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**Delusion and Non-Doxasticism**

***Paul Noordhof***

Non-doxasticists about delusion are united by the idea that at least some kinds of delusion involve subjects in which the state whose content characterises the delusion (hereafter the delusion-characterising state) is not a belief. Non-doxasticism can come in different strengths depending upon whether a delusion-characterising non-doxastic state is an essential feature of delusion (Strong Non-Doxasticism) or a feature of some cases of delusion (Weak Non-Doxasticism). A key question for non-doxasticists is the kind of non-doxastic state that is delusion-characterising because there are variety of such states and some differences of view as to their proper characterisation. In the first section of the chapter, I shall make some preliminary clarifications about the nature of these states and their relationship to empirical work on belief. In the second section, I will discuss grounds that have led non-doxasticists to espouse their approach, revisiting the arguments against doxasticism discussed in the chapter on Delusion and Doxasticism (Ch. 19). In section 3, I will consider the particular versions of non-doxasticism that have been offered and the challenges they face, dividing the territory into those which add an appeal to meta-cognitive states, those that postulate a hybrid state, and those that are developed within a two-level account of cognition.

My conclusion will be that none of the non-doxastic approaches so far are successful. They suffer from a number of failings that, taken together, point the way to a more successful non-doxasticist approach. The approach must avoid a dilemma. When non-doxasticists appeal to standard non-doxastic states to understand subjects with delusions, these introduce puzzles of the same order as doxasticism. When non-doxasticists appeal to hybrid states which capture subjects overall state of mind better, then their explanatory implications are quite unclear. The difficulty is to strike a balance between fitting and informing. At the close, I shall make some suggestions about how this can be done.

**1. Non-doxastic states**

Relevant non-doxastic cognitive states include cognitive imaginings, acceptances, and suppositions.

In contrast to imaginings involving sensory imagery, *cognitive imaginings* have a content of the same type as belief. Cognitive imaginings are often under our control although they can be brought about spontaneously or guided by a particular purpose. We shouldn’t assume that spontaneous cognitive imaginings are passive. I might spontaneously imagine a lurking man when coming home late at night. I didn’t seek to do so and yet my imagining was not something that happened to me but something that, in a highly general sense, I did to myself. When our imaginings are guided by a particular purpose, then what we imagine is subject to constraint. For example, we may seek to imagine what beliefs and desires another person has on the way to predicting what they will do. The key point is that, by being under our control, our cognitive imaginings don’t have to display the sensitivity to evidence that some urge is distinctive of beliefs. This is one source of their attraction as a delusion-characterising state. On the other hand, it also makes the delusion-characterising state something over which the subject with delusions has potential control and is something they are doing to themselves. These elements should be born in mind.

Cognitive imaginings are sometimes contrasted with supposings. The former are more closely linked with affective consequences than the latter. When we *imagine* that a friend has had a serious accident, we are emotionally engaged. When we suppose that they have, this need not have the same emotional consequences (Arcangeli 2019: 31). The distinction does not require that suppositions always fail to give rise to an emotional response or, indeed, that cognitive imaginings produce them. The contrast is that, where a particular content may engender an emotional response in the case of a cognitive imagining, the subject could have supposed that content without the same level of emotional response. Supposition is more divorced from the affective system in this sense. Equally, although our emotions can give rise to suppositions – for example, the anxious father supposing that his son might be ill to consider whether there is anything he should do – our emotions engage with the development of our cognitive imaginings in a more pervasive fashion whereas, in the case of suppositions, the subsequent development is broadly inferential (Arcangeli 2019: 40–6, for one way to develop these points). On the other hand, cognitive imaginings are relatively insulated from the guiding of action otherwise our cognitive imaginings in response to fiction might involve more fight and flight (Weinberg & Meskin 2006b: 222–6).

Suppositions can involve contradictions whereas cognitive imaginings are typically taken not to. There is no problem with supposing that a contradiction holds and considering what follows from that (Weinberg & Meskin 2006a: 193). Imagining that a contradiction holds is a different matter. One way of drawing the contrast is to note that, when we suppose that p, we entertain a content, that p, for a particular purpose. By contrast, when we imagine that p, we consider how p is true (cf. Kind 2013: 149–51). This might involve fleshing out our understanding of the circumstances in which p holds. For example, David Chalmers takes cognitive imagination to have the content that p mediated by an object, a situation, in which p is true (Chalmers 2002: 151). A more committed version of this position takes the object to be an experience in which p is presented as so (Peacocke 1985: 20 –1). The latter reduces the distinction drawn between sensory and cognitive imaginings.

Other philosophers adopt an account of cognitive imaginings that does not differentiate them from suppositions. Both of them are taken to be a re-creation of belief in imagination (Currie 2002: 215–20). Imagination is process of re-creation of mental states independent of the standard ways in which they are produced, and their standard connections to action. The apparent difference between cognitive imaginings and suppositions stems from the fact that some imaginative projects are more richly developed involving a subject’s disposition to have imaginary desires. The latter are a re-creation of desire in imagination without the standard ways in which they are produced and their standard connections to action. We can remain neutral on this except to note that subjects with delusions should typically be taken to have a richer project if a non-doxasticist theory draws upon cognitive imaginings.

