Addleton Academic Publishers
*Review of Contemporary Philosophy*
Volume 12, 2013, pp. 30–42, ISSN 1841-5261

# THE BEST ESSAY EVER: THE FALLACY OF WISHFUL THINKING

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ABSTRACT. It is argued that wishful thinking is an informal logical fallacy and is distinguished from self-deception and delusion. Wishful thinking is unique in that a human desire is the starting point, which remains unfulfilled because of insufficient, no evidence, or ignorance, despite the agent's beliefs. It contrasts with self-deception, a more serious mental state in which the agent hides or denies the truth from himself, regardless of whether it is desired. Wishful thinking is a logical fallacy, depending on the agent's genuine beliefs as an epistemic dilemma or merely a harmless fantasy.

Keywords: wishful thinking, informal fallacy, self-deception, desires

## 1. Introduction

One of the most common forms of false optimism is wishful thinking in which agents desire and often hope for something with little or no evidence that it can be obtained or attained, or the evidence is misinterpreted or not examined. Generally, agents hold a belief for a desired future outcome, or perhaps an imagined past, without a strong reason to believe that this will or has been true. I would like to think this is the best essay ever written, and if I *believed* that, I would be committing the wishful thinking fallacy (WT). I have no reason or evidence at all to hold that this is the best essay ever written, and I am certain that it is not close. If I simply believe that it is a nice pleasing but farfetched thought, then no fallacy is committed. Furthermore, it is very questionable whether strong evidence would or could exist to make that particular truth claim. One reason would be the lack of consensus among philosophers on the criteria for this claim. WT, I argue, is an *informal fallacy* when *it* is a real belief for a desired state of events with weak or no evidence and a highly improbable likelihood. It is a leap into improbability based upon false optimism. In most cases, the agent has no argument; it is only implied, not explicit. Yet an enthymeme can be constructed into an



argument which is necessary in order to show that a fallacy exists. Obviously, if the agent does not quite believe his fantasy, or if no argument is able to be reconstructed based on the premises, then no fallacy is committed. The term "wishful thinking" is used in this paper to refer to a mode of thought that may or may not be a fallacy.

In the WT fallacy the agent is motivated by a lack of opposing evidence to propose that his belief is true perhaps because it has not been disproven. Although it may be mistaken for appeal to ignorance, which argues from the absence of such evidence or reason to a conclusion that the proposition must be then true, WT moves from a pleasant comforting desire or wish to a conclusion that it is, will be or has been true. The desire for the idea to become true must be present in the WT fallacy. Primarily, WT is unsupported optimism, idealized unrealistic hope or wishfulness. This paper explains and clarifies *WT as a fallacy,* distinguishing it from self-deception and delusion, and defends the crucial importance of hard evidence to support one's beliefs. It is very consistent with evidentialism and the intellectualistic theory of belief.

## 2. Problem of Evidence

As an inductive fallacy, WT begins as a desire that is often very strong and is held as a belief, despite insignificant or no evidence to support it. The individual then leaps to an unwarranted conclusion. As such, the agent intuits rather than reasons to the unjustified conclusion that the belief is/will be true. The rule for evidence can be stated: "Apportion the strength of your belief to the evidence; believe only what is justified by the evidence, and believe it to the full extent, but only to the full extent, that it is justified by the evidence."[1] Although it may be considered a character idiosyncrasy, it is an inductive error in which the agent moves from a merely possible or impossible desired future to a belief in a highly probable or certain one without checking or collecting the necessary and sufficient information.

It is similar to Optimistic bias (in psychology) in that agents are over confident in believing a positive event will occur to them rather than to other agents, especially their peers. *I am* more likely to win the contest or game, not the others. Younger agents are also optimistic that negative events such as diseases will not occur to them; diseases are supposed to happen to others, not us. Accidents and crimes are also perceived more likely to happen to others perhaps because one minimizes their risks to oneself, but as Seneca noted, whatever bad events happen to other people can happen to you. In these scenarios, common intuition suggests that the pessimistic agent is frequently more realistic and precautionary, yet also more fearful, while the optimistic one is more willing to take risks and be disappointed when negative events occur.

