

The Status of Delusion in the Light of Marcus's *Revisionary Proposals* *

Sam WILKINSON

Received: 01.11.2012

Final version: 03.03.2013

BIBLID [0495-4548 (2013) 28: 78; pp. 421-436]

DOI: 10.1387/theoria.6910

ABSTRACT: Marcus's view of belief is applied to the debate that centers on the question, "Are delusions beliefs?" Two consequences of this are that i) the question, "Are delusions beliefs?" needs rephrasing and ii) the answer is, "No, some delusional patients do not believe what they *prima facie* seem to believe".

Keywords: belief; delusion; rationality.

RESUMEN: La concepción de Marcus sobre las creencias se aplica al debate centrado en la cuestión: "¿Son creencias los delirios?" Dos consecuencias que se siguen de ello son: i) que la cuestión "¿Son creencias los delirios?" necesita reformularse, y ii) que la respuesta es: "No, algunos pacientes que sufren delirios no creen lo que, *prima facie*, parecen creer".

Palabras clave: creencia; delirio; racionalidad.

1. Introduction

To my mind, few have written as clearly and convincingly on the notion of belief as Ruth Barcan Marcus. In this paper, I want to examine what happens when we accept her view of belief and apply it to a particular debate in recent philosophical work on clinical delusions. The debate in question takes the form of different answers to the question: "Are delusions beliefs?" Call this "the doxasticity debate", or DD for short, since the bone of contention is whether delusions are doxastic (*viz.* beliefs). There are two consequences of adopting Marcus's view of belief in approaching this question. One is that this question, "Are delusions beliefs?", strictly speaking, needs rephrasing. The current phrasing reflects the fact that many of the main participants in the DD subscribe to a view of belief that Marcus opposed. The second consequence is that, once the question is rephrased, the answer is "No". In other words, many delusional patients do not believe what they *prima facie* seem to. To use Marcus's own terminology, the belief claim is "retrospectively reviseable".

Let me locate this within Marcus's work, in a way that should also serve, at least in part, to motivate it. In "Rationality and Believing the Impossible" (1983) Marcus uses the issue of believing the impossible as a starting point for putting forward her view of belief. The central point is as follows. On any view of knowledge, if the subject claims to know something, but that something turns out to be false, then the knowledge claim must be revised: the subject can only truly be said to have *thought* to have known,

* I would like to thank Matthew Chrisman for several useful discussions on topics related to this paper. I'd also like to thank the UK Arts and Humanities Research Council and the Jacobsen Trust for funding my doctoral research.



to have merely *thought* to have had knowledge; so far, so uncontroversial. However, on Marcus's view of *belief*, a belief claim turns out to need revision in just this way, not, however, if what is believed turns out to be false (or, strictly speaking, to not "obtain", since she takes states of affairs to be the proper objects of beliefs, and not sentential entities), but if it turns out to be impossible. In short, we cannot believe the impossible. And yet we do appear to believe the impossible: mathematicians make mistakes, people make mistaken claims of identity or non-identity etc. So Marcus spends a certain amount of time explaining away, in my view successfully, these appearances.

The view of belief that leads to the counter-intuitive claim that we can't believe the impossible is what Marcus calls an "object-centered view of belief". This she opposes to a language-centered, or quasi-linguistic, view of belief. Instead of belief being a relation to a structured proposition or "thought" (à la Frege) or to a sentence-like representation (à la Fodor), she takes belief to be a relation between a subject and a possible state of affairs.¹ In part this is because she finds these entities to be mysterious (Frege) or implausible (Fodor). Later, she calls these views "Anti-Naturalist" (Marcus 1995). On her view one can't believe the impossible because one cannot stand in the belief relation to an impossible state of affairs.