Acceptances are usually understood in terms of taking a proposition as true in a certain context for a certain purpose (e.g. Stalnaker 1984: 79–81; Bratman 1992: 20). They are naturally distinguished from simply entertaining a certain proposition. There is no commitment to taking a proposition as true in simply entertaining it. It is conceivable that acceptances could be assimilated to imagined beliefs. However, acceptances are propositions taken as true in an actual context and not taken as true in an imaginary context. Acceptances are acted upon whereas the connection between an imagined belief and action is typically suspended. To that extent, it is plausible that acceptance is distinct from supposition and cognitive imagining.

A necessary condition for a successful non-doxastic position is that, when subjects are in the relevant non-doxastic state, it does not follow that they believe the contents of these states. This makes non-doxasticism potentially in conflict with Spinozan theories of belief formation. According to such theories, when a subject entertains, supposes, or cognitively imagines a proposition, the subject immediately believes it (e.g. Gilbert 1991: 108–9, Mandelbaum 2014: 61–2). Rejecting the proposition requires mental effort governed by a distinct process. The proposition’s endorsement or unacceptance occurs at a later stage. In which case, any non-doxastic cognitive state with a delusion-characterising content implies that the subject in that state believes the delusion-characterising content (Bongiorno 2021: 728–9).

There is only a conflict if the states Spinozans classify as beliefs are plausibly contrasted with the states in terms of which non-doxasticists offer a distinct account of delusion. Otherwise, the difference is terminological. Suppose that when a subject understands an utterance, they accept the content. The question is whether this acceptance is belief in the sense that non-doxasticists deny that subjects with delusions have beliefs. Spinozans recognise that the state their theory concerns may be thought of as ‘thin’ belief as opposed to the thick belief of epistemologists (Levy & Mandelbaum 2014: 27, Mandelbaum 2016: 236). They also do not differentiate between beliefs and credences that p where the measure of the credence is enough to have behaviour consequences but need not be as high as 0.9 (Mandelbaum 2014: 58, fn. 11). It is not obvious that this is sufficient to distinguish their notion of belief from guesses and or run of the mill acceptances. Non-doxasticists can argue that they deny delusions are believed in the thick sense.

A second challenge from Spinozan theories of beliefs derives from their idea that, after a subject has contemplated and believed a content, they may (unless cognitively loaded with competing activities) go through a process of endorsement or rejection. Subjects with delusions have attention-grabbing anomalous experiences which place them under a cognitive load so that they are unable to go through the process of rejection or endorsement with regard to the content of the delusion-characterising state (Bongiorno 2021: 733-5).

The experimental support for the effect of load on subjects’ capacities to evaluate their beliefs comes from the following kind of set up. Subjects are asked to give sentences to offenders for crime incidents. They look at a video screen with a top scrolling line of text and a bottom one. The top contains true (in black) and false (in red) statements which are either extenuating or exacerbating concerning the personality of the perpetrator. The bottom is a string of numbers. Loaded subjects are those who have to identify when a 5 occurs, unloaded subjects don’t. It was found that loaded subjects were more likely to take the information flagged as false (i.e. occurring in red) into account in determining the sentences, than unloaded subjects (unloaded, extenuating, 6 years, unloaded, exacerbating 7 years; loaded, extenuating, 5 years, loaded, exacerbating 11 years) (Mandelbaum 2014: 83–4, from experimental work by Gilbert, Tafarodi, & Malone 1993). This is not because the subjects were prepared to use *false* information as the basis of the judgements because they were also found to misremember the false-flagged information as true. The influence upon sentencing judgements is taken to illustrate the inferential promiscuity of the contents making them contents of beliefs. The inferential promiscuity identified is thin. It involves an influence on sentencing judgement exercised in an experimental rather than real life situation and the influence in question is independent of any beliefs about which features are relevant for taking into account in a sentencing judgement.

Setting aside the question of whether this thin notion of inferential promiscuity is enough for a thick understanding of belief, it is questionable whether subjects with anomalous experiences are under cognitive load in a way analogous to the notion of cognitive load to which the experimenters appeal. A subject with Capgras delusion only has anomalous experiences when they have visual experience of the loved one they claim to be replaced by an imposter. They are not under load for large parts of the day or, for that matter, when interviewed by psychiatrists.

**2. Arguments in favour of non-doxasticism**

**2.1 Argument from lack of evidence responsiveness**

Those who argue that weak non-doxasticism is true tend to emphasise the importance of a delusion-characterising state’s failure to be rationally responsive to evidence. The emphasis is natural bearing in mind the single most striking feature of subjects with delusions is the bizarre contents they assert in the face of any evidence offered against them. They will argue that doxasticists underplay this feature.

There have been two recent challenges to the argument from lack of evidence responsiveness. First, it has been argued that research into the character of belief shows that beliefs generally are not formed in response to evidence and they may not be revised in the light of evidence unless the circumstances are right. Second, it has been argued that the correct notion of evidence-responsiveness is much weaker than non-doxasticists suppose it to be. I will consider these in turn.

Spinozan theories of belief hold that, standardly, there are no evidential constraints on the formation of beliefs. The experiment concerning sentencing judgments described above is taken to be one illustration of this point. In spite of the fact some statements about a man to be sentenced are flagged as false, the subject still forms beliefs with those statements as contents.