A less common form of WT is when the agent imagines or perceives a more pleasant past event or state of affairs than was actually true—frequently romantic or nostalgic thought or reverie—the good old days. One wishes that she was an excellent student, and as this desire is so subjectively important to the agent, she believes it is true, regardless of the fact that she was only average. The thought that she was a superior student who loved learning provides so much support and pleasure, as well as vanity when she tells others of her studiousness. This little myth is a self-deception because she strongly believes this story and no evidence to suggest otherwise exists.

It may be so important for a man to remember himself as a good husband that this belief turns into WT because the truth is that he was frequently unreliable, selfish and abusive to his wife. His memory is very selective, however – distorted to the point that his belief becomes magical because he cannot live with the truth. This self-deception is a comforting naïve denial of the past which becomes his personal reality. He may shrug off the accusations: "I hit her only twice when she needed it", or "she could not be trusted with money" and in this way, relieves himself of any responsibility or guilt. In both these cases, Jean-Paul Sartre would call them bad faith (*mauvoise foi)* in his celebrated chapter in *Being and Nothingness.*

Evidence is understood here with neither broad nor narrow criteria, but instead has moderate inclusiveness in its definition that excludes *a priori* arguments and does not rely solely on scientific sorts of knowledge. Evidence should not include mere hearsay, yet includes reliable anecdotal reports, and excludes unreliable and exaggerated sources. Obviously, it excludes assertions that rational agents suspect are fallacious. All relevant evidence should be considered as a precaution against committing hasty generalizations and other fallacies. Of course, even overwhelming evidence occasionally directs us to mistaken answers and false assurance of the truth. For this reason, interpretations of evidence must follow from narrowly reasoned inferences that utilize a skeptical methodology, minimizing assumptions at every step in the process. It follows from this that I am not proposing a verification epistemology or theory of meaning, but nor should it become a *laissez faire* theoretical or pragmatic framework. UFO sightings, visions of Mary and Jesus, conversations with God, and other reports like this without sufficient *quality* evidence are likely examples of WT and perhaps optimism bias. Observations of the paranormal may involve some WT, yet as mentioned, one must be cautious about rejecting these beliefs only because the believer demonstrates WT, lest the genetic fallacy is committed.

Lack of evidence includes insufficient or absence of evidence.

Or when the agent–

- Does not believe the evidence
- Does not know the evidence exists



- Does not understand the evidence
- Ignores the evidence
- Is not interested in the evidence.

It is clear that *a priori* arguments are *not* evidence and cannot be used as any evidence, contrary to Wood in "The Duty to Believe according to the Evidence."[2] By definition, *a priori* arguments are not grounded in observations, and abstractions (such as Being) obfuscate rather than refer to genuine knowledge. Since ancient times, rationalists have ignored or overlooked concrete evidence and reliable sense perception and focused on abstractions, definitions and lofty ideas, as James argues in *A Pluralistic Universe.* Rationalists (intellectualists) believe that philosophy begins and ends with untested unverified ideas, beginning with Socrates or earlier. In 1690 Locke brought philosophy back in the right direction with modern empiricism that shows that evidence clearly relies on *a posteriori* knowledge. Wishful thinking, he implies, lacks sufficient reasons for true beliefs. "Sufficient" or "insufficient" reasons are to be determined case by case, though Locke does not assert this.

Wishful thinking is missing from standard logic textbooks (such as Copi's and Hurley's) though some Critical Thinking texts discuss the issue. Perhaps it is construed as a genetic fallacy, psychological mechanism or an agent's character flaw. One cannot reject an argument solely because it began as a wishful thinking proposition. The argument itself must be examined, and if there is no argument, then it can be rejected as merely wishful fanciful thinking. If an argument is present, it must be analyzed, and determined as strong or weak—credible or incredulous, fallacious or reasonably acceptable. Statements such as: "I will be a movie star". "I will win the big lottery", "I will go to Heaven", "I will be a millionaire" are clearly not arguments, only improbable "truths", and the agent often makes no attempt to support these beliefs with appropriate reasons. If the agent merely expresses her hope for winning the lottery or going to Heaven, etc., then no fallacy is committed.

