**19**

**Delusion and Doxasticism**

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People with delusions claim to believe very strange things and we can’t see why they do, or reason them out of it. Some argue that when subjects with delusions say that their loved one has been replaced by an imposter or that they themselves are dead, these aren’t really their beliefs but rather something else. The prevailing terminology is that *Doxasticists* hold that delusions essentially involve beliefs that have a content characteristic of the delusion in question (hereafter, ‘delusion-characterising content’) and *Non-Doxasticists* (or *anti-doxasticists*) hold that delusions essentially involve other kinds of cognitive states with that content. However, many non-doxasticists allow that some delusions may involve beliefs and commensurately some doxasticists allow that delusions may involve other kinds of cognitive states with delusion-characterising content in virtue of which subjects with these states have a delusion (e.g. Bayne & Pacherie 2005: 179). Let’s call positions that allow for these possibilities: *weak non-doxasticism* and *weak doxasticism* respectively.

Successful defence of doxasticism depends upon a proper characterisation of belief, and the relation of this characterisation to other competitor states for the delusion-characterising content; the arguments that identify features of delusion that beliefs allegedly fail to have; and the success of the competitor states in explaining these features. The latter issue will be evaluated further in the chapter on delusion and non-doxasticism (Noordhof, Ch. 20). I will set one issue aside. For some, the peculiarity of the ostensible delusion-characterising content implies that subjects with delusions don’t have states with that content at all. They believe different ‘framework propositions’ to us which we cannot interpret or just mouth the words that putatively express the content (Campbell 2001:96–8, for further critical discussion see Thornton (2008) and Ohlhorst, Ch. 27, this volume). At least in the monothematic case, these claims are implausible because subjects with such delusions show an appreciation of how other people use the words and, outside of the delusional context, seem to appreciate their meaning (Bayne & Pacherie 2004: 8–9, Hamilton 2006: 228). The issue of doxasticism vs non-doxasticism does not resolve the question of how delusions are to be fully explained but just focuses upon one aspect of their characterisation.

The discussion will have the following structure. First, we will consider the nature of belief. The conclusion of this section is that a particular type of functional theory is to be preferred (independently of a commitment to physicalism or functionalism generally).

In the second section, we will outline the arguments that have been offered against delusions involving beliefs and explain how the functional theory may deal with them without any substantial adjustment. In the chapter on Delusion and Non-Doxasticism, we will consider the nature of non-doxastic alternatives and how they hope to explain, better, the features of delusions that suggest that delusions don’t involve belief. Generally, the non-doxastic alternatives will be found wanting. The conclusion will be that the general arguments against delusions involving beliefs don’t work although there may be cases in which there are no grounds for attributing to a subject a belief with delusion-characterising content.

**1. The nature of belief**

Part of the reason why doxasticism continues to be contested is that there is no generally agreed approach to the nature of belief. Different approaches yield different verdicts. Discussion of eliminativist approaches would take us too far afield. It is an assumption of the debate that they are false. Dual level approaches, which break down our common understanding of beliefs into two types of states that work in different ways to capture our full understanding of beliefs, will be discussed towards the end of the chapter on Delusion and Non-Doxasticism, drawing upon discussion of single state approaches, and non-doxastic states, that taken together make up the two types of states that they envisage.

Single state accounts of belief may be distinguished between those which appeal to a feature that is potentially independent of the present potential for the belief to stand in relations to other beliefs, mental states more generally, and behaviour, and those which aren’t. On the former side, there are phenomenological, biological-functional, and representationalist accounts of belief, on the latter dispositional or functional theories and normative interpretive theories. I will explain how the former don’t help to decide the issue between doxasticists and non-doxasticists before turning to the latter where the issue is more pressing.

**1.1 Phenomenological approaches to belief**

Phenomenological approaches to belief take belief to involve the entertaining of a proposition in consciousness in a certain way, typically assenting to or feeling convinced that it is the case (Bagehot talks of the emotion of conviction, Bagehot 1871: 32–4). Such approaches are largely recognised to be untenable unless integrated into one of the other approaches identified below. We attribute beliefs to a subject in the absence of any phenomenological properties relating to them when the subject is asleep or their consciousness is occupied with something else (Armstrong 1973: 7–8). The approach faces two related issues. The first concerns whether the characteristic feeling is compatible with a subject having no inclination to the cognitive responses and behaviour typical of the belief identified by the characteristic feeling. Feeling convinced that the bridge across which you are walking is going to collapse should, at the least, make you anxious and hasten your pace. The second is that it is natural to suppose that the feeling of conviction may be either, at least partly, a functional property of a certain kind or part of the characterisation of the functional role of belief. If the former, then it does not avoid the puzzles to which cases of delusion give rise. The functional role of feeling convinced *that p* is likely to involve acting as if *p* is true and integrating *p* in one’s mental life. As an example of the latter option, a recent defence of doxasticism holds that a subject S believes that *p* if and only if S is disposed immediately to judge that *p* (understood to be an intentional occurrent state with a phenomenal character of judging that *p*) when p-entertaining triggers obtain (Clutton 2018: 201; Kriegel 2015: 123). Apart from the problem of justifying a narrowly focused functional role in terms of phenomenological dispositions, the analysis doesn’t get past the difficulty of divorcing the phenomenal character of judging completely from its natural articulation in acting as if p and integrating the content of the judgement with the rest of a subject’s mental life. We will discuss functional theories more generally below.