As things stands, the experiment is open to another interpretation. Subjects are forming their beliefs on the basis of written testimony. Written testimony is a perfectly appropriate and familiar basis for beliefs. When placed under load, their ability to differentiate between true and false testimony is affected. The difficulty is to distinguish between the hypothesis that we believe anything presented to us (or even entertained by us) and the hypothesis that we prima facie trust what is delivered to our senses and testimony unless we recognise it to be false.

Two considerations have been offered in favour of the former hypothesis. First, when subjects, and observers of their performance, are pre-briefed without being cognitively loaded, that the feedback relating to whether the subjects have successfully distinguished genuine from fake suicide notes is bogus, the judgements, of both subjects and observers, was still affected by the feedback. Where the feedback had been positive, the judgement concerning how many suicide notes were, in fact, correctly identified, and the subjects’ ability, were both inflated and, conversely, if the feedback had been negative (Wegner, Coulton, & Wenzlaff 1985: 343). If a subject were just taking testimony to be prima facie trustworthy, one would expect that the pre-briefing would set this aside (Mandelbaum 2014: 70–1).

It is plausible that what is going on here is an anchoring effect. The subjects are meant to generate a guess as to how good they are at the task where the feedback, although bogus, isn’t necessarily false. Subjects make an adjustment using the initial feedback value as an anchor against which they make their judgment. If this is the correct diagnosis, then the significance of the experiment turns on whether the Spinozan has a plausible account of anchoring effects.

When a subject is asked to guess the answer to a question, for example, the population of Chicago, the final answer they give is influenced by the answer that is immediately suggested to them, or by them (an anchor). I will arrive at different answers regarding the population of Chicago if I start by thinking ‘Is the answer 200,000?’ or if I start by thinking ‘Is the answer 5,000,000?’ The effect is present even when the subject has generated the initial answer for themselves and takes it to be fatuous (Mandelbaum 2014: 71, fn. 40). Mandelbaum takes this as evidence that subjects believe whatever they entertain. The details of the phenomenon do not support this.

First, if a subject *believed* the initial answer, they should not be inclined to adjust their answer as opposed to stick with it. The initial answer seems to be used as a stimulus for accessing information that either might support it or, if it does not, inclines a subject to make an adjustment to the nearest answer that seems plausible in the light of the information accessed.

Second, subjects respond differently when they are the source of the initial answer rather than somebody else, such as the experimenter. This is shown in the experiments on manipulation of the adjustment. When a subject is the source of the initial answer, the extent to which they adjust from the initial answer differs depending upon whether they shake their head or nod their head. They adjust more if they shake their head, less if they nod their head (Epley & Gilovich 2001: 392–5). This does not occur if somebody else has proposed the initial answer. A natural way to interpret the difference is that the subjects have different attitudes to the original answer depending upon the source. Otherwise the nodding and shaking behaviour would apply to both. Even if we were to take the anchoring effect to be explained by a subject believing the anchoring proposition suggested by others, it would be a mistake to take a subject’s own entertaining of a certain anchor to result in belief. The difference is to be expected if the prima facie trust in testimony hypothesis is correct.

The second challenge stemmed from a weaker notion of evidence-responsiveness. The suggestion is that the key connection between belief and evidence is that if a subject believes that *p*, then they should have the *capacity* to respond rationally to evidence for and against p (Flores 2021: 6305). The capacity to respond rationally to evidence is specifically related to a particular proposition *p*, the characteristic content of a delusion, rather than the subject having a general capacity to respond to evidence concerning the propositions they believe and the response should be in rationally permitted ways (Flores 2021: 6306). That does not mean that a subject usually responds rationally to evidence concerning p because the capacity may be masked by various factors: the anomalous experiences supporting the delusion; motivational states which favour the delusory belief; and a subject’s biases for example, a liberal acceptance bias that allows for a greater range of explanatory hypotheses that can be used to set aside counter-evidence (Flores 2021: 6305-11).

It is questionable whether this doxasticist response is successful. One issue is whether the three masking conditions mentioned above are masking conditions for the exercise of the general capacity to respond rationally to evidence or, more specifically, as Carolina Flores argues, masking conditions for the particular capacity to respond rationally to evidence relating to the delusory content.

Suppose that somebody suffers a sports injury as a result of which, if they try, they have to stop because of the pain before completing a two mile run. It is plausible that while they have the capacity to run they, *currently, do not* have the capacity to run two miles. Flores seems to think otherwise because she claims injury is a mask of a capacity to run 10 miles in under 40 mins (Flores 2021: 6306). It is implausible that the sports injury sufferer is currently capable of running 10 miles in under 40 mins. Some things that get in the way of the manifestation of a capacity strike at the grounds for attributing it in the first place. The question is whether what are alleged to be masks of the particular capacity to respond to evidence relating to p in fact strike at the grounds for attributing the capacity in the first place, for example, by implying that a subject cannot apply their general capacity to respond to evidence rationally.

Flores suggests that one reason for thinking they have the particular capacity is that subjects try to explain evidence against their delusory belief away and seek to avoid further evidence of that type. They seem aware of what the rationally permissible response to counter-evidence is even if they are not able to make it. Avoiding the evidence against one’s belief suggests that the subject is concerned that they might rationally respond to it (Flores 2021: 6308–9).

