

Taking Care: Self-Deception, Culpability and Control

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RESUMEN

El argumento de si las personas que se autoengañan pueden responsabilizarse moralmente de su autoengaño está ligado en gran medida a si éstas son capaces de controlar adecuadamente la adquisición y el sustento de sus creencias autoengañosas. Como desafío a la noción que afirma que el auto-engaño es deliberado o que requiere creencias contradictorias, los modelos que tratan el autoengaño como una especie de inclinación motivada han ganado popularidad. En relación con estas consideraciones deflacionarias hay que tener en cuenta que la ansiedad, el miedo o el deseo desencadenan procesos psicológicos que producen una inclinación a favor de una creencia autoengañosa y, como resultado, los que se autoengañan consiguen y retienen creencias falsas al enfrentarse a una preponderancia de evidencia contraria. Estos modelos parecen exculpar a los autoengañados en tanto que sus creencias autoengañosas son el resultado de este proceso. En este ensayo, examino las condiciones bajo las cuales los que se autoengañan podrían ser culpables de los modelos deflacionarios propuestos por Neil Levy. Más concretamente, afirmo que al contrario de Levy, alguien que se autoengaña no necesita dudar de lo que cree ni debe reconocer su importancia moral para ser moralmente responsable de su propio autoengaño.

ABSTRACT

Whether self-deceivers can be held morally responsible for their self-deception is largely a question of whether they have the requisite control over the acquisition and maintenance of their self-deceptive beliefs. In response to challenges to the notion that self-deception is intentional or requires contradictory beliefs, models treating self-deception as a species of motivated belief have gained ascendancy. On such so-called deflationary accounts, anxiety, fear, or desire triggers psychological processes that produce bias in favor of the target belief with the result that self-deceivers acquire and retain false beliefs in the face of a preponderance of counter-evidence. On the face of it, such approaches seem to exculpate self-deceivers insofar as their self-deceptive belief is the result of such a process. In this essay, I examine the conditions under which self-deceivers might be culpable on deflationary models proposed by Neil Levy. In particular, I contend that contrary to Levy, a self-deceiver need not doubt the target belief nor recognize its moral importance to be held morally responsible.

I. SELF-DECEPTION AND MORAL RESPONSIBILITY

Whether self-deceivers can be held morally responsible for their self-deception is largely a question of whether they have the requisite control over the acquisition and maintenance of their self-deceptive beliefs. In general, those who think self-deception is intentional hold that self-deceivers are responsible, since they intend to acquire the self-deceptive belief, usually recognizing at some level the evidence to the contrary. In recent years, however, the dual notions that self-deception is intentional and that it requires contradictory beliefs have been challenged, and models treating self-deception as a species of motivated bias belief have gained ascendancy. On such so-called 'deflationary' accounts, anxiety, fear, or desire trigger psychological processes that produce bias in favor of the target belief with the result that self-deceivers acquire and retain false beliefs in the face of a preponderance of counter-evidence. Such approaches do not require the self-deceiver to hold contradictory beliefs or to intentionally engage in an activity aimed at the acquisition and maintenance of the target belief.

On the face of it, such deflationary approaches seem to exculpate the self-deceivers by rendering the process by which they deceive themselves subintentional. If my anxiety, fear, or desire triggers a process that ineluctably leads me to hold a self-deceptive belief, it appears that I cannot be held responsible for holding that belief. Moreover, even if I could resist the biasing influence of these desires and emotions, it is difficult to see how I can be held responsible for failing to do so if I am unaware of the need to do so, as one often will be in cases of self-deception. In view of considerations of this kind, Neil Levy (2001) argues that on deflationary accounts of self-deception, we ought to see self-deception simply as an intellectual error and jettison the traditional automatic attribution of moral responsibility. Levy contends that self-deceivers are morally responsible only if the target belief is about something important, morally or otherwise, and they express some doubt regarding the truth of the target belief. While Levy allows for the possibility that these conditions are met in some cases, he thinks such cases will be rare.

In this essay, I examine Levy's conditions for culpable self-deception. In particular, I examine whether doubt regarding the target belief is a necessary condition for moral responsibility. I argue that self-deceivers will generally have the capacity to resist the biasing influence of motivation and can exercise this capacity even in the absence of specific doubt regarding the target belief, thereby meeting the minimal conditions for the control necessary for moral responsibility. Additionally, I will argue that an analysis of the moral obligations involved in cases of morally significant self-deception suggests that the characteristic epistemic carelessness involved is often morally culpable. If this is the case, then failure to doubt a particular belief may not

only *not* be exculpatory, it may itself be a morally culpable omission to take due care in forming one's beliefs.