However, according to the object-centered view, it is not *only* when we think that we believe something that turns out to be impossible that belief claims are retrospectively revisable. Marcus was aware of this, but only dealt with it very briefly:

[...] the sentences that we assent to, however sincerely [...] are often poor indicators of what we believe. These are not cases of *deliberate deception*, of insincerity, as ordinarily conceived; they have to do with those deeper notions of self-deception and false consciousness which I need not go into here. (1983, 333-334)

What I will do in this paper is go into this in more depth by examining delusion. One of my claims is that, if we accept Marcus's view of belief, there are cases of delusion where the belief claim is retrospectively revisable in just this sense. Both clinicians, and the patients themselves, may think that the patients believe something when in fact they don't. However, this is not because what is "believed" is impossible (it tends not to be). It is rather because it isn't *acted* upon in the relevant circumstances. The patient doesn't act as if the possible state of affairs in question obtained. And that is central to Marcus's view of belief.

However, I am not the first to suggest that delusional patients may not believe what they seem to. Doing so falls squarely on one side of the DD (*viz.* on the side that Bayne (2011) calls "anti-doxasticism"). These anti-doxasticists clearly do not subscribe to one aspect of the language-centered view that Marcus disliked, namely, that sincere verbal assent is an overriding and sufficient indicator of belief. However, they adhere to a broader and recently widely held family of views that Marcus, less explicitly, considered inadequate. I will call these "internal representation-centered" views.

Adopting Marcus's view of belief leads to anti-doxasticism of a very different kind. Indeed in light of her view, the very question "Are delusions beliefs?" is unhelpful and

¹ Knowledge, in having to be true, is some kind of relation not to a merely possible, but to an actual state of affairs; presumably a different kind of relation to "mere true belief".

would be more accurately expressed as “Does the delusional patient genuinely believe what her verbal actions (viz. utterances) suggest?” or “Are her delusional claims accurate (albeit implicit) self-ascriptions of belief?” Such reformulations are, granted, less punchy, but they are in no way suggested by the approaches of some of the main participants in the DD.

I will proceed as follows. I will put forward “The Standard Approach” to the DD and show how it subscribes to something like an “internal representation-centered view”. I will look at how within this debate, and given this approach, one can subscribe to doxasticism (Bayne and Pacherie 2005, Bortolotti 2009), anti-doxasticism (Currie 2000, Currie and Jureidini 2001) and semi-doxasticism (Egan 2008). I will then introduce Marcus’s “object-centered” view of belief, and consider how it applies to the debate. I will then explore some consequences of this. The two consequences, as mentioned, are:

1. The central question of the DD needs rephrasing.
2. Some delusional patients don’t believe what they sincerely claim, so, in one sense, anti-doxasticism is correct, but it is not anti-doxasticism as traditionally understood against the background of the Standard Approach.

2. *The Standard Approach*

The Standard Approach to the DD, although implicit in some of the aforementioned views, is very explicitly proposed, and endorsed, by Andy Egan (2008) in the following extract. It is such a concise and complete description of the Standard Approach that I cite it in full:

In what follows, I’ll be concerned with characterizing (very partially) the attitude that delusional subjects bear to the contents of their delusions. I’m going to assume that the right way to go about this is to characterize the roles that particular, token mental representations play in the subject’s cognitive economy. So I’ll be assuming that some sort of minimal representational theory of mind is correct – that there is a medium of mental representation, and there are discrete representational items in the head. These representational items are operated on in various ways, and accessed by various systems, in order to regulate both our behavior and the maintenance of other representational items. Believing, desiring, imagining, and the bearing of propositional attitudes in general is a matter of having a representational item with the right kind of content, which plays the right kind of role in one’s cognitive economy. (Egan 2008, 262)

So, the picture that we have here, and that we will abandon later, is that there is a “discrete representational item in the head”, the delusional state, and if it plays the right kind of role, then it is a belief, and if it plays a different kind of role, then it is a different kind of state. The representational state is taken to have the content that is expressed in the standard characterization of the delusion, which in turn corresponds to what the patient sincerely asserts. So, for example, in the most commonly talked about delusion, and the one that we will focus on, the Capgras delusion, there is the representational state that has the content “My father has been replaced by an identical-looking impostor/stranger”.² If that state plays a certain role, it is a belief, if it

² See, for example, Ellis and Young (1990).

plays another role it is some other state. No surprise, then, that on this view the question is phrased as “Are delusions beliefs?” or “Is this delusion a belief?”