**1.2 Representationalist approaches to belief**

Representationalists hold that the belief that *p* is partly constituted from a representation that *p*. The approach can give the impression that inquiring whether there is a representation that *p* in the belief box in a subject’s psychology may yield a fact of the matter over whether a subject believes that *p*, independent of the belief’s relationship to other mental states, or responsiveness to evidence. Such an approach would provide a quick way with the arguments for non-doxasticism. However, just as with phenomenological accounts of belief, the issues that non-doxasticists use to motivate their position affect the present approach at crucial points. Talk of a belief box is a metaphorical way of describing representations that have a particular functional role with respect to other mental states and behaviour. Likewise, giving an account of what makes a representation a representation of *p* involves relations to other mental states and also the environment. So, even if representational accounts of belief can deal with the various problems that have been raised concerning them, for example, tacit beliefs, what access a subject must have to a representation for that to be the content of a belief, and so on, there is no reason to expect that this will bear on the question of whether doxasticism or non-doxasticism holds in the case of delusions (for discussion of some of these issues, see Field 1978: 36, 37 fn. 9, Lycan 1988: 58, Schwitzgebel 2001: 76–8, Quilty-Dunn & Mandelbaum 2018: 2359–60).

**1.3 Biological-functional approaches**

Biological-functional approaches hold that an essential feature of beliefs is that they have a biological function derived from the biological function of the cognitive mechanisms that give rise to them. Biological function is the result of a history of evolutionary selection in which creatures with that type of mechanism were favoured because of the survival advantage it conferred. Some have argued that delusions involve malfunctioning beliefs that may lack the features that the arguments against doxasticism take to be essential to beliefs (Miyazono 2019: 35–7).

While this approach provides the possibility of a defence of doxasticism it faces the following issues that make its successful development difficult. First, the approach has to explain why the malfunctioning of the cognitive apparatus is producing malfunctioning *beliefs* rather than producing something else. Second, the selection history behind the cognitive apparatus producing the delusion-characterising content state has to be shown to be that behind belief production rather than behind the production of non-doxastic states which, in itself, either may be correctly functioning, or malfunctioning in certain ways to produce non-doxastic states with some belief-like features. We can sidestep these issues if the grounds for supposing that delusion-characterising states are non-doxastic are inadequate. We shall find this to be the case with respect to the two approaches outlined below, those most directly challenged by non-doxasticism. There is no need to understand the nature of beliefs in terms of biological function but rather as possessors of biological function which their character enables us to assess as successfully or unsuccessfully carried out (just as a heart is a pump which, in virtue of its selection history, has the function of being a pump).

**1.4 Normative-interpretive approaches**

According to the normative-interpretivist approach, the nature of belief is given in terms of its role in a normatively characterised interpretative framework involving the attribution of beliefs and desires to a subject to make sense of their behaviour. The nature of belief is generally given in terms of the circumstances in which an ideally rational subject would have particular beliefs, how they would reason, and, how the beliefs should interact with desires to give rise to the subject’s behaviour (Dennett 1981a: 18–22). In applying the framework to human subjects, we should seek to minimise a subject’s departure from how an ideally rational subject concerned with the truth would be. Beyond a certain point, an envisaged departure is too great and the interpretative framework becomes inapplicable. However, all that there is to learn about beliefs can be learnt by a fully informed interpreter applying the interpretive framework (Davidson 1973: 144; Davidson 1974: 236–9; Davidson 1983: 148; Child 1994: 1).

Actual subjects approximate to the idealisations of the interpretative framework. Daniel Dennett has suggested that we should see the approximation as similar to the existence of a pattern in a noisy system (Dennett 1991: 42–51). But what happens when the departure gets too much, the pattern lost, and yet it is plausible the subject has beliefs? Broadly speaking there are two not necessarily exclusive approaches: partitioning and adopting a more minimal appeal to rationality.

