

# Overcoming Self-Deception: Integrating Christian Theology with Jungian Psychoanalysis

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Self-deception can be insightfully studied from both a biblical and Jungian psychoanalytic lens. This article shows how both perspectives can significantly complement each other on this issue. It will be argued that insights from psychoanalysis in the past century, particularly from a Jungian perspective, have the potential to be integrated with Christian theology to help individuals effectively overcome issues where they deceive themselves repeatedly. The therapeutic effectiveness of integrating these two perspectives in self-deception will be illustrated in a realistic but fictional case study. Also, examples of biblical characters helping others overcome self-deception will be explored with some Jungian psychoanalytical commentary. In addition, contemporary neuroscience findings will be shown to confirm the wisdom of both the intervention strategies that biblical characters employed as well as modern day Jungian-based interventions that target self-deception. The article will finish by illustrating how an integrative intervention can be utilized to overcome self-deception with the same fictional case study.

Stupefying is an appropriate adjective to describe the nature of self-deception. The thought of humankind having a stubborn and limitless capacity to deceive ourselves is at the same time shocking, humbling, intriguing, and tragic. Whether it is reading news headlines, observing friends, or failing to catch ourselves in the creative process of blinding ourselves from reality, there is no escaping the ubiquitous nature of fooling ourselves that splashes in the face of every reflective person. Part of this mystery that captivates the mind is the paradox of how one can be both aware and unaware of deceiving oneself at the same time (Lewis, 1996). The puzzling nature of this conundrum is part of the reason why there is no universally agreed upon definition of self-deception (Batson, Thompson, Seufferling, Whitney, & Strongman, 1999; Lewis, 1996).

One view is that self-deception involves the belief in a proposition, *c*, having been consciously exposed to the reality of the conflicting proposition, *r* (Lynn & Pipitone, 2014). Another view defines self-deception as a dispositional tendency to have an unrealistically positive self-image (Sackeim, 1983). Explaining the different perspectives on this issue, Nelkin (2002) writes how "intentionalists" argue that

self-deception involves an intention to deceive oneself and "motivationalists" argue that a desire, instead of an intention, causes self-deception. For the purposes of this article, when I use the term self-deception, I will use the definition from the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, which states that "self-deception is the acquisition and maintenance of a belief (or, at least, the avowal of that belief) in the face of strong evidence to the contrary motivated by desires or emotions favoring the acquisition and retention of that belief" (Deweese-Boyd, 2012).

For individuals who are in the mental health profession, the phenomenon of self-deception is not merely an intriguing abstract conundrum for intellectual stimulation. It is an everyday reality that destroys lives, relationships, and communities. Spiritually integrated psychotherapists would benefit by responding to this age-old problem of the human condition in the 21st century with a holistic approach. This article will argue that interventions that aim to address self-deception more holistically will greatly benefit by integrating ancient Christian knowledge on the topic with the insights of modern psychoanalysis discovered within the past century, with a particular emphasis on Jungian psychoanalysis. This is because, in addition to needing spiritual teaching on the nature of deceiving oneself from a theological perspective, there also needs to be a hands-on grasp on the existential nature of how self-deception

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is experienced in a person's moment-to-moment consciousness. The latter can be done by continually improving on the investigation, description, and prediction of self-deception's phenomenology by exploring experience-based theories that have increasingly strong explanatory power. The therapist who practices from a Judeo-Christian perspective can benefit from the rich treasures of contemporary psychoanalytic wisdom. The latter can be borrowed and baptized with a Christian understanding and used for therapeutic purposes.

In this article, I will first explore some biblical teaching on the topic of self-deception. I will then show how there are proximate parallels between the biblical understanding of the human "heart" or "soul" and the psychoanalytic understanding of the "unconscious." I will then give a brief survey of the history of some foundational assumptions of the psychoanalytic school of thought, followed by some Jungian concepts that shed light on the nature of self-deception. A fictional case study will then be used to illustrate the integration of understanding self-deception from a theological and Jungian psychoanalytical standpoint. Following that, I will outline some biblical examples of the use of parables as an intervention to address self-deception while offering some commentary on the psychoanalytic dimension of those stories from the Bible. After that, I will introduce contemporary neuroscience into the discussion, as these findings corroborate certain psychoanalytic assumptions as well as the wisdom of the biblical use of the imagination and narrative as self-deception intervention tools. I will then return to the fictional case study to concretely illustrate how one can combine contemporary psychoanalytic interventions with a Christian theological framework to help someone overcome self-deception.

### **A Biblical Understanding of Self-Deception**

The Bible assumes that humans can become "blind" in a figurative sense (Exodus 23:8, Matthew 15:14, Matthew 23:16-17, John 9:39, 1 John 2:11), which involves individuals not being able to see their own lives clearly due to the effects of the fall of humankind in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3). Likewise, other parts of the Bible use the verb "deceive"

to describe the effects of the fall on individuals who end up lacking some aspect of important spiritual awareness about themselves (Obadiah 1:3, Romans 7:11, James 1:26, 1 John 1:8). When it comes to the New Testament, Christians who profess a knowledge of God are not exempt from the deceitful effects of the fall (1 Corinthians 3:18, Ephesians 4:22, 2 Peter 1:9). After three years of following Jesus, Peter, one of Jesus' closest disciples, was self-deceived in terms of whether or not he would really die for Jesus' sake rather than deny him before his enemies (Matthew 26:33-35, 69-75). Other passages such as Romans 1:18-19 illuminate more about the nature of spiritual blindness in general by telling the reader that it involves suppressing spiritual truths of God that are "plain," which implies an action (whether conscious or not) of the one suppressing. Jeremiah 17:9 says that "The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?" What exact part of the human being is this "heart" that the Bible says gets deceived? Biblical hermeneutics can help shed light by using modern day language to explain what part of us tricks ourselves into self-destructive patterns. What is common among theological commentaries on the original meaning of "heart" is that it is an extremely deep part of the human person. Wilkins explains that "The heart is the source of all thoughts, motives, and actions" (Wilkins, 2004, p.754). Sorg (1976) notes that the word "heart" (*leb* in Hebrew) can even be interchangeable with "soul" (*nephesh* in Hebrew). Moreland (2014) notes that *nephesh*, according to some Old Testament passages, refers to the "seat" of emotion, volition, moral attitudes, and desire or longing for God. Willard (1998) refers to passages such as Psalm 42:5 to show that the biblical view of the soul is that it has a life of its own and is on a deeper level of the self since it seems to be addressed in second person. He notes elsewhere that the soul is "deep" in the sense of "being basic or foundational and also in the sense that it lies almost totally beyond conscious awareness" (Willard, 2002, p.199). Since it is not the Bible's primary role to give airtight philosophical definitions of different parts of the person, these concepts that describe the deepest sources of the oceanic depths of human beings, namely the Hebrew

