Glossary

Behaviorism: a school of psychology that focuses solely on outward measurable behavior without regard for any inner cognitive or emotive processes. Ivan Pavlov and B.F. Skinner are noted behaviorists.

Blaming the victim: to regard the sufferer of a wrongful act to be partially or entirely responsible for the harm he or she has received.

Blind spot: a topic, subject, or area in which one’s prejudices prevent seeing it in an unbiased manner.

Catharsis: the idea that the outward expression of pent-up emotions purges those negative emotions so that the individual is freed from them.

Cognition: mental action or thought.

Cognitive dissonance: a psychological theory that says people are uncomfortable holding two contradictory thoughts at once (“I am a good person, but I did a bad thing”). Therefore we attempt to resolve the discomfort and preserve our self-image through a variety of strategies: by telling ourselves what I did wasn’t really bad, or those we hurt deserved it, etc.

Confabulation: filling in gaps in one’s memory by creating false memories.

Confirmation bias: once a decision has been made or a position taken, due to the need for consonance with that decision, most people tend to “criticize, distort, or dismiss” all disconfirming evidence regarding that decision, and favor all confirming evidence that the original decision or position is right.

Consonance: a state of agreement, harmony, or non-contradiction among all the parts of a whole.

Control group: in a scientific experiment, ideally there is both an experimental group and a control group. For example, in a drug study, the experimental group gets the medication; while often the control group gets only a placebo (usually an inert pill that looks like the medication) or an alternative drug known to have a positive effect. This way the experimenter can determine if the experimental drug has any positive effect or a greater one than an alternative medication.

Correlation: a correlation is a relationship, but not necessarily a cause and effect relationship. There is a correlation, a relationship, between vaccines and autism (autism often manifests itself around the time children receive their vaccinations), but—at present—the best evidence shows no causal relationship.

Dissonance: a state of disagreement, disharmony, or contradiction among parts of a whole.

Dissonance theory: see “Cognitive Dissonance.”
DNA: deoxyribonucleic acid, a double-helix shaped molecule located in genes that gives each animal and plant its unique characteristics. Samples of this molecule in blood, hair, saliva, skin, or sperm can be analyzed to identify one individual from another.

Egalitarian or Equalitarian: a belief in the appropriateness of human equality, in regard to human rights in general, and political, social, and/or economic equality in particular.

Ego: the self. “Ego” is the Greek word meaning “I”.

Empathy: the capacity for sensing and having regard for the feelings, thoughts, or experiences of another.

Ethnocentrism: the false presumption that one’s own ethnic group, culture, etc. is the “center” of what is right and proper (superior) while all others are on the periphery (inferior to your group).

Explicit: something that is outwardly expressed and easily seen.

False-confidence phenomenon: certain types of “training [as in training in determining whether a person is telling the truth or not] does not increase accuracy; it increases people’s confidence in their accuracy.” For example, there is no scientific evidence that the Reid interrogation techniques increase the interrogator’s ability to tell whether or not someone is telling the truth, but it does make the trainee believe that he or she can accurately do so.

Falsifiability: a statement is falsifiable if it is capable of being proven false. From a scientific viewpoint, statements that can be proven false (if they are false) are more valuable for establishing what is and is not true than statements that are not falsifiable (see the discussion on counterevidence for repression on page 113). Related to this issue is the need for a control group.

Hall of mirrors or house of mirrors: literally, a maze lined with curved mirrors that distort their reflections making it more difficult for persons to find their way to the maze’s exit; less literally, it means a situation in which it’s difficult to discern the truth among a series of falsehoods.

Imagination inflation: the process whereby “the more you imagine something, the more likely you are to inflate it into an actual memory, adding details as you go,” conflating your “imagination with reality.” For example, if a patient is asked to write about a traumatic event of his or her childhood, the act of re-imagining the event makes it more likely that imaginary memories will be added to the actual memories of the event.

Implicit: something is implicit if it is not directly expressed, but is capable of being known through something that is directly expressed. Your implicit theory of human behavior can be known by how you respond outwardly to other human beings, such as a spouse.

Infidel: an unbeliever with respect to a particular religion.

Irony: a contradiction or incongruity between two things, such as two conflicting desires, or stated desires and outward actions. For example, Tavris and Aaronson say that “the mind wants to protect
itself from the pain of dissonance with the balm of self-justification; while the soul wants to confess’

**Killing the messenger or shooting the messenger:** rather than taking responsibility for it and addressing the problem, *killing the messenger* is lashing out at the bearer of bad news as if it were his or her fault. One example would be clinicians who defended themselves against accusations of false memory syndrome by attacking the academics and scientific researchers whose research suggested the prevalence of the syndrome.

**Mealy-mouthed:** unwilling to speak the truth straightforwardly and directly

**Naïve realism:** the presumption that something (or everything) is exactly as it outwardly appears to be on the surface and at first glance, “the inescapable conviction that we perceive objects and events clearly, ‘as they really are’”

**Naysayer:** someone who habitually doubts, denies, opposes, or attempts to prove false the proposed point of view

**Paradigm:** a clear pattern or example

**Parent blaming:** holding one’s parents responsible for one’s own shortcomings rather than accepting appropriate responsibility for them

**Prejudice:** a preconceived opinion or judgment (usually hostile) about people or things formed prior to obtaining sufficient knowledge or experience of those particular people or things

**Premise:** a statement that is presupposed to be true and used as evidence to prove the truth of another statement (the conclusion) or statements

**Profiling:** using membership in a particular group (usually ethnic) to single out individual members as to his or her likelihood of having engaged in criminal activity; for example, police stopping cars solely because the driver was black and driving through a white neighborhood