According to the first approach, when the departure gets too great at the level of subjects, it is restored by fragmentation into elements in which the pattern is restored. In the case of self-deceived subjects, when they seem to believe *p* and believe that *not-p*, Donald Davidson puts the belief that *p* on one side of the partition and the belief that *not-p* on the other side, along with the requirement of total evidence: give credence to the hypothesis most highly supported by all available relevant evidence (Davidson 1985): 140). The partition reflects a lack of rational connection between parts of the subject together with rational connections between the elements in the partition (for further discussion see Davidson 1985: 211, Pears 1984, 1986: 97–8, Noordhof 2003: 90–1). It is possible for the agent to come to believe that *p* as a result of their desire to believe that *p* because the unacceptable belief that not *p*, that generated the self-deception, is on the other side of the partition (Davidson 1985: 205–12). In general, the idea is that partitions are recognised when, as a result, the partitioned systems more closely approximate the ideal pattern than the whole system does in the absence of the partition (Davidson 1982: 181).

Some cases of delusion have the same character as self-deception and so can be treated in the same way. One illustration is a form of anosognosia involving the denial of a hemiplegia (paralysis or weakness) in the left side due to a stroke in which a subject’s desire to believe that there is nothing wrong with them is uninhibited by reality-checking mechanisms standardly occurring in the affected right hemisphere (Ramachandran 1996, Noordhof and Sullivan-Bissett 2023: 104–6, Fernández, Ch. 22).

Many delusion-characterising contents are distressing, for instance, believing that you are dead or a loved one has been replaced by an imposter. These cases are not naturally assimilated to self-deception or other ways in which a mind may be fragmented, for example, failure to imply information in long term memory (Cherniak 1986: 57–9, 62–7). For this reason, it is tempting for proponents of normative-interpretive approaches to adopt a more minimal account of rationality to characterise it (e.g. Dennett 1981b: 94–7, drawing from Cherniak’s work amongst others, Cherniak 1986, Bortolotti 2010, Bortolotti 2012).

If a subject has a particular belief-desire set, the subject would undertake some, but not necessarily all, of those actions that are apparently appropriate. (Cherniak 1986: 9).

The difficulty is that the interpretive framework becomes under characterised and its conditions of application unclear. For example, in further articulation of it, Lisa Bortolotti suggests that all we should say is that beliefs are integrated into a system with some inferential relations with other intentional states, that they should display a sensitivity to evidence (without this necessarily corresponding to epistemic rationality and how a subject should respond to evidence), have some manifestation in behaviour, and that these beliefs can be self-ascribed, self-reported, and defended with reasons to some extent (Bortolotti 2010: 261–5). It is far from clear that an interpretive approach of this character provides a complete characterisation of when it is legitimate to ascribe a belief to a particular subject, when it is not, and what the implications of such an ascription should be for the mental life of a subject. All of this has no prospect of being further specified if the normative framework is taken to exhaust the nature of belief.

One response is to take the more moderate rationality condition to characterise what must hold for somebody to count as a believer and yet argue that there is a further story to characterise what belief is like for different kinds of believer (humans, other higher mammals, robots). There would be a normative generality to belief but the beliefs of particular kinds of believers would constitute natural kinds discovered by further kind-specific psychological investigation.

A hybrid approach to belief of this type is hard to motivate when there is an alternative way of capturing the same idea that does not involve this normative-descriptive split between belief in general and kind-specific belief. The alternative is to develop a functional or dispositional approach to belief and recast the moderate rationality condition as a requirement on the functional role having certain features. The general objection that John McDowell makes against a functionalist understanding of the interpretative approach – namely that *ideal* rationality is uncodifiable – doesn’t work against a position that appeals to a moderate rationality requirement to place a constraint upon the features that a belief’s functional role should have (McDowell 1985). The success of the normative-interpretive framework is further qualified when it is appreciated that the epistemic norms that characterise the framework are given different weight in conscious attention than outside conscious attention (Noordhof 2001, 2003, 2024).

**1.5 Functional or dispositional approaches**

The standard distinction between functional and dispositional accounts of belief turns upon whether the nature of belief is understood in terms of a causal role that focuses upon the characteristic links of beliefs to behaviour (in the case of dispositional accounts) or to include, in addition, reference to the non-mental antecedents of beliefs such as the input to the senses, and the relations of beliefs to other mental states (in the case of functional accounts). More recently, some proponents of dispositional accounts of belief have also talked about dispositions to give rise to other mental states (e.g. Schwitzgebel 2002: 2513; Schwitzgebel 2013: 87–8). Equally, early proponents of dispositional accounts of beliefs antedating functional accounts partly characterised beliefs in terms of what we dwell upon in imagination and feeling (e.g. Ryle 1949: 129, leading later proponents to identify themselves as producing a Rylean account, Schwitzgebel 2002: 249, 259–60). So the picture is confused, probably due to the attempt to characterise the shift from behaviourism to functionalism as a decisive shift involving an overlooked element (Putnam 1967: 420–4). I’m going to suppress the issue of whether there’s an element of context sensitivity in the ascription of belief, on the basis of a subject’s satisfaction of its stereotypical dispositions, because the aim of the present discussion is that it is appropriate to attribute delusion-characterising beliefs in both clinical contexts and a wide range of everyday contexts (Schwitzgebel 2002: 256–7). Both functional and dispositional accounts of belief can be developed independently of, or inclusive of, the results of psychology in the characterisation of the causal role of belief. Recent dispositionalists such as Eric Schwitzgebel who emphasise that they are providing a superficial theory of belief – rejecting a deep nature of belief to be discovered by empirical investigation – are best thought of as taking on an additional commitment to which we need not adhere here.