The behaviour does not indicate that the subject has the particular capacity to respond *rationally* to the evidence against p. It is plausibly explained by attributing the general capacity to respond rationally to evidence and a particular capacity to respond to evidence relating to p, although not necessarily rationally. In a more every day case, when we find a subject unwilling to accept strong evidence against a proposition they believe and we consider it due to some motivational state – for example, that one’s son is innocent of some terrible crime – it is plausible to say that the subject is not capable of responding rationally to the evidence against their son’s innocence.

Flores claims that when subjects *actually* give up their delusions and rationally respond to the evidence against p (as they often do in cognitive behaviour therapy), then it follows (trivially) that they have had the capacity to respond rationally to the evidence against p (Flores 2021: 6312, 6314). However, this is a mistake. We don’t have a capacity trivially if we actually do what the capacity is defined in terms of. Suppose I throw a dart and hit a bullseye. This is a fluke. It doesn’t follow that I have the capacity to hit the bullseye. To have the capacity to do A, I have to be able to do it reliably in the circumstances. The reliability requirement implies that Flores hasn’t successfully identified a substantially weaker plausible constraint on evidence-responsiveness.

Flores suggests that it would be architecturally too disruptive to suppose that subjects with delusions failed to have the capacity to respond rationally to evidence with respect to *p* but that when they undergo cognitive behaviour therapy, they develop the capacity (Flores 2021: 6014). This overlooks a natural way of describing the situation. The subject with delusions has the general capacity to respond rationally to evidence. The general capacity is masked with regard to propositions falling within the delusionary theme although they do have the particular capacity to respond to evidence. Cognitive behaviour theory assists them in having the capacity to respond *rationally* to evidence against their delusionary belief. No great architectural disruption is attributed to occur during cognitive behaviour therapy.

The concerns I have raised don’t presuppose that, if a subject has the capacity to do A, they should invariably do A in favourable conditions when appropriate. Instead, the point is that if there are some persistent features of the subject that make it the case they are not reliably able to do A in favourable circumstances, then those features count against it being the case that the subject has the capacity rather than just being classified as masking conditions. That’s a plausible explanation for why subjects with monothematic delusions should not be attributed the capacity to respond rationally to evidence against their delusory belief.

Lack of rational evidence-responsiveness remains a significant basis for a successful defence of the non-doxasticist position (For more on delusion and evidence, see Flores Chapter 12).

**2.2 Argument from lack of integration and failure to guide action**

In the chapter on Doxasticism and Delusion, we saw how a functional theory of belief was able to defend itself against the claim that the lack of integration of the delusion-characterising state, and its failure to guide action, showed that the state was not a belief. On the one hand integration and action guidance did take place and, when it did not, there were plausible excusing conditions which were always a distinctive part of a plausible functional theory.

Proponents of weak non-doxasticism more effectively defend their position when they argue that they offer an alternative account of these features that might plausibly fit some cases. Such a defence will have two features. First, the way in which the non-doxastic state explains the occasions when there is lack of integration and guidance of action more naturally follows from the way in which we may take the non-doxastic state to play its mental role, than the excusing conditions that would have to be attributed to the delusion-characterising state if it were a belief. Second, it is plausible that a subject with such a non-doxastic state would, intuitively, count as a subject with a delusion.

The proposals below should be assessed with these features in mind.

**3. Types of non-doxastic theory**

There are broadly three strands of theoretical development in the non-doxastic position. There are those which take delusions to involve a non-doxastic delusion-characterising state but add a meta-cognitive element. There are those whose appeal is to a hybrid first-order state. There are those that draw on a two-level conception of cognition.

**3.1 Non-doxastic delusion-characterising states with meta-cognitive states**

An appeal to cognitive imagining, rather than belief, recognises that cognitive imaginings may interact inferentially with a subject’s beliefs. The inferences drawn are to assist the imaginative project further. This is most typically the case in when cognitive imaginings are in the service of our understanding of fiction. The important difference between the inferential promiscuity of belief and cognitive imagining is that when a subject cognitively imagines that p, when p is in conflict with some of the subject’s beliefs, these are backgrounded but available for use when the imagining is ended. Cognitively imagining that p is not a challenge to a subject’s belief that not-p nor does the subject’s belief vitiate the imagining in question (Currie & Ravenscroft 2002: 15–17, 178–9). This approach to delusion has a meta-cognitive element because subjects with delusions generally take themselves to believe what the theorist says they merely imagine (Currie 2000: 176). More specifically, it holds that a subject with delusions ‘fails to monitor the self-generatedness of her imagining that p’ (Currie 2000: 177; Currie & Jureidini 2002: 160). As a result, the imagining that *p* presents itself as something generated by the world beyond itself. In typical cases, it is taken to be a response to precipitating, and validating, experiences.