Agent's Desire and Hope→ Insignificant/No Evidence→ WT Fallacy

Smith may wishfully believe that she will become a recording star, and though she does nothing to achieve this goal, this is her wish or belief that it will come true. Although it is only a statement, this enthymeme can be developed into a faulty inductive argument. 1. "Smith strongly desires to be a recording star." 2. "Smith has a good voice and is unknown." "Thus, she will become a recording star." The missing premises are that some persons with good voices and are unknown become recording stars. This is true but this by no means implies that she will become a recording star. "Some" actually indicates that only a tiny percentage of singers will become professionals and stars. She may change her mind once counter evidence is shown to her, such as the fact that she has no talent, has no contacts and is publicity shy. She will

realize that her dream was wishful thinking, but will not know that she committed a logical fallacy.

Epistemologists usually assume or imply that the purpose of beliefs is to indicate or in some manner direct us to knowledge, yet this is not always the case especially in cases of WT. Assuming that knowledge is justified true belief, believing in p has many purposes or reasons, notably:

1. P may confirm what one already believes and holds true, which psychologists refer to as confirmation bias. Some scientific studies are prone to this tendency, as well as innumerable everyday examples. The strength and duration that the belief is held determines the probability that one will reconfirm it and reject counter-evidence, e.g. views regarding religion and politics.
2. P advances one's own self-interests and goals, such as winning an argument. I shall return to this reason later.
3. P is consistent with one's deeper feelings and emotions, especially love, fear, hate, jealousy. It is especially comforting to align wishful thoughts with one's love or passion for something. The common belief "to follow one's dreams" frequently originates from non-rational desires or passion, rather than a logical idea.
4. P facilitates wishful thinking or to unintentionally deceive ourselves. It enables pleasant comforting thoughts that one might not otherwise entertain. Wood is overly critical and harsh when he asserts that "it is cowardly and contemptible not to face the facts...or face up to one's own limitations..."[3] If that was true, then most agents in the world would fit that description, and how should we then describe the genuine contemptible cowards? Moreover, he fails to adequately defend this bold assertion.

Robert Audi's analyzes characteristics of evidence-based beliefs under doxastic control that are consistent with cases of WT as well as realistic or plausible beliefs. He states that many agents cease believing in something upon finding only an inadequate basis for p which he thinks is automatic, and some skeptics (including myself) can willfully resist believing propositions even when there is good ground for supporting them.[4] Now surely the wishful thinker cannot do this; he or she may continue believing in p, even after ample or good evidence opposes it, and this depends on the strength and intensity of the belief. Audi distinguishes between intensity control which is the degree of confidence that the belief in p is held, compared to the strength, defined as the agent's resistance to cessation of the belief.[5] The wishful thinker may weakly believe that she will win Lotto this year and be very resistant to giving up that belief. Or she may believe fiercely that she will win but is very willing to relinquish her belief. In some cases, he notes, one's belief is like a light switch that is only on or off, but I contend that beliefs, including wishful thinking, are always a matter of degree, even if one is unaware of this. Frequently, the belief is intense and when it is very



strong, one may become self-deceived and relinquishment is improbable. In any case, agents acting rationally often can control the intensity, strength and plausibility of their beliefs, and as Clifford and Audi claim, bear a responsibility for maintaining or relinquishing them with sufficient evidence.

W. K. Clifford's essay "The Ethics of Belief" is perhaps the most extreme defense of evidentialism, positing a forceful bulwark against WT in that it is wrong always everywhere, and for anyone to believe anything upon insufficient evidence. However, as Wood rightly states, his argument fails to show that belief is a matter of degrees as is good evidence from the least to highly probable, and thus his position claims too much and is too far reaching, as if Clifford is unaware of its limitation, practical and theoretical. "Clifford writes as if belief is an all-or-nothing matter—either you believe something or you don't, and there are no degrees of belief. (He never directly asserts this...)"[6] Degrees or strength of belief and evidence are clearly real factors in forming our judgments. So we must cease from becoming overly credulous without the proper evidence. Furthermore, we have a moral duty to investigate and verify sufficient evidence prior to holding a belief, acting on it and communicating it to others, and if we fail to do this, we commit a sin against mankind. If this maxim was practiced all or almost all the time, which is practically impossible, then WT would not be committed.