While debates continue over the nature of self-deception and its moral propriety, the aim of this essay is not to establish any global judgment regarding self-deception and moral culpability. I will not argue that all self-deception is morally culpable. Instead, more modestly, I argue that self-deception is morally culpable when it serves to facilitate moral wrongdoing, with the degree of culpability varying depending on the seriousness of the moral wrong and the effort required of the self-deceiver to avoid the self-deception in question. Before turning to this argument, let us first consider the details of Levy's conditions.

II. LEVY'S CONDITIONS FOR CULPABLE SELF-DECEPTION

Neil Levy argues that self-deceivers can be held moral responsible for their self-deception, but only under certain conditions, which he contends are rarely met in cases of self-deception even when it is about morally important matters. At a minimum, Levy contends, we must be aware that motivational bias is or might be at work if we are reasonably to be expected to resist it. And, while in some cases, we are aware of such bias, in many cases we are not; in many cases, the effectiveness of bias relies upon its being undetected. So, Levy asks, when do we take care to detect and resist bias? Chiefly, he claims, when we think something is important and have some uncertainty regarding that thing. Whether my child's school is doing him any good might be such a case. If I doubt that it is doing him any good, I will carefully scrutinize the evidence available so as to ensure the most accurate belief. If I strongly desire that it is doing him good, because changing schools will be very difficult, costly or impossible, my care will amount to an active resistance of the influence of this desire on my belief formation process. My recognition of the importance of the belief coupled with my doubt regarding its truth, give me reason to take the care necessary to ensure my belief formation process is not biased. Under such conditions, Levy thinks, it is reasonable to expect that I will recognize the potential for bias and take measures to guard against it. Accordingly, he cites the following as necessary conditions for culpable self-deception: "(1) the subject matter of the belief is important (whether morally or in some other manner), and (2) that we are in some doubt about its truth (call these the importance and the doubt conditions)" [Levy (2001), pp. 305-6].

The importance condition as stated is ambiguous regarding whether the agent recognizes the importance of the subject matter, but it seems clear from what Levy says elsewhere that the importance condition includes such recognition. We might, therefore, restate it as follows:

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

In Levy's view, failure to meet (1') is exculpatory. If I don't know the subject matter is important, I have no reason to take special care in forming my belief about it. It may seem that the importance condition suffices for culpability. Levy contends, however, that since an agent who has no doubt regarding the truth of the belief in question will not recognize the need to exercise special scrutiny when making up her mind, such doubt is also a necessary condition. When these conditions are met and a person deceives herself regarding the subject matter, she is guilty of knowing epistemic negligence in Levy's view¹. When either of these conditions is not met, the self-deceiver is not culpable.

The fact that self-deceivers usually do not meet the doubt condition on deflationary accounts raises a significant obstacle to attributing responsibility to self-deceivers for their self-deceptive belief. Levy argues that the doubt condition cannot be met when one is successfully self-deceived, since to be self-deceived regarding p just is not to doubt whether p or $\sim p$. Accordingly, the recognition and repression of doubts concerning p must occur either at or before the time the belief is acquired². But such cases will be rare if self-deception is, as the deflationary views suggest, simply a form of motivated bias. Typically motivated bias results in a failure to recognize that one's evidence favors $\sim p$ over p , prompting one instead to think it favors p with the result that one believes p . Since such models do not require self-deceivers to believe or even suspect that $\sim p$, there is no reason to suppose the agent doubts the truth of p . And, if the self-deceiver does not doubt p , she has no reason to exercise special care in forming her belief regarding p ³.

Hence, Levy's doubt condition relies on the notion that self-deception is avoidable only if one doubts the target belief, since barring doubt one has no reason to scrutinize even beliefs one knows to be important. Take, for example, Alberta who is responsible for choosing which factory will make her company's apparel. Alberta may believe that the factory she chooses does not utilize slave labor, which would be in violation of her conscience as well as company policy. On deflationary models of self-deception, if Alberta is self-deceived in holding this belief, she possesses or could easily possess evidence that makes this belief unwarranted, and her failure to recognize this evidence is due to some desire or emotion she has regarding the belief in question. If Alberta strongly wants to maximize profits for her company and this factory is by far the least expensive producer, she may well be biased in her treatment of evidence regarding whether the factory employs slave labor. On deflationary views, she need never doubt her belief or intentionally bias her evidence; her desire in this case is what causes her to see her evidence as supporting the self-deceptive belief that the factory employs no slave labor. Levy's point is that she may never even think about the moral significance of