Accepting this picture for the moment, why might someone think that the representational state doesn’t play the right kind of role? In order to say that a given mental state, say, a delusion, is not a belief, one has to, (i) get clear on the functional role of belief and (ii) show that the delusional state lacks that functional role. This is precisely what anti-doxasticists like Currie and his collaborators do. A semi-doxasticist, like Egan, claims that the functional role is somewhere between that of belief and imagination, and therefore calls it “bimagination”. Doxasticists (Bayne and Pacherie 2005, Bortolotti 2009) either claim that the functional role is that of belief, or close enough, or that “the belief” has somehow been “compartmentalized” (viz. it is a belief that has somehow been prevented for playing the role that it otherwise would (e.g. Bayne 2011)). As you can see, it is at least implied, and at most explicitly asserted, that a belief is a kind of thing, namely, an internal representation that plays a certain role. But before seeing what happens when we adopt Marcus’s view of belief, let’s look more closely at why, within the Standard Approach, delusions might not be beliefs.

3. *Why might delusions not be beliefs?*

As I said, the main proponents of the anti-doxastic position are Gregory Currie and his collaborators (Currie 2000, Currie and Jureidini 2001, Currie and Ravenscroft 2002). Their view comprises of two claims: a negative and a positive claim. The negative claim tells us that delusions aren’t beliefs (Anti-doxasticism). The positive claim tells us what kind of representational state delusions are, namely, they are imaginings that are mistaken for beliefs (what Bayne and Pacherie 2005 call “The Metacognitive View”). Although the positive claim will crop up later, for now let’s focus on the negative claim.

Currie thinks that delusions ought not to be counted as beliefs because they lack the right kind of functional role. Since, according to Currie, delusions

- (i) are not supported by evidence in their initial formation,
- (ii) are not open to review in the face of contrary evidence,
- (iii) do not fully guide action, reasoning, or elicit the appropriate emotional responses,

they should not be counted as beliefs at all, and, as just mentioned, should be counted rather as imaginings that are mistaken by the subject for beliefs. This mistake, which gives rise to a false second-order belief, accounts for the sincere delusional assertion. As Currie and Jureidini put it:

Imaginings seem just the right things to play the role of delusional thoughts; it is of their nature to co-exist with the beliefs they contradict, to leave their possessors unwilling to resolve the inconsistency, and to be immune to conventional appeals to reason and evidence. (Currie and Jureidini 2001, 160)

The claim that delusions aren’t beliefs, can, in principle, be opposed on the basis of two different kinds of considerations:

- A. Conceptual – you can disagree with the functional role that Currie and co. claim is essential to belief.

B. Empirical – you can disagree that, as a matter of fact, the delusional state actually fails to exhibit this functional role.

B-type considerations would ideally require a fully fleshed-out story concerning the aetiology of the delusion and what the deluded subjects are like. Note also that a critique could clearly make use of both A and B-type considerations, both disagreeing with the functional role of belief, and with the portrayal of the delusion or the deluded subject.

People with doxastic leanings often respond with B-type considerations. To (i) they respond that delusions may be based on evidence of a sort, namely, on strange experiences (e.g. lack of affective response to familiar faces in the case of the Capgras delusion, cf. Maher 1974, Ellis and Young 1990).³ In response to (iii) they claim that, although delusions often fail to generate the kinds of actions and emotional responses one might expect, the Capgras delusion (for example) leads to violence against the impostor in 18% of cases, and sometimes of a particularly gruesome sort. Granted, it is much harder to explain away (ii) since the delusions are (and some, including the DSM, say *by definition*) highly resistant to correction in the face of contrary evidence. However, perhaps one can claim that the experiential evidence in favour of the delusion is so strong that this resistance to correction is not irrational since the experience trumps all possible testimony; we just don't know how weird these subjects' experiences are (see Reimer 2009). But in any case, these are all descriptive, B-type, issues about what these patients are actually like. Putting aside for the moment what these patients are like, what would *any* case have to be like in order to qualify, or fail to qualify, as a case of belief? Does a mental state really have to satisfy (i), (ii) and (iii) to count as a belief? In other words, what is belief *essentially*?