conception of the "heart" and "soul," are, in the author's view, somewhat amorphous and numinous with some mutual overlap. In line with Sorg's aforementioned descriptions that assume that these two words can sometimes be used interchangeably in the Bible, as well as other descriptions mentioned, this article will define the scriptural understanding of the "heart" or "soul" as the deepest source of all thoughts, feelings, motives, and yearnings for the divine which is nevertheless beyond a person's immediate conscious awareness and has, to a certain degree, an autonomous life of its own. With regard to the topic of self-deception, it is this part of the human that has the capacity to become blind due to deep and hidden internal dynamics occurring within oneself.

### **The Beginnings of Integrating Christian Thought with Jungian Psychoanalysis through the Overlap of the Soul and the Unconscious**

In addition to Christian theologians and philosophers studying the concept of self-deception for centuries, contemporary psychoanalysts this past century have also experientially studied this phenomenon. One psychoanalyst in particular, Carl Jung, who was a seminal figure in the field of psychoanalysis in the last century, was an avid researcher of the "unconscious" in human beings. In his intellectual autobiography, Jung (1961) wrote about his passion of studying the unconscious by professing that "My life has been permeated and held together by one idea and one goal: namely, to penetrate into the secret of the personality. Everything can be explained from this central point, and all my works relate to this one theme" (p. 206). While he noticed that most people are overcome by fright when they reach down into the innermost experience of the "nucleus of personality" (p. 141), he continually dove deeper and, through daily experience, learned "what intense resistance the unconscious opposes to the tendencies of the conscious mind" (p. 162). He formed his theories about the unconscious based on his personal experiences of it and observations in others (p. 287). He understood the unconscious as "everything of which I know, but of which I am not at the moment thinking; everything of which I was once conscious but have now

forgotten; everything perceived by my senses, but not noted by my conscious mind" (Jung, 1970, p. 185) and as something that "consists of a multitude of temporarily obscured thoughts, impressions, and images that, in spite of being lost, continue to influence our conscious minds" (Jung, von Franz, Henderson, Jacobi, & Jaffe, 1964, p.32). He believed that the unconscious naturally produced spontaneous symbolic images that, as a rule, "have a reality and spontaneity of their own" (Jung, 1961, p.324). Jung believed that the unconscious is made up of a myriad of complexes, bundles of ideas, and associated thoughts and feelings that function with almost an autonomous life of their own (Kelsey, 1991), which is similar to Willard's conception of the soul having almost a life of its own. As a psychiatrist, while having this insatiable curiosity about the unconscious, what distinguished him at the time was that he also had an openness to the mysteries of life, including the "paradoxes of love" (p.353) and believed that "there are indications that at least a part of the psyche is not subject to the laws of space and time" and that "the psyche at times functions outside of the spatio-temporal law of causality" (p.304).

This openness to a high degree of mystical phenomena that Jung had when exploring the ocean springs of the unconscious was perhaps one of several reasons that attracted many Christian psychotherapists and spiritual directors to his psychoanalytic insights in the past several decades. Many immersed in both the fields of theology and psychoanalysis have formed a link between the Jungian idea of the unconscious and the Christian idea of the soul. Although not absolutely synonymous, they are seen as greatly interconnected, mutually overlapping, and both touching upon proximate content in the inner depths of the human person. One specific area that exemplifies this overlap is the area of dreams. This is because many Christians have traditionally thought that dreams originate from the soul and most, if not all, psychoanalysts, including Jung, have traditionally thought that they originate from the unconscious. This conceptual integration of the theological soul with the Jungian unconscious has been done by Catholic, Episcopal, and Protestant clergy. Thomas Moore (1992), a Catholic Jungian therapist, views the soul as an entity that

mediates the mind and the unconscious and uses human imagination to express itself. Noreen Cannon Au, another Catholic who is both a faculty member of the C.G. Jung Institute of Los Angeles as well as Loyola Marymount University, a Catholic institution, notes that people grow in wholeness by becoming conscious of parts of them that have been buried in their unconscious and describes Jungian analysis as having a distinct spiritual quality that entails a kind of "soul work" that addresses the depth dimensions of human life (Au & Au, 2006). Among Protestants, George Slater (1999), a Jungian psychotherapist and United Church minister, thought that what humans are doing when they are dreaming is getting in touch with both their souls and unconscious, which are the hidden depths of oneself. Herman Riffel (1990), an ordained Baptist minister who did intensive study at the Jung Institute in Switzerland, thought that dreams give the dreamer access to the thoughts of the heart, are a mirror of the soul, and give access to the deep unconscious parts of a person. John A. Sanford, an Episcopalian priest who was trained in theology and who was also a certified Jungian analyst, stated that "In the Bible the heart is generally a synonym for what we would call today the unconscious" (1978, p.15). Morton Kelsey (1991), another Episcopalian clergyman who directly studied under Carl Jung at the Jung Institute in Switzerland, thought that dreams reveal powerful realities that lead the soul and have a source from the human unconscious. Being a person with one foot deeply immersed in Christian theology and the other deeply in Jungian studies, it is interesting that Kelsey notes that Jesus' examples of parables touch the deepest level in people and that the substance of this level was that from which Jung thought significant dreams arose. Robert Wise, another Episcopal clergyman who did post-graduate work at the Jung Institute in Switzerland, and Paul Meier, a Christian psychiatrist, also assume that dreams arise from the unconscious and are at the same time windows to the soul (Meier & Wise, 1995).