Besides this, his broad propositional claim mentioned above *itself* lacks the very evidence that it requires of beliefs, like a snake that bites its own tail.

Clifford's epistemology strongly cautions against hasty generalization (hasty conclusions), which leads to beliefs based on insufficient or unrepresentative evidence. The fallacy is not mentioned by name and might be mistaken for WT, except that wishful thinking must begin with desire. It is prevalent in social psychological studies that are based on answers from surveys, especially with college student populations, which are then falsely generalized to the general population. William James in "The Will to Believe" criticizes Clifford, yet agrees with him that one should make decisions based on the sufficient evidence when and where it is present.[7]

### 3. Locke and Religious Beliefs

Locke's empiricism overlooked or refused to consider the importance of evidence for beliefs in God, partly because his definition of empirical evidence was too broad and included intuitions. Wishful thinking was a serious concern, as he states, when referring to epistemic divine revelations. He argues that thinking or hoping something to be true is no evidence at all and a poor reason for holding the belief.

> And what readier way can there be to run ourselves into the most extravagant errors and miscarriages, than thus to set up fancy for our supreme and sole guide, and to believe any *proposition to be true, any action to be right, only because we believe it to be so? (my italics) The* strength of our persuasions is no evidence at all of their own rectitude...men may be *as* positive and preemptory in error as in truth. How come else the intractable zealots in different and opposite parties?[8]

And yet he avoided or neglected to apply this admonition to his belief in God as so many anti-evidentialists and others still do, if only to protect the sanctity of their convictions.

Considering wishful thinking, does anyone believe in God or Heaven contrary to their own desires? Rarely do agents maintain that God does not exist yet wish that He does exist. Who does *not* believe in God, yet wishes Him to exist? Humans have long believed in a Heaven or afterlife primarily because this fulfills their desires, and it supports their own immediate and eternal interests as promised in the Bible. (Many agents, especially Christian, also believe in Hell, presumably based from fear not desires.) This suggests that God and Heaven are not merely consistent with human desires but also very motivated by them. Clearly, this in itself is arguably a genetic fallacy, and yet it is certainly worth mentioning (see also Wood, p. 21). Theists also tend to believe in miracles, past and present.

Hume's well-known essay challenging belief in miracles has been cited by evidentialists, critics and skeptics of religion in which he argues that, ultimately, belief in miracles is from faith, not reason or common sense, especially when the belief is from an advocate of religion. Hume hints that WT may be involved. "A religionist...may know his narrative to be false, and yet perseveres in it with the best intention in the world for the sake of promoting so holy a cause or even where this delusion has not place, vanity, excited by so strong a temptation, operates on him more powerfully than on the rest of mankind...and self-interest with equal force."[9]

The "religionist" is sparked by a vain desire to witness and/or believe in a miracle which would confirm his holy beliefs, even if he suspects that the story is false. The religious agent may be self-deceived, and when this deluded thinking is absent, the agent is driven by self-interest which causes WT with a passion that cannot be relinquished. But even if she is not deluded, the agent is convinced of her wishful thought (her vision of Mary) which fills her with pride (itself "sinful") and irrational cognition. Assuming this is true, the belief rooted strongly in faith, emotion or wishful thinking cannot be vanquished by argument or purely rational methods, or it is very difficult. The Christian view that God loves all humans also lacks persuasive evidence and because it is supported primarily by the Bible, seems derived from wishful thinking (see Maller, *Sophia*, March 2009).



Discussing the nature of religious beliefs, Mill rightly notes that "we are in an age of weak beliefs, and in which such belief as men have is much more determined by their wish to believe than by any mental appreciation of evidence."[10] Similarly, in his argument against the belief in immortality he writes, "the consoling nature of an opinion, that is, the pleasure we should have in believing it to be true, can be a ground for believing it, is a doctrine irrational in itself and which would sanction half the mischievous illusions recorded in history or which mislead individual life."[11]

## 4. Self-deception

Wishful thinking as a mode of thought and as a logical fallacy is often construed and analyzed as self-deception for various reasons and is sometimes distinguished from the latter. Self-deception, which has a large literature, shares some general similarities with WT, and may sometimes be confused with mild delusions. As mentioned, self-deception is often a purpose or reason for belief when one avoids confronting the truth. One believes p because it avoids the truth, and the clear counter-evidence is ignored or dismissed as unimportant. Rather than consider going into therapy one ignores all the relevant evidence, believing that he is only different or unusual, not abnormal.