this belief, because she never doubts its truth. If the factory doesn't employ slaves, then there is no moral problem. Even if she does recognize the moral weight of this belief, she will have no reason to exercise special care if she does not have the slightest doubt regarding the belief's truth. Not only will it often be the case that self-deceivers like Alberta fail to meet the doubt conditions, they will also commonly fail to meet the importance condition as well. She might fail to recognize the importance of the subject matter in two ways: either she might simply not think about it (though if she did, she would recognize its importance), or she might self-deceptively believe that whether the factory employs slaves or not is morally insignificant. In the latter a case, Alberta wouldn't see a reason to scrutinize her self-deceptive belief that there are no slaves even if she did doubt its truth⁴. In either case, she is excused on Levy's account, because she doesn't consciously recognize the weight of the matter under consideration. Accordingly, Levy claims "we can be held responsible for self-deceptive beliefs only if we are, or might reasonably be expected to be, aware that we might have them and which beliefs they might be" [Levy (2001), p. 307].

The problem, then, is that when one is successfully self-deceived that p , one cannot believe that one is self-deceived regarding p —the self-deceptive belief is unidentifiable. Furthermore, self-deception may also obscure one's appreciation of the moral importance of any particular belief, thereby removing any motivation to exert special control over one's belief formation process. The importance condition is insufficient, then, because self-deception can render one ignorant of the moral importance of one's beliefs, and because even when one does appreciate the moral importance of one's belief, one has no reason, or perhaps opportunity, to exercise control over one's belief formation where the truth of the belief never is in doubt. The fundamental obstacle to attributing moral responsibility for self-deceptive beliefs on deflationary models, accordingly, is that self-deceivers will regularly fail to meet these conditions.

III. RESISTIBILITY AND CONTROL

Levy's contention is that self-deceivers cannot be held responsible for their self-deception unless they have indirect control over the acquisition and maintenance of their self-deceptive belief p , and they have such control only if they meet the importance and doubt conditions. If they lack control over the activities that eventuate in their believing or continuing to believe p , such as the acts or omissions involved in the gathering of and attending to evidence regarding p , then they cannot be held responsible for their self-deceptive belief⁵. Following Fischer and Ravizza (1999), Levy argues that the control necessary for moral responsibility is guidance control. A person

has guidance control, according to Fischer and Ravizza, just in case the mechanism that operates in the actual sequence of events to produce the action or omission (and consequences) is moderately responsive to reasons. A person acts on a moderately reasons-responsive mechanism if she is able in a suitable number of scenarios to recognize sufficient reasons (including moral reasons) to do otherwise and would act upon such reasons in at least one of these possible scenarios. In cases of self-deception, what we want to know is whether a given agent would recognize and react to sufficient reasons for exercising the sort of epistemic care that would result in her believing something other than the self-deceptive belief p ; would the self-deceiver recognize and react to sufficient reasons to exercise scrutiny regarding p with the consequence that she fails to believe p in at least one possible world? Further, is it possible for a self-deceiver to meet this condition for moral responsibility without meeting Levy's doubt and importance conditions? If it is, then, we must ask whether they are necessary conditions for culpable self-deception.

In order to explore these questions it will be helpful to begin by considering the following example, which meets both Levy's conditions and the conditions for guidance control. The example comes from Clifford's well-known article, "The Ethics of Belief":

A shipowner was about to send to sea an emigrant-ship. He knew that she was old, and not overwell built at the first; that she had seen many seas and climes, and often had needed repairs. Doubts had been suggested to him that possibly she was not seaworthy. These doubts preyed upon his mind, and made him unhappy; he thought that perhaps he ought to have her thoroughly overhauled and refitted, even though this should put him at great expense. Before the ship sailed, however, he succeeded in overcoming these melancholy reflections. He said to himself that she had gone safely through so many voyages and weathered so many storms that it was idle to suppose she would not come safely home from this trip also. He would put his trust in Providence, which could hardly fail to protect all these unhappy families that were leaving their fatherland to seek for better times elsewhere. He would dismiss from his mind all ungenerous suspicions about the honesty of builders and contractors. In such ways he acquired a sincere and comfortable conviction that his vessel was thoroughly safe and seaworthy; he watched her departure with a light heart, and benevolent wishes for the success of the exiles in their strange new home that was to be; and he got his insurance-money when she went down in mid-ocean and told no tales [Clifford (1877), p. 70].