Since many learned Christians across the denominational spectrum have integrated Christian theology with psychoanalysis by relating the soul and the unconscious together, it seems fitting to elaborate on and extend the parallels between the two fields for this

article's purposes where appropriate. It is not enough to cognitively study a scriptural concept of self-deception to overcome it. Although the Bible tells us that the heart and/or soul is deceitful, it is somewhat silent about the exact intrapsychic mechanisms of self-deception that take place through the tangled interaction between the conscious and unconscious parts of a person's psyche. Here, Jungian psychoanalysis may complement our theological understanding of self-deception and provide wisdom for its concrete therapeutic treatment. Learning to detect and understand it during the live field experience of everyday consciousness is required to, in biblical terms, put off one's old deceitful self, be made new in the attitude of one's mind, and put on the new self that was created to be like God (Ephesians 4:22-24). Before these ideas are synthesized, however, we will first explore a brief overview of some classical psychoanalytic concepts.

### **A Brief Overview of Foundational Assumptions of Classical Psychoanalysis**

Although psychoanalytic theory may seem very complex, underneath the complexity is a fairly small number of principles (Kahn, 2002). Some of the reason for the resurgent interest in psychoanalysis in recent years (Bargh, 1997; Grigsby & Stevens, 2000) may be a fascination with the psychoanalytic assumption that people's behaviour is determined, at least partly, by internal forces that are outside of one's awareness and control. This assumption is combined with another foundational one which is that "everyone experiences threats about aspects of himself or herself" and that "Whatever most threatens you, your defensive processes keep it from overpowering you" (Carver & Scheier, 2012, p. 168). Freud (1933) theorized that these mechanisms of defense are unconscious methods for dealing with anxiety through denial or distortion of reality. This idea of continual defense is an important aspect of psychoanalytic thought (Carver & Scheier 2012). The proverbial comparison of the entirety of a person's mind to an iceberg has its origins in Freudian thought, which assumes that the vast majority of the iceberg cannot be seen, namely the unconscious. In this view, the unconscious is where the most important operations of the personality take

place but cannot be brought voluntarily to awareness because of forces that keep it hidden (Carver & Scheier, 2012).

Fernando (2009) defines an unconscious defense as "a psychological reaction or process that attempts to keep some mental content - a wish, feeling, judgment, etc.- from conscious awareness and/or behavioural expression" (p.25). Denial is one form of defense that is used to keep things from awareness (Usher, 2013). In the psychoanalytic framework, there is a distinction made between suppression, which happens on the more conscious level, and repression, which happens on the unconscious level (Mischel, Shoda, & Ayduk, 2008). There is some empirical evidence that people who repress are very sensitive to criticism and threat and use defenses to protect themselves from this vulnerability (Baumeister & Cairns, 1992).

### **Jung's Contributions to Psychoanalysis**

Freud stripped the word *psychotherapy*, which in Greek literally means soul curing, of its spiritual and religious roots (Stokes, 1985). Jung, in contrast, was much more open to the spiritual and religious aspects of the psyche. Jung originally studied under Freud and had a close working relationship with him for six years between 1906-1912. However, he later chose to branch away from certain psychoanalytic trajectories of Freud due to substantial differences in assumptions (Van de Castle, 1994). An example of this was the fact that although Freud and Jung agreed about the mechanism of unconscious repression, they disagreed upon what kind of content was being repressed. For Freud, most of it was sexual content, but for Jung, it was much more varied (Van de Castle, 1994). There is some evidence that this break may have had some personal overtones to it, as Jung acknowledged in his memoir that "Freud was placing personal authority above truth" (Jung, 1961, p.158). Regardless of the causes of the split, there are some notable modifications and additions to classical psychoanalytic assumptions that Jung contributed that are of immense importance in providing a framework for how a person experiences self-deception in their inner life.

With respect to the "Self" of a person, Jung saw it as not merely the center of someone, but also the whole circumference of a person, which embraced both the conscious and

unconscious. In psychoanalytic terminology, just as the ego is the center of one's immediate conscious awareness, so the Self is the center of the entirety of a person (Jung, 1967). To Jung, the Self is "supraordinate" to the conscious ego and embraces not only it, but also the entire unconscious psyche, the latter of which he believed always had an indeterminate amount of material (Jung, 1944).

Jung's take on an unconscious "complex" would be that it is a psychic fragment in oneself that has been split off from the conscious ego due to previous traumatic influences or incompatible tendencies that one had in the past (Jung, 1970). In Jung's mind, if someone had an "inferiority complex," it would mean that a hidden complex would have been formed due to unprocessed feelings of inferiority in the past and behave like an independent being in one's unconscious that had indirect yet powerful effects on that person's outlook on life. It would take on its own autonomous character to disrupt the person from their everyday well-being from behind the scenes of his or her curtain of self-awareness.

Closely related to the concept of a "complex" is a person's unconscious "shadow," which "personifies everything that the subject refuses to acknowledge about himself and yet is always thrusting itself upon him directly or indirectly—for instance, inferior traits of character and other incompatible tendencies" (Jung, 1969). To Jung, the shadow in a person represents instinctual desires that are denied expression in his or her life but will not simply disappear and therefore becomes a relatively autonomous "splinter personality" with tendencies contrary to the conscious ego in one's immediate awareness. What is unique about the shadow is that Jung was the first one who identified such a reality in the psyche and realized that its darkness resulted from it being deprived of the light of conscious awareness (Jung, 1960).