McLaughlin in "Exploring the Possibility of Self-Deception in Belief" argues rightly that, "...a wishful thinker typically believes that *p* while lacking adequate evidence for p. However, a self-deceiver typically believes that *p* "in the teeth" of strong evidence against *p*. Typically, the totality of evidence the self-deceiver possesses makes not-p much more likely true than p. Here, then, is one dimension along which the continuum from wishful thinking to self-deception runs: as we move toward self-deception, the evidence against the relevant belief mounts."[12]

He argues that when we go from wishful thinking to self-deception, agents move from a slight inclination to believe that not-p toward an actual firm belief in this conviction. Moreover, self-deceivers often have stronger motivations for their beliefs. In ordinary language these three mental phenomena are differentiated by matters of degree and epistemic depth, depending on whether the agent truly believes the proposition p and also as a motivating function of the personality. Whether or not the agent acts on the belief is not as relevant for this analysis nor is it the determining factor.

In cases of self-deception, the agent truly believes p, and he deceives or fools himself, often not intentionally or consciously, in that p is untrue and likely never to be true. This is closer to denial and is deeper rooted than WT, and when the agent recognizes his self-deceit, he is deceived no longer. Importantly, self-deception is not always wishful, and strongly resists change even after ample evidence is shown to the agent.[13] No strong reason can be

shown for claiming that WT and self-deception must utilize or necessarily include an agent's actions or non-actions involved. Lloyd H. Steffens tries to make the distinction that the wishful thinker fantasizes but takes no action, whereas the self-deceiver is defined by his/her actions. He states, "If we extract action features from our description, the result would be that no distinction could be drawn between 'self-deception' and a notion like 'wishful thinking'. Such a distinction is necessary, however, for wishful thinking, unlike self-deception, is never described as paradoxical, and we do not think of the wishful thinker in action terms, in terms of doing."[14]

The wishful thinker, he argues, does not take action on his/her belief, but counter-examples show that sometimes they take many meaningful actions. The agent who wishes to become a multimillionaire may venture large risks (assuming he has the capital), or make major investments in rising stocks at low prices, even if all his attempts fail. Depending on how the belief is formed, its strength, and the evidence for fulfilling that belief determines whether WT is committed. In some cases, the agent may actually succeed and fulfill his/her wish somehow by accident or inadvertently, and in these cases, it was still wishful thinking despite his/her pure luck. Paradoxically, a man might naively believe and try to win the love and commitment from a beautiful charming woman when he is homely, poor and has no social status. This sort of wishful thinking usually leads only to disappointment and frustration.

Steffens' discussion of wishful thinking and self-deception, contrary to his belief, is not verified by experience or common usage of the terms. Both the wishful thinker and self-deceiver might act on their beliefs for different reasons. In some cases, the agent is a self-deceived wishful thinker at the same time and in other instances, she may be merely wishful thinking or very self-deceived. It is a matter of degree ranging from minimally wishful or fantasy when belief is shallow to a deeply rooted belief that will remain unchanged. Furthermore, the self-deceiver is both the deceiver and the deceived simultaneously, as Sartre shows, but one cannot characterize the wishful thinker in this manner. Self-deceivers possess emotions and feelings which control their thinking and hide unpleasant truths from themselves. Their reasoning is more complex than the wishful thinker. Their goal, whether subconscious or unintentional, is *not* the truth, but rather continuing to believe falsehood—living a lie.

Delusion is a much deeper self-deception that is never characterized as normal. Its deep roots are basic to the personality; talk therapy is usually ineffective. Considered a neuroticism or symptom of a personality disorder, it is no fallacy itself, but rather a failure to reason in touch with reality. One who believes that he is Caesar suffers from paranoid delusion, not merely self-deception or wishful thinking. His delusion might not arise from his own desires, and may develop from a fear of conspiracy. Jones may fancy himself a Roman soldier or wish for this sort of life, though he knows that he cannot travel back in time. But if Jones believes only that he can become the commander of an international "Fall of Rome" reenactment battle set around the famous Coliseum, then he drifts into WT in that no such reenactment battle exists or will be planned.