In this example, call it 'Shipowner', the shipowner comes to hold a false belief — the ship is seaworthy — that facilitates his wrongdoing and this belief is motivated by his desire to avoid the great expense of overhauling the ship. The shipowner recognizes the possibility that the ship is not seaworthy, but manages to dismiss this doubt by attending to evidence suggesting the ship

would safely make the trip in question. He also recognizes the moral import of this doubt; his 'unhappiness' and 'melancholy' stem from his view that it would be wrong to let an unsafe ship sail. So, it seems the shipowner meets both Levy's doubt and importance conditions.

The self-deceptive belief that p is, at least, a consequence of an omission, namely, the shipowner's failure to take the actions necessary in gathering and attending to the evidence regarding p that would make believing p impossible. In addition to these omissions, the shipowner's belief also seems to be the result of actions he undertook: he actively sought to overcome his doubts by specifically, intentionally seeking out evidence to support the false belief that the ship was seaworthy. As Levy rightly recognizes, the doubt regarding p along with the recognition of its importance, indicate the capacity to recognize and respond to reasons to exercise care in forming this belief. The shipowner's doubt about the seaworthiness of the ship, his suspicion that it isn't seaworthy, helps him to appreciate the importance of taking the precautions necessary to ensure an unbiased treatment of his evidence. The story suggests he *overcomes* these doubts by actively emphasizing evidence in favor of his preferred belief and dismissing any potential counter-evidence.

The acts and omissions involved in the shipowner's belief formation process require effort on his part, effort aimed at quelling his doubt. Antecedent doubt, then, is a marker of control, because it suggests active, willful negligence is at play when such doubt is quelled in the face of evidence to the contrary. If I know that p is important and suspect p to be false, then to omit actions necessary to assess accurately the evidence available regarding p or to take actions that makes such an assessment less likely seems are under my guidance control. So, it seems there is good reason to associate control with the doubt and importance conditions.

Consideration of whether the conditions for guidance control are met in this case helps us to see why meeting the doubt and importance conditions will usually indicate moderate reasons responsiveness. To determine this we must ask whether this shipowner capable of recognizing and responding to reasons to exercise the epistemic care necessary to avoid forming a false belief about the ship's safety. In this case, the shipowner seems clearly able to recognize reasons for exercising special care in forming his belief regarding p . In the actual scenario, he recognizes, but does not act upon, one such reason, namely, it would be wrong to recklessly put the lives of these passengers in danger when he can avoid doing so. The shipowner might also recognize that if the ship sinks, he and his company might be financially ruined, he might suffer unbearable guilt, become social pariah, be fined or imprisoned. All of these things constitute sufficient reasons to exercise care in forming his belief regarding the ship's seaworthiness, and there is little reason to suppose he could not recognize these sorts of reasons, even if he does not in the end act upon them in the actual sequence. Guidance control requires simply that

the shipowner be capable of recognizing such reasons and, in one possible world, act on one of them. Despite his strong desire to believe the ship is seaworthy, it still seems reasonable to think that our shipowner would meet this minimal condition for moral responsibility. The fact that the shipowner actually suspects that the ship is not seaworthy, recognizes the importance of this belief, and nevertheless fails to take the measures necessary for the accurate assessment the ship's safety, only serves to highlight the presence of these capacities. Meeting the importance condition signifies that the agent is aware that the consequences attached to the belief in question are ones for which she would be an appropriate target for blame. If I know that p is important, then I am obligated to take care in forming my belief regarding p . Meeting the doubt condition when this is recognized suggests willful negligence, because one has reason to believe this obligation has not yet been met. If the shipowner never worries that the ship is not seaworthy, he might well think he has met his epistemic and moral obligations. Insofar as recognizing the importance of something amounts to recognizing reasons for ensuring one's belief formation process is not biased, it suggests the agent meets the recognition condition. If the doubt condition is also met, it seems quite reasonable to suppose that in at least one possible world, the agent acts on her reasons to take care in the formation of her belief about what she recognizes is a morally important matter.