### **Living under the Shadow of Self-Deception**

What is relevant to our discussion here about self-deception is how unacknowledged parts of a person (e.g., feelings of inferiority that form into an unconscious inferiority complex, feelings of unworthiness forming a complex of worthlessness, or the hurt of feeling

consistently unattended to forming an unconscious shadow that feels not worthy of being paid attention to) do not simply disappear if someone represses them. The inferiority complex or shadow in a person is like an invisible but authoritatively compelling whisper in the background of one's psyche with a seemingly unknown source which deceptively leads to an attachment to self-defeating behaviour. An example of this is a person who repeatedly engages in excessive people-pleasing behaviour, even after realizing its self-defeating nature, due to a pervasive background music of inferiority towards others that has formed in the hidden parts of one's unconscious. When this person repeatedly people-pleases to try to drown out the unconscious soundtrack of feeling unworthy or unlovable to others if they do not continually and affectionately show that they are pleased with him, he is at the mercy of his Jungian shadow and complex without fully knowing it. This example shows self-deception because excessive people-pleasing is done in the vulnerable heat of the moment even after one has cognitively realized many times that doing so does more harm than good in the long-run (and sometimes even short-run) and will not satisfy the deepest desires of oneself, which is to be unconditionally seen, accepted, and loved while being completely oneself. Tallman (2005) describes these unconscious forces that surreptitiously but powerfully drive human thoughts, feelings, and behaviour as being like magnets that move under a piece of paper that invisibly but powerfully move emotional iron fillings on top of it.

The way to strip the power of these unconscious drives, according to Jung, is to differentiate one's ego from these unconscious contents and bring them into relationship with one's conscious awareness (Jung, 1961). One way the shadow can come into the light of one's conscious awareness is through the medium of dreams. Jung writes that dreams "compensate" for the "deficiencies" of one's personality and simultaneously warn a person of the dangers in one's present course. He writes that "The general function of dreams is to try to restore our psychological balance by producing dream material that re-establishes, in a subtle way, the total psychic equilibrium" (Jung et al., 1964, p.50). He gives an example of this by explaining why it is common for

"people who have unrealistic ideas or too high an opinion of themselves, or who make grandiose plans out of proportion to their real capacities, [to] have dreams of flying or falling" (p.50). In classical Jungian thinking, dreams can sensitize oneself to the dark side of one's nature and help assimilate or integrate the shadow's content rather than being overwhelmed by it (Van de Castle, 1994). They sensitize people to neglected areas of their personalities by zeroing in on the blind spots about themselves so that they can become aware of their neglected parts and strive for their expression, much like how the body attempts to maintain a steady temperature by perspiring when too heated and shivering when too cold (Van de Castle, 1994).

One perspective of how Christian theology can be integrated with Jungian compensation is that the shadow can be seen as an unmet God-given need (e.g., to be appropriately appreciated, heard, or given attention to) that has been curved and twisted into a contaminated belief instead (e.g., "I need to excessively flirt with multiple members of the opposite gender and draw ample romantic attention to myself in order to avoid feeling worthless and of no value"). The unmet need of appropriate appreciation and attention has to be consciously recognized and integrated into the personality while the unconscious distorted belief needs to be rejected and discarded. As Benner (2012) says in his integration of Christian spirituality with psychoanalysis, the "soul thrives in reality but withers when we choose to live in places of illusion or denial" (p.122). Meier and Wise (1995) write that in this process of Christian compensation, God enables the Self to overcome past denial and deceit through spiritual and emotional development by bringing repressed needs into an encounter with the Holy Spirit.

### **Understanding Integration Through the Illustration of Addiction**

One can see how Christian theology can be integrated with Jungian psychoanalysis on the topic of self-deception through the example of addiction. Using a fictitious example, suppose Jim, a sincere Christian, has an addiction to internet pornography. Although he cognitively knows it separates him in his relational intimacy with God, disrupts the natural neuroscientific

chemistry of his physical brain, harms his relationship to his own body (1 Corinthians 6:18), and distorts his view and interaction with members of the opposite gender and therefore sincerely wants to stop, he still finds himself addicted and falling into this habit weekly. From a theological standpoint, his heart is being deceived with desires from his fallen "old self" (Ephesians 4:22) which wage war against his own physical body and mind (Romans 7:23). In addition, from Jesus' standpoint, he is a slave to this state (John 8:34) even though another part of him genuinely wants to be free from it (Romans 7:18-20). In other words, in terms of his conscious intention to stop this addiction due to its myriad forms of harm, his cognition fully grasps the issue but his soul does not yet, at least fully. Given the fact that self-deception involves being blind to God's truths about oneself, Jim, at a deeper layer, is unaware of what his deeper "core beliefs" believe or disbelieve about how God views him. These core beliefs (Issler, 2009) lie below the surface of his awareness and were formed mostly without his awareness. Jim is unaware of the fact that when he was young, his emotionally abusive mother continually made him feel unvalued, unloved, and unworthy in the presence of herself, which in turn led him to unknowingly transfer these unprocessed emotions to females in general. This happened in conjunction with insensitive female classmates who made fun of his "unattractiveness." Due to this history, he developed some deeply hidden spiritual core beliefs that ended up enslaving him to pornography. These hidden core beliefs that drive his addiction include: "If I am not given affectionate attention from females, then I am not worthy, special, or loved." This contorted understanding of himself has been unknowingly buried deep in his soul without his awareness. Yet, much like an invisible cage, this elusively imprisoned identity of himself restricts him from the freedom of defining himself as God does instead of how females do even though he is completely persuaded in terms of his theological head-knowledge that he should cut off this pornography addiction.