One problem with this position concerns the appeal to a failure of source-monitoring. On the one hand, the delusion-characterising cognitive imaginings are a response to experiences, and more easily generated by experiences than beliefs (Currie & Jureidini 2002: 159). On the other hand, when we arrive at judgements on the basis of experience, we take ourselves to be judging. Otherwise, the contents would not be taken to be our judgements but rather have an external origin inserting them into our minds. The difference to which Gregory Currie and Jon Jureidini seem to be appealing is that subjects fail to recognise *the way* in which the imaginary state is an exercise of mental agency. Experience is insufficient to support a belief (otherwise experience would be the basis of a self-ascription of belief) but subjects are unaware that the experience is insufficient. Lack of awareness of the nature of their own contribution makes them think that the imagining is a belief. The problem is that it is unclear why this kind of monitoring failure only gives rise to a meta-cognitive belief (about the imagining) that it is a belief as opposed to generating a first-order belief that is ill-grounded in experience. The move from believing that one believes that p, to believing that p, seems almost immediate when a subject does not appreciate that they are responsible for the content of the state but take it to be based in experience.

A second problem concerns the explanatory benefits of appeal to imaginings together with a meta-cognitive belief. The suggestion is that, whereas beliefs have a functional role that results, when we have a new belief, in adjusting our other beliefs in conflict with it, imaginings do not have this functional role. Imaginings may be adopted while putting beliefs that clash with the content of the imaginings in the background. Appeal to imaginings explain why subjects with delusions fail to respond to contradictions between the content of their delusion and their other beliefs.

The problem is with the meta-cognitive element. Contradictions in our beliefs are most difficult to understand when subjects are aware of the contradiction. In this situation, subjects will believe that they believe that p and that they believe that they believe that not-p. If subjects with delusions have a state of imagining that p that they take to be a belief that p, then they both believe that they believe that p and believe that they believe that not-p, in cases where they have beliefs that contradict their delusory belief. Why don’t they seek to resolve the contradiction that they believe is present? The explanation of this cannot be that the belief contradicting the delusion-characterising state is in the background because, as far as the subject is concerned, it is conflicting with the delusion-characterising state taken as a belief (Currie & Jureidini 2002: 160). Any other explanation of their puzzling state of mind is one to which the doxasticist could easily appeal to explain why subjects with delusions fail to resolve contradictory beliefs. For example, if they are distracted from resolving the contradiction that their meta-cognitive states claim is present in their beliefs, then appeal to this distraction can explain why a subject persists in having contradictory beliefs in the first place. It seems that the distinctive meta-cognitive element has been set aside when identifying the explanatory advantages of imaginings over beliefs with regard to contradictory beliefs.

This is not the only difficulty deriving from the meta-cognitive element. Currie himself notes that a subject who believes that they believe that *p* is likely to end up believing that *p* because a subject would, if they believed that they believe that *p,* assume that *p* was true, and so, as a causal consequence, believe that *p* (Currie 2000: 177–8). However the connection is tighter than this. If a subject believes that they believe that *p*, the functional role of the higher order belief will include much of that of the belief that *p*. If a subject has this higher order belief, then they will be disposed to act upon the truth of *p* and make sure it is integrated with their other beliefs. For example, if I believe that I believe that my wife has been replaced by an imposter, don’t we expect that I should be concerned by what has happened to her and whether the imposter is out to do me harm and puzzled if I am not? Perhaps it will be suggested that the meta-cognitive belief need not be a conscious one. But in that case, we have no explanation of why subjects with delusions report themselves as believing what the non-doxasticist says that they merely imagine.

A final problem with the metacognitive approach is that it fails to explain why a subject only mistakes *some* of their imaginings in response to their experiences for beliefs. If subjects with delusions mistake cognitive imaginings for beliefs, one might expect this failure to distinguish them to show up more generally (Bayne & Pacherie 2005: 177).

Other proponents of the meta-cognitive approach broaden the first order states from cognitive imaginings to include beliefs, emotions, hunches, forebodings, premonitions, opinions, and even empty speech acts which they take to be the object of a complex higher-order attitude, characterised as a delusional stance, to interpret the lower order attitude in various ways (Stephens & Graham 2004: 239). They characterise the delusional stance as follows.

S is deluded that p just in case p is the representational content of a lower order state or attitude of S: (a) with which S personally identifies, (b) to which S clings in the face of strong contrary considerations and (c) about which S lacks insight into the nature and imprudent costs of maintaining. (Stephens and Graham 2004: 240)

S identifying with the content means that they don’t take the content as intrusive.

Suppose that the subject has the non-doxastic delusion characterising state that their bones are being consumed by worms. The contrary considerations to this referred to in (b) are taken to be prudential ones relating to the impact upon the quality of their life and reputation as a thinker. It is hard to understand how they can be characterised as clinging onto p in the face of contrary considerations in (b) but, at the same time, having no insight into the nature of these pragmatic considerations in (c). How can both (b) and (c) be true and how can the subject with delusions lack insight into the costs of maintaining that the delusory content is the case. Equally, it is unclear why there should be a problem with persistently imagining that one’s bones are being consumed by worms in itself.

The situation is changed if the content of this imagining is taken to be true by the subject. It would be a disturbing thought, something that a subject would wish to communicate whatever the cost, and explain why the subject persisted in being in a state with this content even though there were strong prudential considerations against it. The puzzle is to explain the nature of the subject’s distress and the reason for their lack of insight in a way that does not appeal to their belief in the delusion-characterising content. This puzzle is comparable with the puzzle that motivates going non-doxastic in the first place, namely that a subject may claim to believe that their bones are being consumed by worms and yet not seek medical attention.

