

Self-Deception & Sin

Basic Thesis: we regularly act out of anxiety, excessive self-interest, and pride, but we hide from ourselves and others that we are doing this. We deliberately choose to ignore our own natural limits and our own sins.

A Few Quotes on This from Niebuhr

1. “Man loves himself inordinately. Since his determinate existence does not deserve the devotion lavished upon it, it is obviously necessary to practice some deception in order to justify such excessive devotion” (The Nature and Destiny of Man, 1:203).
2. Niebuhr puts it this way, the rise of science in Western culture “gave modern culture a special animus against ‘dogma.’ But unfortunately it was not prepared to deal with the hidden dogmas in prescriptions of science itself” (ibid.).
3. “. . . we have had such an ironic conflict between the pious and the rationalists, each of them aware of the hypocrisy of the other but neither of them aware of the dishonesty in themselves” (The Self & the Dramas of History, 151).

A Few Scripture Passage on Self-Deception

1. “In their own eyes they flatter themselves too much to detect or hate their sin” (Psalm 36:2).
2. The prophets continually confront people along these lines. “On your clothes is found the lifeblood of the innocent poor, though you did not catch them breaking in. Yet in spite of all this you say, ‘I am innocent; he is not angry with me.’ But I will pass judgment on you because you say, ‘I have not sinned’” (Jer. 2:34–35).
3. “If anyone thinks they are something when they are not, they deceive themselves. . . . Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows” (Gal. 6:3, 7).
4. “Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye?” (Matt. 7:3).
5. So, note: everyone whom we regard as a sinner tends to justify themselves. The conclusion to draw is not that these are particularly bad people but rather that this is a universal tendency of all sin, including our own!

Two Stories -- Pride & Prejudice; Micaiah (1 Kings 22, see esp. verses 8, 15–16, 27)
See: <https://www.weswhite.net/2020/10/oh-that-abominable-mr-darcy/>

Small Group - What parts of this lesson or the previous ones have resonated most with you?

-Do you have a time that you can think of where you have experienced self-deception?

-How do you think we can learn to overcome self-deception?