From a Jungian psychoanalytic lens, Jim has a Self that includes his ego consciousness and unconscious mind. Due to his childhood experiences with an abusive mother as well as insensitive and condescending female schoolmates, he developed an inferiority complex

towards women that has unknowingly become buried in his unconscious. Yet this buried complex profoundly affects his conscious mind and makes him feel inferior towards females. This surreptitiously produced a shadow in him which he has inattentively repressed. This shadow's original unmet need would be the natural desire, to an appropriate degree and manner, to have affectionate attention shown to him by members of the opposite gender. Over time though, the more he repressed this shadow's unmet need, the more voracious it became behind the scenes. Unfortunately, this repressed wound of felt rejection and perceived worthlessness festers in his unconscious and lingers wherever he goes as if it were a literal shadow. This deep shadow wound in the melody of his unconscious plays a strong but subtle background music of feeling unworthy towards females which, in turn, reverberates powerfully through all the different levels of his psyche. The result is that he is tempted to try to use any possible means to drown out the cacophony of self-devaluing soundtracks playing in the headphones of his psyche. He has learned through experience that when he consumes internet pornography, the unpleasant and unbearable unconscious background music temporarily fades away for a time. Hence, he gives into internet pornography repeatedly to get relief, however temporary, from his deep wound of feeling unworthy, not special, and unloved (by women in particular) without fully realizing what is going on. Since he has not squarely confronted and dealt with his deep feelings of pain, hurt, and rejection from females, the cycle repeats itself and the shadow keeps rearing its dark head as he continually tries to mute the seemingly immutable cry of his unconscious wound. This happens because Jim is not aware that unconscious shadows do not simply disappear. Little does Jim know that he has unknowingly developed unconscious emotional logic that he is completely oblivious to. This elusive emotional logic in Jim begins after he repeatedly senses an unconscious voice that is constantly badgering and persuading him that if no females give him ample affectionate attention, then he is unworthy, not special, and unloved. Since he cannot stand such distressing content from such an overwhelming force in his shadow, he constantly tries to appease that force by

consuming subjectively convincing affectionate attention from females in the virtual world of internet pornography. In this alluring virtual reality that preys on his shadow, beautiful women are giving him unadulterated (or in another sense adulterated) affectionate attention with a level of unbridled intimacy where they open up their private and privileged sexuality to him with no boundaries. Doing so temporarily alleviates the pain of his unconscious shadow's unbearable and self-debasing voice by giving him a short-lived emotional sugar rush of artificially contrived worth, special esteem, and affectionate love from females on his computer screen. This is extremely powerful on the hidden levels of his shadow's longings that unthinkingly bypass his conscious detection most of the time. When his shadow's instinctual hungers pass a certain threshold of starvation, they ravenously overpower whatever conscious defenses that get in the way and try to feel gorged with no care or regard for what is actually real. However, a short while after the peak of illusory erotic stimulation is over, he repeatedly falls again into emotions of feeling unworthy, not special, and unloved. Hence the cycle continues. This unconscious emotional logic profoundly affects him in ways of which he is not aware.

At the moment of pornography temptation, Jim chooses to suppress his biblically informed conscience and cognitively grasped theological knowledge by shifting his attention to the powerful unconscious desires to feel worthy, special, and loved. If Jim has done this for many years, these solidified habits of his may have strong knee-jerk-like reactions that he is not even aware of, which would increasingly strengthen his repression tendencies. As we will see later though, there is hope for Jim to overcome the roots of the blindness of his soul/unconscious through using biblical teaching combined with appropriate tools from Jungian psychoanalysis.

### **Examples of Self-Deception in the Bible**

Before we explore the concrete use of psychoanalytic tools to address self-deception from a Christian perspective, we should first explore some examples of how God addressed self-deceived individuals in Scripture. Three examples will be given. The first

will be from Nathan the prophet confronting David in 2 Samuel 12. The other two will be Jesus addressing Peter with the Parable of the Unmerciful Servant in Matthew 18 and Jesus giving the Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector in Luke 18.

In 2 Samuel 12, after David commits adultery with Uriah's wife and subsequently has Uriah killed, the Lord sends Nathan the prophet to confront David. In his book about self-deception, Ten Elshof (2009) refers to Bishop Joseph Butler, who said that nearly a year must have passed between the time of David's adultery and the time of the prophet's confrontation towards him, yet it appears that during this year, David does not show the least remorse or contrition. This shows that David likely did not fully come to grips with the error that he committed or recognize the kind of person he was in order to commit such an act before God. Yet, when God speaks to David through Nathan, he does not begin with propositional statements of his mistake, but instead uses an elaborated story of a rich person stealing a poor man's sheep. David is angered by such a story and wants to kill the rich man. Nathan immediately rebukes him by saying that he is metaphorically that very culprit, as he murdered Uriah and took his wife to be his own. Such an approach successfully pierces David's heart and convicts him of the egregious nature of his ways, which he probably did not come to full terms with before due to some measure of self-deception. Schipper (2007) notes that in this story, David interprets Nathan's narrative as a parable. TeSelle (1975) posits that parables are extended metaphors and that they involve stories that set the "familiar" in an "unfamiliar" context. Furthermore, he notes that they involve "a story of ordinary people and events which is the context for envisioning and understanding the strange and extraordinary." If self-deception is considered "strange and extraordinary" and camouflages itself by being unnoticed in its "familiar" hiding place of the hidden depths of a person, then fresh and "unfamiliar" parables can help the listener discover self-deceived areas in one's depths which may have become too blindingly "familiar" to notice without assistance. This certainly happened to David when Nathan's parable involving a fresh and "unfamiliar" symbolic

story convicted David about his “strange and extraordinary” self-deception with regard to his adultery and murder, which he had become too complacently blinded to and lackadaisically “familiar” with. This parable proved to be a successful medium in making David face a spiritual mirror to see the error of his ways.