Doxasticists can agree with non-doxasticists that the delusion-characterising state does not explain the delusion. An important element is the surrounding mental context or mental stance they take to these contents. Current characterisations of the meta-cognitive element involved either seem to undermine the explanatory utility of non-doxastic states or work better if they are directed to doxastic states (For more on delusion and imagination, see Kind, Chapter 21).

**3.2 Hybrid first-order states**

One version of this strategy holds that delusions do not involve either beliefs or imaginings but rather an intermediary state with a functional role involving elements of each but is, in fact, of neither. Andy Egan calls them bimaginings (Egan 2009: 263). The ways in which subjects with delusions seem to depart in their behaviour from that we would expect if they believed, or imagined, the typical delusory content provides reason to recognise these intermediate states between belief and imagining.

A general problem with all identifications of hybrid states of this kind is that their motivation derives from the fact that some delusion-characterising content states fail to behave in the way that we would expect if they were beliefs. The hybrid state is tailor-made to fit this kind of case (Egan 2009: 265–9). However, apart from fitting the case, the functional role of these states more generally is unclear. If you bimagine something, what are the circumstances in which it interacts with our beliefs, what is the impact of bimagining on our emotions, and so on. It does not look as if we identify a functional role that has wider articulation to justify postulating these states within scientific psychology (Matthews 2013: 107–9). By contrast, we can seek to explain the case of delusion by appealing to a standard case of belief in which there are excusing conditions with predictable results. Imagining ourselves in those circumstances, we can see how we might display similar behaviour to subjects with delusions.

Part of the appeal of bimagining is that it draws on the fact that we can envisage a continuum of states from those with most of the expected functional role of belief being manifested to those with most of the expected functional role of imagining being manifested. Aspects of the role don’t come as a package. Yet, it is unclear whether the envisaged variation is due to exceptional circumstances holding in which the role is not manifested or due to the state being a different state which don’t have certain expected manifestations as part of its role. As Amy Kind points out, disruptive beliefs (like the true belief that one’s partner has just died) may fail to be properly integrated with one’s other beliefs (Kind 2024: 55). For example, one might hear noises in the next room and take it to be her for a moment, forgetting that she’s dead. We wouldn’t conclude that this is evidence that one doesn’t believe it. It’s just that the belief hasn’t sunk in. Deciding which is appropriate is a matter of the explanatory potential of the recognition of the states in question. The tailor-made character of bimagining which looked to be its strength is currently its major weakness.

Another hybrid position suggested by delusions and other phenomena is to take the subject to in-between or half-believe the delusion-characterising content. We might call this a semi-doxasticist position, rather than a non-doxasticist position, but I discuss it here because it denies the appropriateness of saying that a subject believes the delusion-characterising content.

Eric Schwitzgebel illustrates the attractiveness of attributions of half-belief by the following kind of case. Juliet is politically liberal, claims that all races are equally beautiful, will remark upon and favour (if asked) the beauty of non-white ethnic groups while nevertheless being more emotionally engaged by, and more spontaneously aware of, beauty in white people. In her most reflective moments, she is aware of this in herself. Schwitzgebel resists the claim that there might be a psychological reality such as the representation of ‘white people are more attractive’ in her belief box. Rather, the thought is that she half-believes this and half-believes the opposite reflecting the way that her dispositions don’t accord with the stereotype of one belief or another (Schwitzgebel 2013: 85–88).

Understanding the attribution of half belief as a kind of summary judgement about the whole network of dispositions present in the subject has some plausibility. As before, the question is whether this also gives us an explanatory purchase on subjects in the state of half-belief or whether we get more insight by the attribution of belief and the recognition of excusing conditions. How would you expect someone who half believes that p to behave and to what extent is this distinct from them bimagining that p?

Consider the case of Juliet. If she is negotiating a social context in which all her friends are politically liberal and she wants their good opinion, then one might suppose that she secretly believes that white people are more beautiful but the rest can be explained by the social context. On the other hand, if the excusing condition for this belief isn’t there and she displays these dispositions, then we might say that, although she believes that the races are equally beautiful, she might find the physical characteristics of white people more emotionally engaging. It is plausible that in characterising Juliet in these ways we get more explanatory grip on her behaviour even if either or both of them count as ways of half believing a particular proposition taking her whole state of mind into account.

While it is true that according to the functional account of belief, once information about the dispositions are fixed, there is no further matter to investigate for the attribution of belief (e.g. whether there is a sentence in the language of thought with a particular content in the belief box), the correct attribution of the dispositions is not a straightforward matter (contrary to what Schwitzgebel seems to assume, for example, Schwitzgebel 2002: 261–2). There is significant play off between the attribution of different beliefs with different excusing conditions, the role of social context in evaluating them, and attributing more complex states of emotional engagement (as Schwitzgebel acknowledges in principle, Schwitzgebel 2010: 534–5). The capacity of a dispositional account to avoid questions of whether there is deep fact about whether a subject believes that *p* or not is overrated. Schwitzgebel suggests that dispositions may not distinguish between affective, evaluative, and belief states – or, at the least, stereotypical dispositions may not – however this seems implausible (Schwitzgebel 2013: 90). We are well aware, in everyday life, of verbal and other behaviour that distinguishes between these states and discuss these differences between ourselves when attributing to somebody one state or another. Affective states don’t always correspond to what it is quite plausible that we believe, as one development of the Juliet case would display.