From the foregoing, we can see that meeting the doubt and importance conditions likely suffices for guidance control and the moderate reasons responsiveness it requires. But, since Levy claims that on deflationary accounts self-deceivers regularly fail to meet these conditions, we must ask whether that failure implies a failure to meet the conditions for guidance control. If it does not, then Levy's condition may not be jointly necessary for culpable self-deception. My interest in this section is specifically whether the doubt condition is necessary. To see whether it is a necessary condition for culpability, we can modify Clifford's story and stipulate that the shipowner neither expresses nor entertains any doubts regarding the seaworthiness of this vessel, despite his knowledge of its age, repair history, and other facts warranting the contrary belief — call this Doubtless Shipowner. If the shipowner still meets the conditions for guidance control in this story, then it seems that while doubt may be a sufficient condition for such control, it isn't a necessary one.

Doubtless Shipowner is essentially a deflationary reading of Clifford's story; this version follows a model Mele suggest in his *Self-deception Unmasked*. On this sort of model, the shipowner's belief that the ship is seaworthy might be motivated by his strong aversion to bearing the great financial cost of overhaul. He assesses the cost of falsely believing the ship is seaworthy as exceedingly high, since it will be very expensive to overhaul the ship, and further if this expenditure is unnecessary for the ship's safe passage, it will be a waste of money. His aversion to falsely believing the ship is un-

seaworthy leads him to have a significantly higher acceptance threshold for this belief than for the belief that it is seaworthy. That is, it takes a great deal more evidence to get the shipowner to believe the ship is unseaworthy than it does to believe the contrary. This asymmetry in acceptance thresholds explains the biased way in which the shipowner treats his evidence. At no point in this process, does the shipowner doubt or suspect that the ship is unseaworthy. And, while he might see that it would be an important thing to consider if the ship were unseaworthy, he doesn't stop to consider his belief, since he has no doubt that it is true and warranted by the evidence he has. So, he never suspects bias is at play in his belief formation process. In the end, he is in the possession of a comfortable conviction that the ship is seaworthy and this conviction has at no point been clouded by the unhappy thoughts that originally beset the shipowner in Clifford's story.

According to Levy's account, the shipowner's self-deception is not culpable, because he fails to doubt the seaworthiness of the ship. So, even though this belief has catastrophic consequences, and the evidence available to the shipowner does not warrant his belief that the ship is seaworthy, the shipowner is excused, because without doubt, according to Levy, he had no reason and hence diminished ability to exercise special care. Indeed, he may well have thought the decision to send the ship out not to have been a morally weighty one at all. If he didn't doubt that the ship would safely make the passage, he had no reason to think the decision was morally weighty⁶. Given this failure to meet the doubt condition, the shipowner cannot be held responsible for failing to exercise care in forming his belief regarding the ship's seaworthiness. The question is whether this doubtless shipowner might possess guidance control over his belief formation process. If he does, then it is possible to fail to meet Levy's doubt condition and still meet the minimal conditions for moral responsibility.

This question, it seems, is largely a question of whether the desire or emotion causing the bias so incapacitates the self-deceiver that she could neither recognize nor act on sufficient reasons to exercise care in forming her beliefs. But, as even cursory reflection suggests, it is doubtful that the shipowner couldn't recognize reasons to scrutinize the evidence regarding *p* to ensure an accurate judgment regarding the facts. It seems he could recognize any of the reasons listed above. Our desires and emotions do not render us automatons, even if they do represent obstacles to our seeing things correctly. It may be that the doubtless shipowner would only exercise care in forming his belief if he believed the cost of shipwreck to be higher than any cost associated with overhaul and repair. Mele's own model suggests that the biasing mechanism itself would be sensitive to such changes in the agent's estimation of the cost of falsely believing *p*, raising or lowering the belief threshold accordingly. These costs can include both moral and non-moral components. If the shipowner estimates the cost of falsely believing *p* to be eternal damna-

tion, significant moral guilt, or financial ruin, then he might not be bias in his treatment of the evidence *despite* having a strong desire for the ship to be seaworthy and to avoid unnecessary and expensive repairs.⁷ That is, in such circumstances, the shipowner would recognize and act upon reasons to exercise care in forming this belief.⁸ For our purposes, the selectivity of self-deception reveals a sensitivity that amounts to reasons responsiveness in Fischer and Ravizza's sense, and suggests self-deceivers may regularly meet the minimal conditions for guidance control, even when they do not doubt the target belief.

We might, however, wonder whether the importance condition is necessary for culpability even if doubt is not. After all, having the ability to recognize and respond to reasons to do otherwise will be immaterial if one has no obligation to respond to those reasons. And, if Levy is right, we do not have such an obligation if we do not recognize the importance of the subject matter. It would seem from the forgoing that if the doubtless shipowner recognizes the importance of the ship's being seaworthy, and his belief formation is sensitive to his estimation of error costs, he both has guidance control and an obligation to exercise that control. But what if he does not recognize the importance of the subject matter? Doesn't that inhibit his ability to recognize and respond to reasons to exercise care? To address this question, we will need to consider the moral obligations involved in such cases in greater detail.

