

Liars, Cheats, and Lovers



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Skeptics love truth and fear error. We are sometimes mistaken for cynics, who do not love and who seek to justify that. Skepticism is the foundation of science which, as a matter of principle, knows nothing for certain. Skepticism is also essential in a social species like ours, because lying and cheating can be so profitable and fun. Deception is central to courtship and to most social choreography, in which we strive to be seen in the most attractive possible light in order to be loved unconditionally.

Who would deny that they might spin their autobiography a bit in the course of an interview, an audit or a confirmation hearing? Even honest autobiography is historical fiction. This is not a problem as long as our story doesn't get too crossed up with the world and its population. When it does, we may need to challenge some of our most cherished assumptions, beliefs, and delusions. Productive self examination requires a courageous skepticism about who we think we are and what we think we know.

But skepticism must be balanced with acceptance or it degrades to cynicism. That everything is susceptible to challenge does not mean that everything must be challenged. Enlightened skeptics exercise aesthetic judgment and submit to a guileless appreciation of the beautiful and the good while they lean away from the dark side. There is nothing wrong with a sojourn in Strawberry Fields as long as you don't get lost in the weeds. Skeptics love other skeptics and they fear cynics, who do not love and who seek to justify that. Healthy skepticism is essential to personal satisfaction, to healthy relationships and to psychotherapy. Trust me. Call me.

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