One philosopher, Lisa Bortolotti (2009), has recently devoted an entire book (*Delusions and Other Irrational Beliefs*) to defending doxasticism, and her argument has focused on the functional role of the states we call beliefs, namely, on A-type considerations. She claims that all of (i), (ii) and (iii) are too strict, and that many states that we are happy to call beliefs (e.g. scientific and religious beliefs) infringe them. Her tactic is to present the anti-doxasticist with a dilemma: if we are to deny belief-status to delusions, then we are going to have to do the same for many states that, intuitively, we are happy to call beliefs. However, note that an implicit premise in this argument is that denying belief-status to these non-pathological states—states that we are, on an everyday basis, happy to call beliefs—is too great a theoretical cost. This rests on a conservatism with regard to everyday belief attribution, which is in direct conflict with Marcus's "revisionary" approach. We have seen that Marcus is happy to tell us of all sorts of instances where we regularly attribute beliefs to people, but they, strictly speaking, aren't *really* believing.⁴

³ Maher hypothesizes that "delusional belief is not being held "in the face of evidence strong enough to destroy it," but is being held because evidence is strong enough to support it" (1974, 99).

⁴ Although she doesn't phrase it in these terms, Tumulty (2012) responds to Bortolotti's book in a similar, revisionist, manner. She claims that one can say of both delusions and the non-pathological states that Bortolotti cites, that they are not really beliefs but "in-between states".

Now, when should one tend towards conservatism and when should one tend towards revisionism when analyzing a term? Well, if the term is a natural-kind term, or of fundamental theoretical importance, there are very good reasons (and precedents) for revisionism. Marcus clearly thought that belief, in the most interesting philosophical sense, is something both theoretically interesting and fundamental.⁵ As a result, we should be revisionists about belief. It's not for nothing that she explicitly called her paper "Some Revisionary Proposals about Beliefs and Believing", or that she started her exposition of her view of belief by making the highly controversial claim that people can't believe impossibilities. Intuitively people *do* believe impossibilities, for example, every time they make false claims of non-identity (believing that Bruce Wayne is not Batman is not, according to Marcus, a false belief. It's not a belief at all). In denying this, she was being deeply revisionist.

It is with this in mind that I present Marcus's view of belief.

4. Marcus's Object-Centred View of Belief

Perhaps the clearest way of presenting Marcus's view of belief is in terms of the views that she opposes. One can make out two related, but dissociable, such views:

Language-centered accounts: Belief is a relation to linguistic entities. In particular, "sincere, reflective, non-conceptually-confused" (1983, 333) linguistic assent is both a necessary and sufficient condition for belief.

Internal representation-centered accounts: Belief consists in having a certain internal representation that plays a certain role.

The former is the one that she most clearly opposes (see especially "The Anti-naturalism of Some Language Centered Accounts of Belief" (1995)). However, she opposes the latter too, and this is implicitly seen in her positive formulation of a non-language-centered account. Of these two views, one can consistently hold both or either. Namely, one can think of linguistic assent as being central to belief, *and* as being the expression of ("giving voice to") an internal representational state (viz. the belief) (Marcus seems to attribute this to Ramsey). Or one can think of linguistic assent as being crucial to belief, but be neutral, or even skeptical, about internal representations (I'd interpret Davidson in this way). Or one can think of linguistic assent (in public language) as not being necessary for belief, but insist that belief is a matter of having an internal representational state that plays the right functional role (Fodor, and many others, seem to hold this). It is this commitment to internal representations (which we saw so clearly in the passage quoted from Egan 2008) that is at the heart of the Standard Approach to the DD, and to the question "Are delusions beliefs?"