IV. MORAL NEGLIGENCE AND SELF-DECEPTION

Control, of course, is a necessary condition for the possibility of culpable self-deception, but if there is no obligation breached by the self-deceiver, such control will not imply culpability. Our examination so far has suggested that self-deceivers will typically have the control necessary for moral responsibility, but there remains the lingering worry that failure to recognize the moral import of one's belief — failure even to doubt its truth in the actual sequence — militates against moral responsibility and is thus exculpatory. While we have already shown that self-deceivers not meeting Levy's doubt condition can have guidance control over their belief formation, a brief consideration of what Ronald Milo refers to as 'moral negligence' will help us to see what obligations are breached when we fail to exert this control in important matters⁹. His account of inadvertent negligence will help explain why it is reasonable to blame self-deceivers for such a failure even when they fail to recognize the importance of the matters at hand.

Ronald Milo defines moral negligence this way: "a culpable failure to take those precautions necessary to assure oneself, before acting, that what one proposes to do is not in violation of one's moral principles. [...] [M]oral negligence includes all wrong behavior that results from the fact that the

agent is ignorant that his act is wrong because he failed to take reasonable precautions to avoid such ignorance” [Milo (1984), p. 84]. On Milo’s account, negligence can be either inadvertent or willful. ‘Shipowner’ is a case of willful negligence; the shipowner knows what he is up to and actively seeks to obscure morally relevant facts. ‘Doubtless Shipowner’, on the other hand, is a case of inadvertent negligence; the shipowner doesn’t think about what he is doing, or, at least, he doesn’t think carefully enough about it.

Moral negligence as Milo construes it is a violation of a duty to ensure that we are not doing something we would deem to be morally wrong. This duty is implied by a commitment to act morally. I cannot act morally if I lack the relevant knowledge regarding the circumstances of that action. Elizabeth Linehan explains this duty to know this way:

[C]areful scrutiny of the beliefs that guide our action is required when consequences of those actions could involve grave harm to others. In other words, the basic moral imperative to *avoid evil* sometimes obliges us to *seek* knowledge; knowledge of the moral law, knowledge of the particular circumstances, knowledge of ourselves. The greater the possible harm, the more stringent the obligation [Linehan (1982), p. 104].

In the of moral negligence, a person fails to meet this obligation to know the moral significance of her action by not taking adequate care to consider the relevant circumstances or consequences. So, in our cases this would amount to the claim that the shipowner would not approve a ship for a voyage if he believed it to be unsafe, since such an action would risk great harm to the passengers, and he would see this as morally wrong. His failure to take care in forming his belief regarding the ship’s safety, then, is a failure to acquire the knowledge necessary to ensure his action is good, not evil.

The key question here, then, is whether it is reasonable to expect people like the doubtless shipowner to take the precautions necessary to fulfill this duty to know, since such people seem never to think about the moral importance of the belief in question. Milo’s distinction between willful and inadvertent negligence helps to clarify the nature of this obligation and the rationale behind our expectations of the inadvertently negligent.

Willful negligence is a failure to recognize that one’s action is in violation of one’s principles that occurs because the agent deliberately ignores morally relevant elements of the act in question. In cases of willful negligence, the agent fails to make “an honest and adequate attempt, before acting, to resolve his doubts about the moral propriety of his act. If he suspects that the act might be wrong and yet makes no adequate attempt to confirm or disconfirm this suspicion [...] then the risk of wrongdoing is unreasonable.” [Milo (1984), p. 101-2] Cases of willful negligence meet Levy’s conditions,

because the agent both recognizes the importance of the belief in question and doubts its truth. As I noted above, ‘Shipowner’ is a case of this sort.

Inadvertent negligence is a failure to recognize that one’s action is in violation of one’s principles that occurs through an unconscious omission of careful deliberation regarding the nature of the act, its circumstances, and likely consequences. The doubtless shipowner seems to be a case of this sort, since he never scrutinizes the evidence regarding the ship’s safety, never doubting that it is safe. In this case, the shipowner’s desires produce a strong bias in favor of the false belief that the ship is safe. The shipowner fails to recognize that his act of approving the ship for passage violates his moral principles, because he fails to take care in forming his beliefs regarding the nature of this act, principally with respect to his beliefs regarding the seaworthiness of the ship. His neglect here is inadvertent, unthinking, and careless, but culpably so on Milo’s account since he could have and should have exercised scrutiny in this case.