When we come to the New Testament, we see Jesus doing his teaching in parables (Matthew 13:34). When Peter asks him whether he should forgive his brother who sins against him up to seven times, Jesus immediately answers that he should forgive seventy-seven times. He then gives a parable of an unmerciful servant who himself received abundant mercy and pardon for his enormous debts from his own king but who was nevertheless unmerciful to his own servant who owed him a relatively miniscule amount (Matthew 18:21-35). Jesus, like Nathan in the Old Testament, uses the medium of a narrative to amplify a person’s attention to a disparity. There is an enormous incongruence between Peter seeking a limit on the relatively miniscule mercy he “ought” to have given to others and the enormous amount of mercy he himself received from God, which, in turn, he was supposed to extend to others in light of the amount of undeserved grace he himself received. Jesus’ parables pierce through the unconscious defenses of repression that divert one’s attention from unpleasant truths about oneself. One thing this parable likely did to Peter was to shatter his self-deceived image of himself as someone who more or less had it altogether and therefore did not really receive an enormous amount of mercy and forgiveness from God himself. The aim of the parable is to make him aware of how God saw him, namely as someone very imperfect who needed to receive an enormous amount of mercy and forgiveness from God to a degree that will never come close to the relatively small requirement from God to forgive people who sin against him. This narrative medium likely impacted Peter’s soul more than it would have if mere abstract propositions of the same content were stated to him. This is so because parables that employ a narrative can get past people’s ego defenses.

The same could be said of Jesus’ parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector going up to the temple to pray to God (Luke 18:9-14). The

text says in verse 9 that Jesus told his listeners this parable because his listeners were confident in their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else. From a psychoanalytic standpoint, Jesus exposed the hidden shadow of self-righteous people who had an implicit desire to feel righteous by comparing themselves to other “more sinful” people. Jesus was addressing their unconscious self-images that saw themselves as more or less perfectly righteous people due to comparing themselves to people who had less ability to hide their obvious imperfections. He shattered their false visions of themselves that felt inherently righteous just because their external actions’ righteous appearance exceeded that of robbers, evildoers, adulterers, and the tax collector. He also dispelled additional illusions in his listeners who erroneously ascribed righteousness to themselves merely due to performing external acts of righteousness (fasting twice a week and tithing). Jesus targeted these self-deceptive self-images because they deceived people into thinking that they were exempted from being inherently broken and imperfect people who needed to seek God for mercy and healing.

### **The Confirmation of Integration from Contemporary Neuroscience**

Contemporary neuroscience confirms the effectiveness of both Jungian psychoanalytic tools as well as interventions that biblical characters used to address unconscious self-deception. Although the neuroscientific nature of these types of interventions is very complex and varied, for the purposes of this article we will focus on how these interventions predominantly target the right-brain as opposed to the left-brain. Field (2014) notes that the right side of the brain is associated with unconscious social and emotional learning and includes intuition, empathy, creativity, and flexibility while the left side of the brain is responsible for rational and logical abstract cognition and conscious knowledge. In terms of addressing, exposing, and healing oneself from self-deception, neuroscience points to the effectiveness of right-brain interventions.

As Ten Elshof (2009) notices, any subject that evokes strong emotion in someone is a good candidate for self-deception because self-deception is most likely to happen when we have strong emotional attachments to a belief

on some topic. Neuroscience shows that processing through the right hemisphere will generally produce a more intense emotional response (Lehman, 2011). One's unconscious image of God, according to contemporary neuroscience research, happens to be predominantly processed by the brain's right hemisphere (Cozolino, 2010, Garzon, 2007), whereas one's more explicit and conscious declarative knowledge of God is predominantly processed by the brain's left hemisphere (Garzon, 2007; Siegel, 2012). Researchers define *God image*, which is largely unconscious, as an internal working model of a specific divine attachment figure in relation to oneself derived from one's very own relational experiences with that divine attachment figure (Barret, 2007). This is in contrast to the term *God concept*, which refers to a person's consciously learned and professed theological set of beliefs about a specific divine figure. God concept includes explicitly taught knowledge about how that divine attachment figure relates with, thinks about, and feels towards humans as well as how humans should relate with, think about, and feel towards the divine attachment figure (Davis, Mauch, & Moriarty, 2013). On the other hand, one's God image guides and integrates how a person will experience the divine attachment figure on an emotional, physiological, largely nonverbal, and usually implicit level (Horowitz, 1991). This is learned through emotional, implicit, and incidental learning (Smith & Kosslyn, 2007) and is encoded in a person through subsymbolic and nonverbal-symbolic representations (Hall, Fujikawa, Halcrow, Hill, & Delaney, 2009). God concept, by contrast, is mediated primarily by explicit thoughts, memories, knowledge, and particular semantic memory (Kihlstrom, 2008; Siegel, 2012), and it guides how a person talks and thinks about a divine attachment figure on an abstract, theological, conceptual, and explicit level inside of one's conscious awareness (Davis, 2010; Horowitz, 1991). It is learned through explicit and intentional learning (Smith & Kosslyn, 2007). With this line of thinking, material that is ripe for self-deception involves not only images of oneself but also images of God since both are interconnected, processed by the right hemisphere, and have strong emotional attachments whether one is aware of them or not. Hence, if someone wants to transform their God image (e.g., a cold, distant, conditionally

accepting, and consistently angry Father to a warm, close, consistently joyful, and unconditionally accepting Father), from a neuroscience standpoint, right brain interventions that involve the imagination should be used. Doing so can address repetitive self-defeating habits that have their roots in how one's distorted shadow sees oneself in relationship to God (e.g., seeing oneself as worthy and loved by God only if one feels needed and indispensable in accomplishing God's work, hence idolizing and obsessing about Church ministry while discarding self-care and rest).

Moving on to the neuroscience of processing stories, research shows that the right frontal lobe and right hemispheric neural networks are used in the processing of a narrative (Baddeley, 2000), and brain lesion research has confirmed the necessity of the right hemisphere for story comprehension (Mar, 2004). Other research found that the right inferior frontal lobe and the right middle temporal gyrus were activated when participants were asked to comprehend the moral of an Aesop's fable (Nichelli et al., 1995). These contemporary research findings about narratives, in conjunction with the previously mentioned research about God image and self-image, significantly corroborate the effectiveness of the biblical use of parabolic stories to address self-deception happening in a person's right hemisphere pertaining to unconscious portraits that the self-deceived individual has about themselves and God.