Functionalism as a general theory of mind claims that every kind of mental state can be characterised in terms of input conditions, output conditions, and mental states where the latter are also functional states. Functionalists have recognised the possibility of a weaker position in which a particular kind of mental state is characterised functionally but some of the mental states mentioned in the characterisation need not be functional states (Shoemaker 1981b: 310–11). It is the weak functionalist position that we are going to be considering in the case of belief (of which Schwitzgebel’s phenomenal dispositional account is an instance, Schwitzgebel 2002: 257–9).

Proponents of functionalism draw a distinction between the core realisation of a mental state and its total realisation (Shoemaker 1981a: 264–5). The core realisation is what is required for the presence of a state characterised in terms of a causal role. The total realisation are the conditions that must hold, along with the core realisation, for the functional state to be a kind of mental state, namely the minimal conditions for there to be a mind of which it is a state. Precisely the same issue afflicts dispositional accounts of belief developed in terms of a cluster of stereotypical causal relations. These relations don’t have to be present for the disposition to be realised, just their potential (Schwitzgebel 2002: 252–7). If beliefs cannot be instantiated out of minds, then they are not simply functional states but rather a complex state involving a functional state in a certain context.

If the total realisation conditions are those that are required for any mental state to be present, then there is no reason to assume that, when these hold, the functional state that partly constitutes a belief should stand in the expected causal relations to other mental states. This represents a clear difference between functional theories of belief and normative-interpretative theories. Nevertheless, functionalist accounts of belief can introduce further conditions which, they may claim, should hold if a functional state is going to count as a belief. We may call these supplementary total realisation conditions, *belief realisation conditions*. Brian Loar calls them *L constraints* (Loar 1981: 72). An illustration of a L constraint is if S were to believe that *p*, then it is not the case that S would believe that *not-p*. However, as Loar makes clear, the L constraints are meant to hold *in general* and allow for exceptions. The functional role characterises the expected potential for causal relations in standard circumstances, where this records a tendency rather than an invariable occurrence of these relations, and in non-standard (excusing) circumstances the subject will not respond as expected (Bayne & Pacherie 2005: 181).

This point gives rise to an important distinction when dealing with the way in which subjects with delusions don’t seem to behave, and emotionally respond to, the delusion-characterising cognitive states in the way that we would expect if they were beliefs. There is a difference between being in excluding conditions in which the expected causal role of state fails to be manifested and being in a state that only has some of the expected causal role of belief in standard circumstances. When Eric Schwitzgebel writes

it is not sufficient for believing that p that one be in a state, or possess an entity, that typically, for members of your population plays a certain functional role. That state has to actually play that functional role, for you (Schwitzgebel 2012: 14)

he overlooks the distinction. If you are a subject with delusions, the belief need never play the expected functional role, if you are always in excluding circumstances.

Although a defence of doxasticism is clearly available within a functional approach to belief, the success of such defence of doxasticism turns upon whether a plausible account of the functional role of belief can be provided that still allows for the accommodation of cases of delusion. The features upon which I focus are of particular importance for the contrast with non-doxastic states.

A central aspect of the functional role of belief is its *motivational role*, the role it plays in combination with desire, to produce action. When we act, we often rely upon means-end beliefs. To illustrate, if I desire that *p* is the case now (over everything else) and I believe that if I make it the case that *q*, then *p* will be the case (and no other option presents itself), then I will act to make *q* the case (given I can). Merely thinking or imagining that this is so won’t play the same role. Similarly, if I believe that *p* is the case, then I won’t act on my desire that *p*, indeed my desire may even be extinguished once I have the belief, but merely thinking or imagining that p is the case may sharpen my desire and make me act. Beliefs can give rise to emotions which then play out in bodily responses and actions. Motivational role, in the most general sense, should be understood as the potential for impact on behaviour in all of these ways.