⁵ She may have also thought that it was a natural kind, but we don't need to get into that.

4.1. Marcus's Critique of Language-Centered Accounts: Belief without Language

In all three of her main papers on belief (1983, 1990, 1995), Marcus uses the intuition that non-human animals have beliefs, namely, that there can be belief without language, as a springboard from which to critique language-centered accounts. As she is well aware, she is in good company in holding this, and cites Hume: “[...] no truth appears to me more evident, than that beasts are endow’d with thought and reason as well as men” (Hume’s *A Treatise of Human Nature* quoted in Marcus 1995). Although Hume finds this to be such an “evident truth” that it doesn’t warrant illustration or argument, Marcus gives us a nice example of her own:

A subject, call him ‘Jean,’ and his dog, call him ‘Fido,’ are stranded in a desert. Both are behaving as one does when one needs and desires a drink. What appears to be water emerges into view. It is a mirage [...] Both hurry toward it.

On what ground can we deny Fido a desire to drink, a belief that there is something potable there? [...]

The important kernel of truth in such a linguistic view is that arriving at a *precise* verbal description of another’s beliefs and desires is difficult, and especially so when the attribution cannot be verbally confirmed by the subject. We will not go far wrong in attributing thirst to the dog Fido, or the belief that there is the appearance of something potable. Whether we can attribute to the dog the recognition of *water* would depend in part on whether dogs can select water from other liquids to roughly the extent that we can. That is an empirical question. (1990, 134-135)

In essence, the view is as follows. Many animals exhibit autonomous goal-directed behaviour, and use their sensory and cognitive apparatus to inform themselves about the world. Language, as a public, communicative, symbolic medium is certainly vital for belief *attribution*, but not for belief *per se*. Our attributions will be accurate to the extent that they capture the animal’s perspective. As a result, it is much easier to attribute beliefs to other human beings, not only because they can correct us, but also because their perspective is more likely to resemble our own. However, in using a less fine-grained content ascription with animals (“something drinkable” instead of “water”) we minimize our risk of getting it wrong.

Language is not only useful for attributing belief, but can supplement the kinds of beliefs we can have. The simplest way in which this occurs, is in enabling us to have beliefs that have linguistic entities in their content. I can, for example, believe that the utterance “This poem has a synecdoche in it” is true, without yet knowing what a synecdoche is.⁶ Our linguistic abilities may also help us in having other kinds of beliefs that are closed to non-language users: beliefs about modality, about the distant future, about mistakes, commitments, second-order beliefs etc. But that does not mean that without language, there cannot be belief. To claim this, and thereby a discontinuity between humans and non-human animals (and indeed pre-lingual infants), is, as Marcus rightly states, “anti-naturalistic”.

⁶ This synecdoche example is from Recanati (1997).

4.2. Marcus's *Implicit Critique of Internal Representations*

What if one grants that non-human animals have beliefs, but that belief is still language-like? Animals may not have a *public* language, but, if they are cognitively sophisticated enough to believe, they have a “language of thought” (Fodor 1975). Others have spent far more time directly criticizing Fodor’s position (e.g. Dennett 1981). Marcus, on the other hand, doesn’t so much criticize the Fodorian view, as bypass it. Marcus asks, on Fodor’s view, “what would count evidentially in the attribution of an unconscious belief to an agent. Is it unconscious assent to a sentence in mentalesé?” (1990, 138) Presumably, from the way in which this comes at the end of a paragraph and she swiftly moves on, answering that question in the affirmative strikes her as implausible.