To avoid false belief, Milo argues that the inadvertently negligent “need to take care not to be blinded or distracted by anger, greed, lust, ambition, sorrow, disappointment, the desire to impress others, etc. [...] [They] must learn to how to control [their] desires and feelings, and this involves learning what measures or steps [they] can take to prevent them from unduly influencing [their] judgments about what [they] ought (or ought not) to do” [Milo (1984), p. 87]. We are able to learn to exert control over the influence of desire and emotion on our morally significant beliefs, and we are obliged to do so in Milo’s view. We might think of this as an obligation to ensure the realization of the conditions necessary for moral action. Linehan construes this as an obligation minimally not “to so undermine the conditions for moral agency that we can commit significant evils unknowingly” [Linehan (1982), p. 109]. The self-deceiver who fails to recognize the importance of some matter fails to meet this obligation, because she fails to control the influence of her desires and emotions.

The idea that we can exercise control over the influence of desire and emotion is one shared by Alfred Mele, the architect of one of the most influential deflationary models of self-deception. While Mele acknowledges that the *extent* of our control over bias is matter of controversy in social psychology, “that we do have some control over the influence of emotions and motivation on our beliefs is [...] indisputable; and that control is a resource for combating self-deception” [Mele (2001), p. 103]. In Mele’s view, the desires and emotions need not render one an automaton. Although he stops short of saying that a minimal degree of control over the desires or emotions that trigger and sustain self-deceptive belief is a necessary condition for self-deception, it is clear that in many cases self-deceivers will have the capacity for such control. Furthermore, it bears investigating whether it makes sense to say a person is ‘self-deceived’ if a desire or emotion, which is beyond her

control, leads her ineluctably to believe p in the face of evidence that provides greater warrant for $\sim p$. Such a person might better be identified as 'helplessly biased' or 'deluded' and not 'self-deceived', but we cannot pursue this questions further here. What Mele's comments suggest with respect to the question of inadvertent negligence is that it is reasonable to expect self-deceivers to be capable of exerting some control over the influence of their desires and emotions on their beliefs. Such control, he suggests is both possible and necessary to combat self-deception.

What Milo's account and Linehan's principle suggest is that we have an obligation to be on the lookout for morally important matters and to actively seek to create conditions that will make us sensitive to such things, and this obligation requires us to look for and resist conditions that might prompt bias. A morally mature adult on Milo's account has learned to identify these conditions and to exercise special care in response to them. Developing this capacity to control the influence of motivation and emotion on our belief formation is a moral obligation, because it is necessary to avoid moral wrongdoing. So, the inadvertently negligent person can be taxed not only for failing to exercise a capacity to control, which she possesses, but even for a failure adequately to cultivate that capacity [Milo (1982), p. 88].

One way to decide whether a doubtless self-deceiver can reasonably be expected to exercise the care necessary to avoid self-deception is by considering whether agents who possess the same motivation or emotion as the self-deceiver would believe p . It seems clear that a person who has cultivated the sort of self-control Milo describes would not believe p , even when she possesses strong motivation in favor of that belief, because she would recognize conditions that call for care. The difference between her and the doubtless deceiver is that she has cultivated a capacity that helps ensure both that she meets the doubt and importance conditions and that she responds properly when they are met. A person who has a diminished capacity to recognize an important matter is culpable, then, for her failure to develop and exercise this capacity. Accordingly, Milo's account suggests a self-deceiver may be culpable even if she fails to meet the importance condition, because she is obligated to meet it in morally important matters.

What we have seen, then, is that even when one fails to doubt or think about the importance of one's engagements, one can be morally negligent. It appears, therefore, that someone like the doubtless shipowner can fail to meet Levy's conditions, and nevertheless have guidance control over the failure to exercise care along with an obligation to exercise that care. So, while Levy's conditions may be met in particularly egregious cases of culpable self-deception, they are not necessary conditions for moral responsibility. Accordingly, morally significant self-deception will not usually release one from blame. I have argued instead that self-deception is morally culpable when it serves to facilitate moral wrongdoing, with the degree of culpability varying

depending on the seriousness of the moral wrong and the effort required of the self-deceiver to avoid the self-deception in question. This latter condition has to do with how difficult it would be for the self-deceiver to have resisted the motivation or emotion biasing her belief. Thus, this sort of motivated bias represents a real but not insurmountable obstacle to an accurate assessment of one's moral engagements. In view of these considerations, we can see that self-deception in morally important matters may be culpable more often than we usually think, and though it can mitigate moral responsibility, it typically doesn't exculpate¹⁰.

