means to overcome self-deception. More specifically, the psychology of intellectual character appears to mirror to psychology of self-deception except that the focus of such character is the maintenance of true beliefs as opposed to a particular self-schema or cover-story. After these claims concerning the therapeutic value of intellectual character were advanced a stronger claim concerning the necessary therapeutic value of intellectual character was proposed. Specifically, it was claimed that intellectual character fulfills a necessary therapeutic role in combating self-deception due to the nature of self-deception itself. Agents who suffer from self-deception cannot detect its occurrence via introspection. Hence, the only assurance agents have that they are not self-deceived is that they are intellectually virtuous. Consequently, it seems that intellectual character fulfills an indispensable therapeutic role in the attempt to overcome self-deception.

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