Parabolic narratives are not restricted to intervening in an individual's self-deception only during his awake hours. When a parabolic story takes dream form, the right hemisphere can arguably be even more powerfully affected. Jung observed that a dream was like a story, or a drama narrative. It usually had four components including an opening scene that introduced the setting, characters, and initial situation of the main character, the development of a plot, the emergence of a major conflict, and the response to the conflict by the main character (Van de Castle, 1994). Given this insightful observation by Jung, combined with the ability of a narrative to pierce through one's ego defenses to reach the unconscious, it is no surprise that dream work has been seen as therapeutic due to it leading to emotional healing and providing access to the unconscious (Barrett, 2002; Muff, 1996).

Since Jung (1961) found it helpful "to find the particular images which lie behind emotions" (p.177), he also developed an approach similar to dreamwork where a client gets in touch with material from his or her unconscious through an exploratory and healing process he called "active imagination" (Fordham, 1956). This involves using one's imagination to discover and interact with spontaneously produced metaphorical imagery that symbolizes various material in one's unconscious to consciously come to terms with it. Whether the psychoanalytic-oriented intervention involves modern day parables, dreams, or active imagination, a client's unconscious shadow can come into the light of one's conscious awareness through more right-brain interventions.

Although psychoanalysis has sometimes had the reputation of not being able to be operationalized and measured in a scientific way, there are nevertheless some studies that show that long-term psychoanalysis may reduce the use of medical care (Berghout, Zevalkink, & Hakkaart-Van Roijen, 2010; de Maat, Philipszoon, Schoevers, Dekker, & De Jonghe, 2007). After reviewing several empirical studies on the effectiveness of Jungian psychotherapy in Switzerland and Germany, Roesler (2013) has boldly claimed that it has now reached the point where it can be called an empirically proven and effective treatment method for patients. He argues that not only is there symptom reduction of problems in Jungian therapy, but that there are also deep level structural changes of the personality that last over a period of up to 6 years. He notes that the effectiveness of Jungian therapy has been proven in quasi-experimental studies, retrospective studies, and case studies.

In addition to therapeutically working with images through a Jungian framework, studies show that images in general profoundly affect a person's inner psyche. Empirical studies show that positive images have more power in producing positive emotions than verbal processing, and that the same goes with negative images for negative emotion (Holmes, Arntz, & Smucker, 2007). This is demonstrated in the experiential difference between holding an image in mind (e.g., imagining oneself jumping off a cliff) versus verbally processing that content (e.g., talking about the idea of jumping off a cliff). Seeing that image-processing is largely a right hemispheric brain operation, it is not

that surprising to see studies elaborating on the power of the image in mediating effects on how one views oneself on a deep level. Hirsch, Clark, Matthew, and Williams (2003) found that when people held a negative image of themselves while talking to a stranger, they were found to have greater anxiety, rated their performance as poorer, and had less positive behaviour. Holmes and her colleagues (2007) suggest that if "imagery has a more powerful impact on negative emotion than does verbal processing of the same material, then negative imagery may be best modified not only through verbal challenges to the image, but by presenting alternative positive information in an imagery modality" (p. 300). These research implications can support Jungian-Christian interventions that aim to overcome a self-deceived image of oneself situated in the right-hemisphere (e.g., an internal image of feeling loved and valued only if others consistently need the person in an indispensable way) by replacing it with an alternative right-hemispheric image that is biblical and full of healing (e.g., an internal image of being unconditionally loved, accepted, and valued by God even when the person is not indispensable or needed) rather than through trying to use a left-hemispheric intervention to logically reason oneself out of self-deception.

An intervention that has demonstrated some support in renovating internally structured images in a client's psyche is called "imagery rescripting," which involves helping clients to relive and then transform recurring, distressing images (Smucker & Dancu, 1999). Succinctly stated, this involves using one's imagination to re-experience distressing imagery of real life events that were particularly unsettling, then using "mastery imagery" to encourage the client to take control over the imagined scene (e.g., entering the scene with a second version of oneself as an older and more mature adult as opposed to the original scene where one was a child), then offering self-calming imagery to assure the previously distressed self in the original incident. There is empirical evidence that imagery rescripting is effective in treating repetitive, intrusive, and distressing images that persist in disturbing clients (Rusch, Grunert, Mendelsohn, & Smucker 2000). Wild and Clark (2011) found that negative self-images appear to play a role in the maintenance of social phobia and that experiment

subjects who underwent imagery rescripting proved to experience beneficial effects on negative beliefs about oneself, self-image, memory distress, fear of negative self-evaluation, and anxiety in social situations.

The Christian version of imagery rescripting would involve exploring, reimagining, and re-entering into scenes in one's life that seemed to have caused the inception of unconsciously altered ideas about God and oneself that have been buried in one's psyche. This would be followed by inviting Jesus into the scene to do some inner healing of unconscious wounds in one's soul, then comforting the previously distressed self in the original incident and encouraging oneself to move forward in life. The latter can be done by holding, treasuring, and embodying biblically accurate images of God and oneself in order to replace the bent and curved images that one has unknowingly accepted (e.g., replacing "I'm only worthy if I am shown approval by authority figures" with "I'm worthy because God, the ultimate authority figure, approves of me").

Siegel (2007) asserts that "Studies of mental imagery have now clearly revealed that the act of perceptual imagining not only activates those regions of the brain involved in the carrying out of the imagined action, but also produces long-term structural growth in those very areas" (p. 201). An implication of Siegel's finding for the Christian overcoming self-deception is that regularly engaging in right-brain activities that involve narrative, metaphor, imagery, and other artistic interventions that contain and nurture biblically accurate images of God and oneself in relation to him are of crucial importance. These allow for God to produce deep and long-term structural transformations in the person by "refreshing" one's unconscious/soul through meditating on the "Law of the Lord" (Psalm 19:7), which, in turn, will help one to increasingly overcome the source of self-deception. A study that is consistent with this line of thinking was done by Homan (2012), who found that females who were more securely attached to God in their God image had less body dissatisfaction when being exposed to very thin female models in the media compared to those insecurely attached to God.