**Pyramid of choice:** According to Tavris and Aaronson, in making an interpretive choice, we figuratively begin at the peak of a pyramid, but once we incline toward a particular interpretation we begin descending one particular side of the pyramid. The further we go toward the bottom of the pyramid, it is much harder to climb back up and begin again. At the top of the pyramid, we are uncertain; but by the time we reach the bottom, we are sure. This is so, for example, whether the choice is a particular scientific theory, how we should have acted, who our spouse should be, or who is the most likely criminal suspect

**Recovered memory syndrome, false memory syndrome, repressed memory, false memories, found memories:** a psychological phenomenon in which patients recover previously suppressed or repressed memories, usually of abuse, but these recovered memories often have no factual support and are thought to be confabulations
Reciprocity: Tavris and Aaronson use the term to mean a mutual exchange in which a gift or action inspires an obligation to reciprocate, such as a flower for a donation, or gifts from pharmaceutical representatives which inspire doctors to prescribe those specific drugs.

Reid technique: a widely used nine-step interrogation method developed by John K. Reid, and others, in their book, Criminal Interrogation and Confessions. Although widely used, there is no scientific evidence that use of the Reid technique allows the interrogator to determine the truth better than mere chance.

Repression: psychologist Sigmund Freud believed that there were various ego-defense mechanisms that protect us from the anxiety caused by memories of traumatic events. One of these is repression, whereby the memory of the traumatic event is forced into unconsciousness. You need not be a Freudian to believe in repression, but one problem with the idea of repression is that it is not falsifiable.

Revisionism: historical revisionism, as Tavris and Aaronson use it, refers to distorting the story of what actually happened so that the individual telling the story looks better than he or she would have if the story were recounted more objectively. This can apply to individuals or to the groups that these individuals belong.

Self-concept or self-image: the idea or interpretation each of us has about what we are individually like, the beliefs we have about ourselves: how we look, how intelligent we are, if we are good or bad, etc.

Self-esteem: a feeling (or lack thereof) regarding one’s abilities, talents, and worth (32).

Self-justification: the act or attempt to demonstrate that one’s own previous or current behavior was or is appropriate and right.

Skepticism: an attitude of doubt toward anything and possibly everything, at least until adequate evidence has been attained through further inquiry.

Stereotype: a fixed, oversimplified, and prejudiced opinion about what people, places, or things are like.

Self-fulfilling prophecy: a prediction that becomes true, not because the prediction was accurate, but because having accepted the prophecy as being true, one acts upon it to make the prediction come true; for example, I believe myself to be smarter than average, so I go to college, study hard, learn a lot, and become smarter than average—when actually I was no smarter than my peers. Or, I believe myself to be intellectually inferior to others, so I don’t go to college, don’t read books, and in the end do become intellectually inferior to most others.

Source confusion: the inability to distinguish “actual memory from subsequent information that crept in from elsewhere.”
Spin: interpreting in a speech, statement, or memory in a self-serving way, especially for public consumption. Just as we “put a spin on” a tennis ball to make it go the way we want it, we put a spin on a story to serve our ulterior purposes—often to affirm our self-image, whatever it may be.

Survivor bias: if we arrive at a conclusion only by interviewing the survivors or the successful ones without comparing their qualities to those who did not survive or were unsuccessful, we are guilty of survivor bias. For example, see the “The Problem of the Benevolent Dolphin” (108-120). Another example is when we interview successful business persons and conclude that they are risk-takers who persevere, without interviewing and comparing the qualities of the unsuccessful (who may—or may not—also have those traits).

Testifying: false testimony given in court by a police officer that is intended to convict the accused, whom the police officer believes to be guilty of this or other crimes, but cannot prove him or her to be guilty by truthful means.

The end justifies the means: a quote from Nicolo Machiavelli’s The Prince, meaning that to achieve the desired goal, any good or evil act (the means) may be permitted if it contributes to achieving that goal or end.

The Ticking-Time-Bomb excuse/justification: a hypothetical excuse for torturing someone in order to attempt to get useful information to prevent a major disaster—as if there were a ticking time bomb about to go off and this was the only means of finding its location. It is used as generalization to justify torture in non-hypothetical situations.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission: after the end of apartheid in South Africa, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was established to allow victims of torture to confront their torturers, but not take revenge against them. The former police and prison guards were granted immunity from prosecution for all crimes they had committed, if they would allow their accusers to confront them publically before the Commission. Anglican Bishop Desmond Tutu presided over the Commission. See the PBS program Facing the Truth.

Totalitarian: a form of government in which the State (those who are governing) hold total authority over all citizens; for example, any fascist or communist government.

Tipping point: according to The Oxford English Dictionary, it is a “point at which a series of small changes or incidents becomes significant enough to cause a larger, more important change.”

Tunnel vision: having a singular or very limited point of view and an apparent inability to see things any other way.

U unequivocal: unambiguous, certain, without doubt.

Vicious circle: returning evil for evil in an ever-increasing spiral. In Gandhi’s words, “An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, and eventually we are all blind and toothless.”
**Victim narrative:** a heroic story in which a sufferer recounts his or her ordeal and ultimate triumph over what he or she has suffered

**Virtuous circle:** the idea that a good act toward someone makes it more likely that he or she will reciprocate in kind; for example, Leon Festinger proved that mailing a holiday card, even to a complete stranger, often creates an obligation for them to reciprocate

**Watergate:** in 1972, members of President Nixon’s republican administration (H.R. Haldeman, G. Gordon Liddy, engineered a break-in at the headquarters of the Democratic National Committee located at the Watergate Office Complex in Washington, D.C. The real intentions of the break-in are not completely clear. The break-in and the subsequent failed cover-up led to the discovery of a range of illegal behaviors on the part of the Nixon administration and Nixon’s resignation from the presidency in order to avoid being the first successfully impeached president.