In the most common uses of the English words, wishful thinking appears superficial and not very serious or problematic. We casually make wishful utterances, sometimes without fully meaning what we say, perhaps to impress others or give ourselves confidence for a goal. Rarely are they arguments, *per se*. But self-deception, *prima facie* is a serious problem that might be ameliorated by therapy or counseling, or at least careful sober introspection. She thinks that she is a great cook but it is wishful thinking because no one tells her that her cooking is mediocre. Compare this to the woman who thinks she is a poor cook and has always believed that, despite the fact that her friends and family repeatedly request second and third helpings of her dishes, always compliment her on her cuisine and use her recipes. In both cases they are self-deceived based on a hidden personality process or abnormal thinking.

It is a commonplace that everyone seeks what they believe is in their short or long-term self-interest. (On a hidden level, agents may believe that deceiving themselves is in their best interests.) Often they know which actions, choices or mental states are in their own best interest, but act otherwise because it is easier, requires less effort, satisfies their desires or advances their careers. It may be consistent with popular social opinion. Examples can be found in state policy and political philosophy as well, such as the issue of social diversity and Marx's communist state.[15] The fact of my desire for p does not always imply that I should desire p or that p will become a truth. The object of my desire may be counter to my vital and/or long-term self-interest, happiness or survival such as addictive substances.

Arguably, individual psychological egoism is self-evident (though some exceptions exist) in that egoistic agents are more likely, I think, to hope and dream for unrealistic goals, manifested by WT. Higher self-esteem tends to leads to more WT and lower self-esteem to the reverse but there are exceptions. We desire to act in ways that we *believe* are in our self-interest, including some altruistic actions, but we often err and act against our own self-interests. From this it follows that everyone's wishes are directly or indirectly to advance their own immediate and future desires, needs and fulfilling hopes, their reputations, pleasures, etc., even if these wishes are unrealistic and very speculative. Wishful thinking arises from this basic human condition or psychological motivation. We need to imagine and believe that our dreams and deeper needs can and will be fulfilled eventually, whether natural or supernatural, because of personal intuition, from an authority figure or childhood indoctrination, among other reasons. The beliefs are often unquestioned as-

sumptions that remain unchallenged and provide our lives meaning, albeit false meaning. Of course, agents are unaware that this is WT, but even if they become aware of their faulty thinking, they may continue believing because it holds so much value or meaning in their lives. It is part of their moral psychology, survival and *raison d'etre–without it they have no reason to go on.* The subjects of wishful thinking propositions are often indispensable mental pillows for releasing stress and finding pleasurable thoughts.

## 5. Ethical Example of Wishful Thinking

The ancient Greek view that virtue leads to happiness and is its own reward is in our self-interest but the argument lacks sufficient evidence. Virtue theory arguments are usually considered empirical, based on general observations and human psychology, but sometimes they are based only on thought experiments or introspective intuition, and thus are not hard empirical evidence. Through experimental philosophical methods I believe that the results would likely disprove and deeply question this principle. Reliable scientific surveys, case studies and/or interviews would be necessary for the hard evidence to establish this truth, and cross-cultural meanings of happiness and virtue would create bias and much ambiguity even if moral terms are defined. Certainly, the proposition that virtue leads to happiness idealizes morality, and while conscientious moral agents would very much *wish to believe* its truth, generally whether virtuous agents are happier than non-virtuous agents is unknown. Only non-virtuous agents would not wish for the truth of this claim, or put differently, wish that they will be happier being unjust and not caring for virtue. It seems intuitive that at least the majority of virtuous agents are happier than non-virtuous or unjust ones but even this notion is speculative. In very small cultures or sub-cultures it would be possible and interesting to determine whether this is true, and valuable for anthropologists to study. The unjust morally corrupt agents, generally, may be happier than the virtuous just agents, depending whether they are discovered by the law and the state of their soul/ conscience, contrary to Plato in *Republic* in his Gyges ring parable. The argument is rephrased, simplified and stated here, but this is not the place for a full analysis of this position.