David Velleman has argued that motivational role is insufficient to characterise belief because our imaginings may play the same role as belief in cases of play. Children pretending to be elephants can imagine that they have put their trunk (arm touching their nose) in a pail of water, inhaled, and that if they blow through it, then they will be able to spray another child with water. As a result of this imagining, they act accordingly because they desire to spray another child (Velleman 2000: 255–63). Even if imagining plays the role of belief in these circumstances, outside the context of play, imaginings do not play the motivational role of beliefs, whereas beliefs continue with their motivational role. Even in contexts of play, many beliefs retain their motivational role and only those that are explicitly set aside by play (e.g. the belief that one is not an elephant) fail to play the role. When children make-believe that a piece of playdough is a pie, they still act surprised if somebody actually tries to eat the playdough suggesting they monitor the reality that the playdough is a prop and don’t let their imagining give rise to the belief that the playdough is good to eat (Golomb & Kuersten 1996; Van Leeuwen 2014: 701). It is plausible that beliefs have the following functional role: they are the most context-insensitive state that has the motivational role in question (Noordhof 2001: 253, Noordhof 2024, sect. 2). They may sometimes fail to play the role because the subject forgets, or does not focus on this belief, or because of situations of play, but generally, they play the motivational role in question. The times when they do not play the role will often be covered by excusing conditions. If you sought to characterise beliefs and imaginings in terms of the same motivational role, the latter would require a larger number of different types of excusing conditions. The failure of imagining that p generally to result in a meta-cognitive belief that that you believe that p doesn’t provide an excusing condition that restores parity between belief and imagination (contrary to what Anna Ichino suggests, Ichino 2019: 1524–31). There are cases where we don’t believe that we believe that p but find that we do as a result of how we are disposed to act. I don’t believe that I believe my partner is unfaithful to me and yet I find myself anxious and checking her movements. This is not so in the case of imagining.

The context insensitivity of the motivational role in question is relative to the stakes involved given the truth of a particular content. Consider a familiar case in which I believe that a gun is unloaded and am offered £5 to point it at my head and pull the trigger. This may give me pause since £5 is not a lot of money and the risks are huge. That doesn’t mean I don’t believe that the gun is unloaded but imagine it. If we compare believing that the gun is unloaded, with imagining that the gun is unloaded, then the motivational role characterising the belief that the gun is unloaded will be present in more contexts than any of these other states.

Relative context-insensitivity of motivational role is one kind of stability that characterises the functional role of beliefs. The point I have just made relates to a second form of stability that some have attributed to beliefs, namely that our beliefs should, at the least, persist unless a subject becomes aware of *epistemic* reasons that make the holding of the belief theoretically irrational (Ross and Schroeder 2012: 277–80). The loaded gun case can be taken to show that I did not believe that the gun was unloaded because it did not display stability in the sense just identified. An alternative is that I believed that the gun was unloaded but the high stakes circumstances of the gun being pointed at my head is an excusing condition. According to this view, beliefs are the default basis for a subject’s motivation unless the stakes are high. In those circumstances, a subject is aware that their credence in the content of the belief may not be enough to make an action made on the basis of the content of the belief have a better expected value than that based upon the negation of the content.

We needn’t resolve the question of whether to understand the functional role of belief partly in terms of persistence in the face of non-epistemic reason or in terms of excusing conditions that allow the attribution of belief even though it does not lead to relevant action in the case of high stakes situations. Either way, it is unclear why the evidence-resistance of delusion-characterising contents should throw into question the attribution of belief. Delusion-characterising states would display greater stability rather than less.

Perhaps it will be argued that failure to be evidence-responsive stops a state from having the distinctive motivational role of belief because the subject could not take the content of their belief to be true if unsupported by evidence. There are familiar circumstances in which a belief may have its distinctive motivational role in the absence of evidence in support of its content. First, the belief may strike us as independently plausible. Many propositions seem to recommend themselves to reason and, in those circumstances, evidence against the propositions is often dismissed. Second, we make take ourselves to experience the truth of the proposition and this often outweighs evidence against it from other sources. Third, we may see how a proposition is supported by other propositions but lack the attention, ability, or motivation, to see how those propositions rely upon the truth of other propositions that are presented to us as false. Fourth, we may remember that we established that *p* but forget the details. Nevertheless, this memory still supports the proposition in the sense of making us believe that we, previously, had a reason for taking *p* to be true. Fifth, it may seem unacceptable for us to believe that a proposition is false – some politically contested propositions are like this – and so we retain the proposition in the absence of overwhelming evidence against a particular proposition (Noordhof 2003, Noordhof 2024, sect. 2).

In the absence of such a link between evidence-responsiveness and motivational role, the existence of delusion-characterising states with the latter character supports doxasticism. With this in mind, we will review the arguments in favour of non-doxasticism.

**2. Arguments against delusions involving beliefs**

Arguments against weak doxasticism usually involve noting the way that the delusion-characterising states are inappropriately epistemically based, lack integration, or fail to guide action in the way that one would expect of belief.