### Illustrating Integrative Treatment

Returning to our fictional client Jim, therapeutic interventions that integrate Christian theology with Jungian psychoanalysis can be used to heal both the spiritual and psychoanalytic dimension of his self-deception in his pornography addiction. It is recognized that various clients are different and that interventions should be adapted to fit their personalities, cultures, and histories. The following is just an example of how this integration may unfold with a client who wants to overcome his cyclical self-deception in the context of theologically informed psychotherapy.

After a therapeutic alliance and rapport has been established between Jim and his therapist, Jim can begin to learn what is happening to him on both the spiritual, psychoanalytic, and neuroscientific dimensions of his addiction. This will involve validating Jim's struggle of wanting to uphold Christian values of avoiding pornography on the one hand while constantly struggling to do so on the other. His cognition genuinely understands the unhealthiness of pornography addiction with respect to his faith, empirical studies on the subject, and the emotional, relational, and spiritual well-being of himself and his future spouse. Though his head-knowledge grasps these facts, his heart/soul does not grasp it, at least to the degree that his theologically informed cognition does. This spiritual perspective can then be complemented by the therapist providing psychoeducation to Jim that, psychoanalytically speaking, his conscious awareness understands the harm and destructiveness of pornography, but his unconscious mind has not fully come to grips with this yet. This is due to a "shadow" of his that has an unmet need that has yet to come into the light of his conscious awareness. This understanding can be further consolidated by a basic and simplified neuroscientific explanation of how the left-hemisphere of his brain seems to comprehend the gravity of this addiction and the need to stop it, but his right-hemisphere, for all intents and purposes, has not fully comprehended the issue yet. Adding onto right-brain versus left-brain explanations, the difference between God-image and God-concept can be explained to Jim while explaining that the former is processed with his right-brain while the latter is processed by his left-brain. The therapist can

then give psychoeducation explaining how his unconsciously distorted lens of himself and God needs to be unearthed and replaced with a biblical lens, primarily through interventions that target his right-hemispheric processing.

Following these explanations, predominantly right-brain interventions can be used where Jim can attempt to discover what self-image and God-image are buried in his unconscious that unknowingly feed his pornography addiction. If Jim consents, he can ask God to give him a dream about his problem that will shed light on the unconscious root of the issue. Steps of dream retrieval that can be used when waking up can be explained to him. If Jim subsequently brings in a dream, the therapist can explore the meaning of the dream through Jungian symbolic association in dream analysis. If Jim does not have any relevant dreams about the issue, it can be suggested to him to try, along with the therapist's help, various active imagination activities, also known as guided imagery exercises, involving metaphors being produced from his unconscious. Through these, hopefully Jim can discover the unconsciously tainted ideas that he has unknowingly believed about himself ("If I am not repeatedly given lots of affectionate attention from females, then I am unworthy, not special, and unloved."). If at this stage Jim knows the distorted beliefs he has believed about himself, he can confess them to God, renounce them in Jesus' name, and then replace them with beliefs in line with biblical doctrine ("I am inherently worthy, special, and loved because God the Father always looks towards me with lovingly affectionate attention"). If an additional, deeper intervention is to be attempted, an imagery rescripting exercise can also be used, where Jim goes back to those specific events in his history where he had distressing, hurtful, and painful interactions with the opposite gender. During his revisiting of those events, he can invite Jesus in to intervene in the scene. Theologically, this can be explained along the logic that since Jesus exists outside of time, he was present at the time of the scene without Jim knowing it. He can sense Jesus' presence in the scene (which a lot of the time is already sufficiently soothing for the client), and ask and receive what Jesus thought and felt about him at the time. After this, Jim can ask Jesus to expose to him what the distorted beliefs he unconsciously believed about himself were. Then, Jim can renounce

the distorted beliefs in Jesus' name and replace them with beliefs in line with relevant Christian theology and pray a seal of spiritual protection of the intervention in Jesus' name.

Time will tell whether Jim was healed from the depths of his soul in addressing the root of the issue in his unconscious. Usually, insight that is arrived at is accurate when there is a deep intuitive sense of "aha," a feeling that things click and make sense in a new way, a feeling of energy and excitement about the new discoveries, confirmation of the insight through additional information, and if the person starts thinking about what to do differently based on the insight (Hill, 2010). There may need to be multiple ministry sessions if there are multiple root issues buried in his unconscious self-deception.

After the above interventions occur, steps to solidify and rehabilitate his new self-image and God-image are required. This will involve more right-brain interventions that Jim can learn to do on his own that involve internalizing his existential identity in God through narrative mediums (perhaps by utilizing interventions from narrative therapy pertaining to the story of his identity formation), image meditation based mediums (perhaps through Ignatian meditation of relevant Gospel scenes with the five senses), metaphorical mediums (perhaps through various art therapies), or any other creative modality that engages and reinforces his existential identity in Christ through predominantly right-hemispheric activity. Doing so will protect his spiritual identity from unhealthy images about himself and God, help keep the light of his conscious awareness on distressing emotional content that could potentially become shadows, and strengthen his neural circuit pathways that fire up his existentially felt identity in Christ.

## Conclusion

In this article, we have explored how there is great therapeutic potential in integrating Christian theology and Jungian psychoanalysis to overcome self-deception. It would be beneficial to explore how different personalities according to different personality frameworks (e.g., the Big Five factor trait theory, Myers-Briggs, Enneagram) respond to various styles of therapeutic integration involving theological teaching on self-deception on the one hand

combined with Jungian psychoanalysis on the other. Researching how to best adjust the blending of these two frameworks to different personality types as well as differing cultural backgrounds would be highly beneficial to reaching a more diverse demographic in our increasingly multicultural society.

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