In the case of delusions, there are good reasons for thinking that subjects are in excusing conditions for delusion-characterising beliefs. Subjects with delusions receive counter-evidence concerning their delusion-characterising beliefs, both from other people and their own experience, and they may be anxious about thinking through the implications of their beliefs given their nature. The explanatory worth of the attribution of half-belief, in contrast to its accuracy as a summary judgement, is yet to be made out.

**3.3 Two level accounts of cognition: delusions as acceptances**

Those who take the delusion-characterising state to be an acceptance that p develop the proposal within a two-level framework for cognition. Level 1 involves credences measured in terms of probabilities from 0 to 1, and desires measured by degrees of valuing (to be distinguished from level 2 desires). On this level, even if a subject has a credence of 1 in a particular proposition p, it doesn’t follow in itself that you have a flat out belief that p. Flat-out belief relates to facts that hold on level 2. On level 2, you have acceptances and goal adoptions (level 2 desires). A sub-category of acceptances are those that count as flat-out beliefs. They involve the policy of taking their content as an unrestricted premise in deliberation subject to exceptions such as when one fails to remember the content, or doesn’t take it to be relevant, or because one has another pragmatically based restricted policy of taking a countervailing content as a premise in practical deliberation. Illustrations of the latter would be when a lawyer professionally takes their client to be innocent or games of pretence (Frankish 2004: 130–2, this is drawn from Cohen’s account of acceptance, see Cohen 1992: 4–5). These policies of taking the content of the acceptance as a premise in practical deliberation are caused by (Frankish says realised in) level one credences and desires. The framework is neutral between doxastic and non-doxastic positions. Non-doxastic positions focus on level two acceptances that fail to be unrestricted policies for premises in practical deliberation.

In Keith Frankish’s development of a non-doxastic version (at times he remains neutral about the truth of non-doxasticism), he suggests that the desire behind the policy of using the delusion-characterising content as a premise is outweighed by other desires concerning the ways in which, if the delusion-characterising content were true, life would be unacceptable, for example, the desiring to continue to live in your home, avoid estrangement from your wider family, and consequent upheaval (Frankish 2009a: 279–80). The policy of using the delusion-characterising content as a premise in practical deliberation is restricted as a result.

A non-doxastic version of Frankish’s proposal might be plausible for cases of delusion that seem to be cases of self-deception. 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 unchecked by reality-checking mechanisms standardly occurring in the affected right hemisphere (Ramachandran 1996, for more discussion see Noordhof and Sullivan-Bissett 2023: 104-6, Fernández, Ch. 22, this volume). However, many delusion-characterising contents are distressing. Why is a subject adopting the policy of accepting that they are dead or that their loved one has been replaced by an imposter? Frankish’s suggestion is that we should look into the subject’s motivation to find out the answer but it is natural to think that one reason why the subject adopts such a relatively unrestricted premising policy is because they take the content to be true (Frankish 2009a: 281). At best, gesturing towards some sort of motivation operating at level one is a promissory note that struggles with those monothematic delusions for which a motivational element has seemed harder to identify, for example, Capgras and Cotard.

A second issue concerns the explanation of the typical behaviour of subjects with delusions. Frankish explains the role that delusion-characterising acceptances play in terms of a subject with delusions high confidence in the desirability of acting upon the outcome of practical deliberation in which the content of the acceptance is taken as a premise (Frankish 2009a: 277–9, Frankish 2009b: 88–90). Consider what the proposal says about the action of the subject with delusions if the non-doxasticist picture is correct. In this case, the subject’s failure to respond in the expected ways in other circumstances means that the premising policy they have is not considered a belief and, thus, is not accurately thought of as indicative of what they take to be true (as opposed to what they accept to be true as part of a policy). When the subject expresses their belief that their partner has been replaced by an imposter and calls the police, this is not because they take it to be true that their partner has been replaced by an imposter but rather because they are (usually unconsciously) confident that the premising policy involving the content that their partner has been replaced by an imposter will, as part of their practical deliberation, result in an outcome that is desirable, namely that they contact the police. As far as what is before their conscious mind, they have an acceptance which, in itself, is not different structurally from professionally accepting your client is innocent if you are a lawyer although the acceptance may be more persistent. The issue is whether we can understand what a subject is up to better than if we were to attribute a belief. It is hard to see the proposal as an improvement in comprehensibility unless we appeal to the extent to which a subject with delusions takes the delusion-characterising content as a premise for practical deliberation as the basis for an illusion that they believe the content in question (Dub 2017: 36-40, gives examples of how this may lead to meta-cognitive mistakes). Otherwise, the delusion is something that they are doing to themselves for obscure motivation that makes little sense even to themselves.