**2.1 Argument from inappropriate epistemic basis**

I The first argument is that states with delusion-characterising content are not appropriately related to epistemic reasons, specifically evidence concerning their content, to be beliefs. There is either not sufficient evidence for the content in the first place or the states are not revised appropriately when evidence comes along which conflicts with their content (Egan 2009: 265; Dub 2017: 29–30; Hamilton 2006: 221, 225–6, for more on this issue see Flores Ch. 12). It is not claimed that subjects with monothematic delusions fail to respond to evidence at all. Most are *sensitive* to evidence (Bortolotti 2010: 117, 262–4, who claims this is enough for belief). Many subjects show a recognition of the fact that there is strong evidence against the content of the delusion-characterising state (e.g. Alexander, Struss, & Benson 1979: 335). It is the failure to be *appropriately* responsive to evidence that makes the attitude to the delusion-characterising content something other than a belief.

One influential response to this objection, due to Bortolotti, is that many of our beliefs in other areas are also merely sensitive to, rather than appropriately responsive to, evidence. Religious and superstitious beliefs involve contents that are similarly poorly supported by evidence and improbable as an explanation of what evidence there is. Determined non-doxasticists respond that the states characterised by religious and superstitious contents should not be taken to be beliefs either (e.g. Van Leeuwen 2014, Dub 2017: pp. 34–5; Ichino 2020: 212–5; Ichino 2024: 82-4).

We can break out of the impasse by making three moves. First, the characterisation of belief, in terms of motivational role given above, does not require an appropriate response to evidence. We could add appropriate evidence-responsiveness to a belief’s functional role but we would be left with the question of how to classify states without this evidence-responsiveness but which played the distinctive motivational role. They look very much like things it is plausible that the subject believes however misguidedly.

There is some evidence that subjects with delusions, in general, show a relative bias against disconfirming evidence to the delusion-characterising content of their states (Woodward et al. 2006: 611–13). The question is whether such differences provide grounds for restricting our talk of belief to a sub-category of states with the motivational role of belief, those without the bias. The implied exclusion of some subjects (those with the bias against disconfirming evidence), and limitation to certain kinds of states, excluding those with religious and superstitious contents, represents a loss of generality that needs to be justified given that our talk of belief seems focused on attributing the most general kind of state about the world upon which we act.

Second, even if the delusion-characterising states are less responsive to evidence than non-delusory beliefs generally, subjects with delusions treat the contents of these states in a way that is more in line with them being beliefs than some other kind of mental state. They recognise the conflict between these contents and the evidence that they have. For example, LU, who believed that she was dead, slowly abandoned this belief when it was pointed out that other dead people she had come across did not move and talk whereas she did (McKay & Cipolotti 2007: 253). Similarly, MF corrected his belief that his wife was an imposter when it was pointed out to him that the ring he had bought his wife that she wore had his initials engraved (Coltheart 2007: 1054). Subjects with delusions respond to cognitive behavioural therapy (Brakoulias et al. 2008: 162 –3; Chadwick & Lowe 1990). All of this shows that they *display* a capacity to respond to evidence against the delusion-characterising content, even if they are resistant to, and avoid, disconfirmatory evidence. In addition, their delusion-characterising states resemble more unproblematic cases of belief by showing themselves to be move evidence-responsive across contexts than non-doxastic states. During play, imaginings may be corrected to the same degree as beliefs. A child’s imagining that daddy has magical powers may be as responsive to features of the game (one cannot imagine that daddy has magical powers if he is not holding the wooden stick (the magic wand)) as their belief that daddy is approaching is sensitive to the presence of daddy coming towards them. These conditions of play do not make such imaginings evidence-responsive outside this context. Beliefs are a different matter.

Such features are explained by non-doxasticists as either because subjects with delusion-characterising states mistakenly take themselves to have beliefs, when they don’t, and respond accordingly or because they are in some half-way house state between belief and a non-doxastic state. In the chapter on Delusion and Non-Doxasticism, I explain why the first alternative is problematic. The second alternative fails to appreciate the significance of the presence of excusing conditions in the functional role of belief.

The two points just made are independent of the question of whether delusions are based on a subject’s, typically anomalous, experiences (as Empiricists about delusion claim, for more on Empiricism, see Bongiorno and Parrott, Ch. 26) and whether subjects with delusory beliefs are rational to persist in having the beliefs (Noordhof and Sullivan-Bissett 2023). If part of the functional role of beliefs included a greater responsiveness to evidence than I have acknowledged, the anomalous experiences to which subjects with delusions are responding are a very plausible candidate for excusing conditions. Regardless of whether a subject is rational to adopt a delusory hypothesis, it is certainly the case that our experiences have a strong influence on the beliefs we form in everyday life and are often responsible for our own strongly held beliefs. To the extent that the subject’s response is rational, anomalous experiences won’t be excusing conditions but proper displays of evidence-responsiveness (Tumulty 2011: 606). Where the response departs from rationality, anomalous experiences excuse the failures to respond appropriately (a possibility Tumulty seems to overlook, Tumulty 2011: 606).