P1. I am and have been a morally virtuous and just man.
P2. I wish to have a very happy life.
C. If I continue to be morally virtuous and just, then I will have a happy life.

P1 intends to be a descriptive moral statement and one assumes its truth. P2 is a truthful statement of personal feeling. The agent's current happiness is unknown or neutral; it originates from the universal desire for happiness, subjectively defined. The conclusion is the hypothetical proposition intending



to link the premises, yet fails because there is no *prima facie* reason why the agent will become happy. Desire does not equal or necessarily imply Fact or future Fact, arguably, just as *is* does not necessarily imply *ought.*

## 6. Conclusion

This paper develops and analyzes wishful thinking as an inductive logical fallacy, and distinguishes it from forms of self-deception and delusional thinking. Self-deception is more strongly believed, more serious and problematic and the agent truly believes his false belief. Wishful thinking is often considered fanciful and a less deep mode of thinking than self-deception. It always begins with desire, as distinguished from other fallacies, and originates from the agent's own perceived self-interests. The wishful thinker desires something or someone that realistically cannot be obtained, and there is little or no evidence that it will ever be obtained or achieved. Locke, Hume and Mill expressed admonitions about individuals whose philosophical positions are based in their own desires. Hume and Mill cautioned against spiritual beliefs that have no empirical evidence to support them. Clifford and Audi explain or show how wishful thinking is so prevalent, and the grounds for this pervasive fallacy.

Wishful thinking is ubiquitous in everyday life among nearly everyone, and also in religious academic terminology and thought, and deserves a place in logic textbooks so that students will learn to prevent and recognize important fallacy.

## NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Wood, Allen (2008), "The Duty to Believe According to the Evidence," *International Journal of Religion* 63: 9.
2. Ibid., 10.
3. Ibid., 18.
4. Audi, Robert (2008), "The Ethics of Belief: Doxastic Self-control and Intellectual Virtue," *Synthese* 161: 404.
5. Ibid., 405, 408.
6. Wood, Allen, 9.
7. James, who has been criticized for wishful thinking in "The Will to Believe" and *Pragmatism*, claims that Clifford is too fearful of holding wrong beliefs, and is unwilling to take important epistemic risks. James argues that a rule of thinking that would prevent me from acknowledging certain kinds of truth if those kinds of truths were really there would be an irrational one. James holds that Clifford's rule is irrational if it excludes certain sorts of truths. James would probably permit some innocent wishful thinking when it enables us to lead better moral lives and does not

conflict with our greater vital interests. See James, William (1981), *Pragmatism.* Hackett Publishing, 37/

8. Locke, John (2009), *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding.* WLC Books, 549.

9. Hume, David (1962), "Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding," in *On Human Nature and the Understanding.* New York: Collier Books, 122.

10. Mill, John Stuart (1998), "Utility of Religion" in *Three Essays on Religion.* Amherst: Prometheus Books, 70.

11. Ibidem.

12. McLaughlin, Brian P. (1988), "Exploring the Possibility of Self-Deception in Belief" in B. McLaughlin and A. Oksenberg Rorty (eds.), *Perspectives on Self-Deception.* Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 44–45.

13. Steffen, Lloyd H. (1986), *Self-Deception and the Common Life.* New York: Peter Lang.

14. Ibid.

15. Social diversity is usually assumed to be either an inherent value in itself as a matter of principle, or as a value for its superior consequences that the policy entails, e.g., social justice, political gain, and advantages for businesses and colleges. However, these positive consequences ought to be shown in some detail, as well as the absence of important negative consequences, and the assumption that diversity is significantly better than the alternatives and older traditions. Two questions are: where is the strong evidence that diversity works better and for whom? Does it enhance or undermine national and community societal bonds, and do businesses and neighborhoods actually improve as a result? These questions among others should be answered with some certainty, or social diversity could become an example of liberal" politically correct" wishful thinking. To gain more credence from philosophic skeptics, an ontology or solid philosophic groundwork should be established for the moral/political principle of social diversity.