Perhaps, in part, to answer this challenge, Richard Dub supplements the picture. He appeals to cognitive feelings to explain why a subject accepts that *p* and persists in accepting that *p* in various contexts. These cognitive feelings are experienced as internal evidence (Dub 2017: 50). Dub suggests that the subject with Capgras delusion has a cognitive feeling of unfamiliarity with respect to what seems like a loved one and the persistent acceptance that they are an imposter is a consequence of this (Dub 2017: 47–8, 51). Dub suggests that these feelings exist to produce a ‘temporary simulated belief’ that motivates us to engage in the relevant reasoning. Temporary simulated beliefs enable us to respond quickly to an alarm while not setting in train the process of updating all our beliefs (which, if the cognitive feeling gave rise to a belief, we would otherwise go through) (Dub 2017: 52).

The position raises a number of issues. First, it requires a sharp distinction between a cognitive feeling supported acceptance and a belief. Even in a case where the content of a subject’s acceptance is part of an unrestricted policy of using it as a premise in practical deliberation, this will still be, by Dub’s lights, acceptance rather than belief. By extending cognitive feeling supported acceptances to explain phobias (such as arachnophobia), Dub also allows that they might have significant impact upon behaviour otherwise suggestive of belief (Dub 2017: 52–3). The motivation for doing so is unclear.

For one thing, there seems no advantage over the idea that belief formation may be relatively swift – generated by prima facie trust in our senses, testimony and cognitive feelings – with the process of belief evaluation and integration with other beliefs being a more lengthy process. So long as there is some check between these two stages there is little reason for separating off the first as involving acceptances which are not beliefs. The earlier discussion of Spinozan theories of belief involved the recognition that there might be adjustment to other judgements that we might be inclined to make as a result of what we accept. So it is not the case that our acceptances are relatively isolated from the rest of our cognitive system. Equally, monothematic delusions undergo elaboration which is harder to understand if acceptances backed by cognitive feelings are simulated beliefs avoiding wider updating of beliefs. By connecting the occurrence of cognitive feeling backed acceptances with phobias, Dub also undermines the motivation for denying that delusion-characterising states are beliefs derived from their relative failure to be action-guiding.

My point is not that theories cannot be developed relating to cognitive feeling backed acceptances to answer these questions. It is rather that, since these questions arise, the theoretical motivation for distinguishing cognitive feeling backed acceptances from belief is undermined and the kind of answers that will be given would naturally support understanding how delusion-characterising states may be beliefs operating in particular conditions.

It is unclear how cognitive feeling backed acceptances are supposed to explain the uttterances of subjects with delusions. Why does the cognitive feeling of unfamiliarity relating to the loved one, make the subject with Capgras delusion assert that their loved one is an imposter in a relatively unrestricted manner as opposed to their loved one about whom they have a funny sense of unfamiliarity? It is hard not think that the missing ingredient is that the feeling of familiarity makes the subject take the content of the acceptance to be true. But that would make it plausible that the subject is actually in a delusion-characterising state of belief some of whose typical consequences may be suppressed because of excusing conditions.

Although it is not an essential part of Dub’s position, he also commits himself to strong non-doxasticism. If a subject with delusions does end up believing the content of their cognitive feeling backed delusion-characterising acceptances, then Dub claims they are no longer deluded (Dub 2017: 55). This seems to take the puzzle of understanding some subjects with delusions as the basis for isolating them from subjects which we might otherwise conceive of having fallen deeper into delusion.

A more plausible way to develop Dub’s position would be to insist that a cognitive feeling backed acceptance may be a delusion-characterising state in circumstances in when a subject feels the conflict of their delusory state with other sources of beliefs that they typically trust ­– perception and testimony – and yet the content of the delusion is something that they find unavoidable to exclude as part of their perspective on the world. They don’t take the content to be true due to the conflict but, because of the cognitive feeling, they find themselves unable to abandon the content in question.

**4. Concluding remarks**

It is plausible that there are two motivations for non-doxasticism. The first there are circumstances in which it is plausible that a subject has a delusion but the attribution of belief is not secure. They are engaged in an imaginative project that they take really seriously or have a cognitive feeling backed acceptance in the context described earlier. Non-doxasticism is at is strongest emphasising the potential diversity of delusion-characterising states rather than insisting that subjects with delusions can’t be characterised as having beliefs because of the arguments identified earlier. The second motivation derives from the non-doxasticists attempt to identify a distinct attitude that the subject with a delusion bears towards the content taken in the round. Where the doxasticist attribute a belief which does not play an expected functional role because of excusing conditions related to the subject’s circumstances, the non-doxasticist takes the combination of the state with the delusion-characterising content, together with the context in which the state occurs, as making it plausible to take the state in question to involve a different attitude to the content as a kind of summary judgement about their state of mind. A problem with this idea is moving from descriptive adequacy ­– which is a potential strength of the non-doxastic approach – to explanatory interest. Does the identification of a distinctive delusory attitude play a useful role the further explanation of the subject’s behaviour? It is clear that non-doxasticists are motivated by thoughts that it does (e.g. Dub 2017: 35). Or is better explanatory purchase obtained by focusing on belief, and how the excusing conditions may operate to give rise to behaviour not typical of the belief? For the moment, matters seem to favour the doxasticist. Yet, delusion provides an interesting case study for the potential development of an understanding of other attitudes than the ones that we generally tend to attribute. For that reason, its further study is of immense value for the more general assessment of non-doxasticist positions.

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