It is an open question whether all delusions have a basis in, or support from, experience in the sense just specified. Even if there are no *anomalous* experiences to explain some delusions, this does not mean that subjects’ apparent failure to respond to evidence appropriately can’t be partly explained in terms of a whole complex of experiences they have over time as a result of which they have a certain world view and set of emotional responses.

**2.2 The argument from lack of integration**

The second argument is that the content of delusion-characterising states is not well-integrated with a subject’s beliefs, and other aspects of their mental life, in the way that one would expect if the state were a belief (Egan 2009: 266; Dub 2017: 31, calls this ‘theoretical circumscription’). Subjects with Capgras delusion don’t seem to think through the consequences of their loved one being replaced by an imposter and alter their world view accordingly (Davies and Coltheart 2000: 10, 27; Young 1999: pp. 581–3). Relatedly, emotional responses one might expect if the delusion-characterising content was the content of a belief seem to be absent. Those who take their loved ones to be replaced by imposters often aren’t too concerned about what happened to them or try to see their loved ones rather than accepting the imposters (Alexander, Stuss, & Benson 1979: 335–6, Young 2000: 53). Louis Sass writes of flatness of affect in schizophrenic cases (Sass 1994): 23–4, 43–5). Where subjects with delusions appear to believe contradictory things, it is more plausible to suppose that one of the contradictory contents characterises an imaginary state than to attribute contradictory beliefs (Currie & Ravenscroft 2002: 15-18).

The impact of the argument is limited. It is rare that subjects with delusions have beliefs that are directly contradicted by their delusion-characterising states. They have beliefs that *we* judge should be seen as in conflict with their delusion-characterising states. To take the most extreme example, in Cotard’s delusion, subjects believe that they are dead and yet, acknowledge they can feel their heart beating and that, for people generally, they wouldn’t feel this unless they were alive. Nevertheless, they count themselves an *exception* (Young and Leafhead 1996: 157–8). Counting oneself as an exception to generalisations we otherwise accept is a familiar phenomenon from everyday life.

The more general point is there are some very plausible excusing conditions to account for why a belief with the delusion-characterising content sometimes fails to be integrated. First, the content of the belief is often radically at odds with, and so disruptive of, their previously held beliefs and a subject’s daily existence. Subjects are motivated not dwell on all the consequences but try to isolate the belief (Davies & Coltheart 2000: 29–30). Second, subjects often face a situation in which there is competition between two bases of belief. The first is that they are trying to make sense of highly anomalous experiences. In the case of Cotard delusion, the subject was suffering from depression and her experiences of eating and her body felt unreal. The second is that other experiences, including testimony from those around them, present counterevidence to the delusion-characterising content. In the case of Capgras delusion, the basis of the imposter belief is visual experience but auditory experience is unaffected and so the subject can hear the imposter as their loved one (Young 1999: 576, drawing on Hirstein & Ramachandran 1997). Other people will claim that the loved one is not an imposter and medical professionals will challenge the delusion-characterising content (Young 1999: 583). Even though the subject has rejected this counterevidence it is still plausible that it has an effect. One aspect will be an increased suspiciousness of other people who challenge the belief but another aspect will be an inhibition of integration. The experiences and testimony of others may serve to distract the subject with Capgras delusion from dwelling on the danger their loved one may be in.

The failure of integration is often overstated and its significance open to question. Although there are typically connections between a subject’s beliefs and their emotional responses, these aren’t invariable. Let me give some illustrations of these points. In a variant case of Capgras, in which a subject believed his wife to be a disliked ex-colleague, although he was prepared to leave hospital and be looked after by her, which might seem rather puzzling, he reacted angrily when she tried to kiss him, brandished his walking stick, and later said to his doctor that part of his concern was that his wife would not have been happy with him being kissed by another woman (Breen et al. 2002: 119). A subject with Capgras delusion addressed the ‘imposter’ in a very gentle way and seemed pleased to see her. Nevertheless, had an inquiring manner when talking of their past, or her characteristics, left the house on one occasion to go looking for his real wife, and urged the imposter to come with him to the police station to report the disappearance of his wife (Lucchelli & Spinnler 2007: 189–90). A mother who became convinced her daughter was an imposter became depressed and refused food from concern they might poison her (Christodoulou 1977: 557). Many subjects with a syndrome of doubles (Capgras, Fregoli, Intermetamorphosis, and Subjective Doubles) were suspicious of, observed intently the appearance and behaviour of, and inquired into past events and acquaintances of, the person whom they misidentified in one of the distinctive ways. This suggests that they had a good sense of the implications of the delusory hypothesis. They displayed this behaviour again when they were in the process of making a recovery from the delusion (Christodoulou 1978: 69-70). It is also worth noting that the avowals of delusion-characterising content have significant costs for the subject with delusions which is both indicative of the conviction with which the content must be held and also the integration between having the belief, having an occurrent expression of the belief, and believing that they have the belief.