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NOTES

¹ Levy argues that in general blame for false beliefs is appropriate when they can be traced back to knowing acts or omissions that constitute knowing epistemic negligence [304]. He offers the example of a person knowingly consulting an out-of-date reference. Such a person's act of consulting such a reference and her omission of consulting an up-to-date one are negligent and the agent knows they are. Below, following Ronald Milo's account of negligence, I suggest that there may be cases of inadvertent epistemic negligence for which an agent is responsible. The idea that one can be culpable only for knowing epistemic negligence is, in part, why the doubt and importance conditions appear to be necessary for such culpability.

² Clearly, doubt can and often does occur whenever a person is confronted with unwelcome and unsought after evidence against the self-deceptive belief that *p*. In many cases, the doubt is quickly overcome as the experience of the evidence fades, but in some cases the doubts are substantial enough to end the self-deception, as when the prophet Nathan confronts David and directs his attention to his acts of adultery and murder. The general point, however, that while one is self-deceived regarding *p*, one believes and does not doubt *p* appears to be the case.

³ There is some ambiguity about what the object of the doubt condition is. As stated, it is the target belief. *S* meets the doubt condition if *S* is in some doubt regarding *p*, which seems to mean more than that *S* just doesn't know whether *p* or $\sim p$ but actually suspects $\sim p$. At other points, however, the object of doubt seems to be whether bias is operating and if so on which belief. Levy seems to think that doubt regarding *p* is enough to prompt scrutiny or some voluntary omission to scrutiny, and so reveals that bias is at play and the belief that is its object.

⁴ A case of this sort represents a very deep sort of self-deception, self-deception about what is morally acceptable. Alberta is not merely deceived about the circumstances relevant to her decision to use the factory in question, she is deceived at the level of her moral principles. I think it is essential to notice that while this seems possible, it doesn't seem usual. The cases of self-deception that are most puzzling and

beguiling are those in which the self-deceiver holds moral principles or values that would be violated if she were not deceived about the circumstances. Alberta condemns slavery and would be appalled if her actions contributed to the perpetuation of this savage institution. In a perverse way, these beliefs contribute to her bias, insofar as they provide some of the motivation for her self-deceptive belief.

⁵ For our purposes, the mental act of attention and omission of inattention might be construed as bodily movements in Fischer and Ravizza's sense.

⁶ It is not clear whether this failure constitutes a failure to meet the importance condition, because there is no reason to suppose that the shipowner wouldn't recognize the importance of the ship's being seaworthy, or the importance of falsely believing it to be seaworthy. The only thing he fails to recognize in this case is that his belief is false. This suggests that he might well meet the importance condition, even though he doesn't consider his belief formation itself to be a matter of such import that it requires special scrutiny.

⁷ It should be noted that the recognition of costs of this sort might imply that the importance condition is met, though it does not require the doubt condition to be met. Importance alone can demand scrutiny. Even if I am certain that I have entered my students' grades correctly, I double-check them. Past experience shows that this extra care is called for. Do I doubt they are correct? In my view, one cannot be said to seriously doubt p unless one thinks the probability that p is less than half. If the doubt condition is met whenever one believes the probability of p is less than one, then this condition is met a great deal of the time even by the self-deceived. My point is that in matters of great importance even if I think the probability that p is very high, I will still have a reason to scrutinize whether p . And, unless doubt is taken to be anything less than full confidence, it isn't necessary to doubt p to see a reason to scrutinize it.

⁸ Mele proposes this model to explain among other things the perplexity that strong desire or emotion does not always lead to self-deception, what Bermúdez calls the selectivity problem. Why isn't it the case that similarly strong motivations do not always result in self-deceptive bias? Mele's answer is that bias is sensitive to the agent's estimation regarding the relative costs of erroneously believing the target belief. Insofar as we exercise some control over such estimates, we exercise some control over the power of our motivation to bias our belief formation.

⁹ Ronald Milo addresses self-deception in his account of moral negligence, but he analyzes it as a case of willful negligence, since he assumes self-deception is intentional and involves knowledge at some level that the target belief is false. In what follows, I apply his account of inadvertent negligence to the deflationary accounts of self-deception, and argue that it shows we can be culpable for self-deception on such accounts.

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