These observations support weak doxasticism. Recognition of circumstances in which it is plausible that subjects have a delusion-characterising belief supports seeking to understand their mental life in other circumstances in terms of excusing conditions or the fact that, while a delusion-characterising belief typically has certain mental consequences, these aren’t invariable. There will be situations in which subjects no longer have the delusion-characterising beliefs due to non-epistemic changes that remove enough of the motivational role identified but identifying these is not straightforward. Subjects with delusions should be understood as instantiating mental processes which have believing the delusion-characterising content as a likely, albeit perhaps intermittent, outcome.

**2.3 The argument from failure to guide action**

The third argument is that beliefs tend to guide action whereas the delusion-characterising states do not to the same extent (Currie & Ravenscroft 2002: 177; Sass 1994, e.g. p. 3; Dub 2017: 32; Hamilton 2006: 221, 226; Egan 2009: 266, Tumulty, Ch. 18). A typical illustration is the subject with Capgras delusion who does not act in the way that one might expect if they believed their loved one had been replaced by an imposter.

As before, one influential response is to note that subjects often don’t behave was we would expect concerning their moral and religious beliefs either (e.g. Young 1999: 583; Bortolotti 2010). As already noted, determined non-doxasticists can extend their non-doxasticism to cover these cases.

The extension is facilitated by overly strict interpretations of what the motivational role of belief involves. Earlier I suggested that beliefs were the most context-insensitive state that played the motivational role distinctive of them. Talk of the *most* context-insensitive state, rather than context-independent state, captured the fact that even when we have a certain belief, our mind may be distracted or otherwise disturbed, so that the belief does not manifest itself in action as expected. The connection is what typically holds and is subject to excusing conditions. In his version of the argument from failure to guide action, Neil Van Leeuwen appeals to full ‘practical setting independence’ (Van Leeuwen 2014: 702). Although Van Leeuwen ostensibly draws this idea from Michael Bratman’s work, it is much stronger than Bratman’s notion. For Bratman, beliefs are the default cognitive background for an agent’s deliberations. It is not the case that, *without changing their mind*, in one context of deliberation, an agent takes *p* to be true, in another context of deliberation, the agent does not, where *p* is the content of a belief (Bratman 1992: 18). When a belief fails to be operative in a context, it may still be part of the *default cognitive background* for the agent’s deliberations. It is just that, for one reason or another, the agent has failed to take *p* into account, for example, by being distracted or bracketing the belief (Bratman 1992: 27–30). For example, I believe Isabel is untrustworthy and will betray all my secrets. I don’t want my secrets betrayed. Yet, in the charm of the moment, I find myself confiding in her, not attending to my belief and my want. These are not circumstances in which I fail to have the belief or desire. Assimilating failure to be operative with not being part of the default cognitive background makes it all too easy to find other cognitive attitudes than beliefs at work in a host of contexts and, indeed, may make one conclude that there are no beliefs. Taking beliefs to be the most context-insensitive state with a certain motivational role, where failures to be operative are covered by excusing conditions, removes much of the support for weak non-doxasticism to be derived from the failure to guide action.

Apart from a subject’s apparently sincere avowals of the content of the delusory state, there is a range of non-verbal behaviour that attest to the fact that the delusion-characterising content is the content of a belief. A subject with perceptual delusional bicephaly shot at what he took to be his second head (which was of his wife’s suspected lover) (Ames 1984). Subjects with Capgras delusion have attacked or killed the suspected imposters, and in one case searched for batteries and micro-film in the head of his ‘imposter’ stepfather (Blount 1986: 207, de Pauw & Szulecka 1988: 92; Silva, Leong, & Weinstock 1992: 80). Subjects with Fregoli delusion have attacked individuals who they take to be familiar individuals in disguise and those who believe that someone else is becoming them (subjective doubles) have attacked the people who they take to be becoming them (Christodoulou 1978: 250; de Pauw & Szulecka 1988: 91–2). Nearly one fifth of those with delusional misidentification of some kind or another showed violent behaviour as a result (de Pauw and Szulecka 1988, Förstl et al. 1991). Even those with Cotard delusion, who believe that they are dead, which is one of the most puzzling delusory beliefs to attribute, may stop eating, retain their urine and faeces, stop bathing, become mute, and fail to respond to noxious stimuli (Weinstein 1996: 20–1, Young & Leafhead 1996: 152).

**3. Conclusion**

The case against weak doxasticism is weak. The most plausible account of belief allows for the possibility of attributing beliefs to subjects with delusions. The arguments against this claim are ineffective. The success of the defence of doxasticism also turns on whether non-doxastic states can provide a more plausible explanation of some of the phenomena that have been taken to threaten doxasticism. If non-doxasticism faces similar problems, then the argument in support of weak doxasticism provides support for strong doxasticism.

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