Directly engaging with a Fodorian view is bound to be difficult if one finds that it misses the point. We have no good reason to postulate discrete representational vehicles that correspond to beliefs. Doing so misunderstands the very nature of belief. Even if human beings, and animals, *happen* to have a language of thought, we can easily imagine beings that exhibit autonomous goal-direct behaviour and react intelligently to their environment in the service of these goals, without anything like a language of thought. These beings would clearly still be believers.⁷ One might retort that there must be internal representations of some sort, even if they need not be language-like. They could be, for example, map-like (e.g. Braddon-Mitchell and Jackson (1996)).⁸ But tweaking the format also misses the point. There are perhaps all sorts of ways that a unified system can be enabled to take the world to be a certain way. And, insofar as the system can be wrong about how the world is, we might say that there is representation “going on”. But that does not mean that there are things in the head called representations that correspond to beliefs. Belief is not that which enables a system to take the world to be a certain way, but is the phenomenon of taking the world to be a certain way *itself*, and we can think about that without any commitment to internal representations at all.

Marcus’s positive view cuts to the philosophical chase. Belief is not, at least not essentially, a relation to a sentence (although it can be a relation to a state of affairs which contains a sentence), or to an internal representation (of whatever format), but rather to a possible (though not necessarily actual) state of affairs. The most relevant states of affairs will usually be those that are in the subject’s egocentric space, whether

⁷ Indeed perhaps the best treatment of the Fodorian view is to take a historian’s viewpoint. The language of thought hypothesis arose amidst advancements in computer science and solid symbol systems, and a related and ill-founded optimism that matter (the brain) could be given mind in a way analogous to the way in which computers were enabled to perform intelligent tasks, namely, by rule-guided operations on concretely stored internal representations. Even bracketing the question of the essential nature of belief, the computationalist paradigm has been shown, firstly, to not be the only way of getting matter to be intelligent (see e.g. Connectionist approaches), and, secondly, to not be a good imitation of human intelligence (e.g. it doesn’t account for learning).

⁸ Egan leaves this possibility open: “This sort of view takes no stand on just what the representations are like, so, in particular, they needn’t be like sentences. They might be more like maps, or models, or something else altogether” (2008, 262).

these involve things perceived, or merely taken to be in the vicinity (consider a blind person's cognitive perspective, or your own when you take it to be the case that someone is standing behind you). But we have doxastic commitments to various states of affairs obtaining that are not in our spatial (or even temporal or, indeed, modal vicinity). I can be committed to things obtaining far away from me, in the distant future, to things being likely or unlikely. What it is to be so committed, according to Marcus, is to be disposed to act (plan, bet, speak etc.) as if that state of affairs obtained. In her 1995 paper, she puts forward her analysis of belief as follows

An agent believes that S just in case (1) under agent-centered circumstances such as desires, needs, and other psychological states including other believings and (2) external circumstances (3) the agent will act as if S obtained, i.e., will act in ways appropriate to S being the *case*, where S is a state of affairs, actual or non-actual. (1995, 126)

She calls this a "Dispositional View" but it must be noted that it is identical to the earlier "Object-Centered View". It is simply approaching the matter with different theoretical concerns. The relation is fleshed out as a disposition to act, but the *relata* are still possible states of affairs. On such a view you still can't believe the impossible, and the appearance of believing the impossible is explained away in terms of dispositions towards states of affairs that *contain* linguistic entities.⁹ Indeed exactly *why* one can't believe the impossible becomes clearer: we cannot act (or be disposed to act) as if an impossible state of affairs obtained.

The best way of fleshing out the finer details of this view is to enumerate some important consequences. Some of these consequences contrast illustratively with its competitors. The last two consequences contrast with the view of belief implicit in the Standard Approach.

4.3. Some Consequences of the Object-Centered View

I. The relationship between language and belief: "Actions speak louder than words"

As we have seen, Marcus takes belief to exist without language, and takes language to be only one indicator of belief, and not an over-riding one. In fact, since language is a symbolic medium, it can cast distance between the subject *a* that which is asserted. Physical action, on the other hand, cannot do this and therefore *is* over-riding evidence for belief. Physical actions trump verbal actions because they are more of a commitment, and hence more revealing of how the subject takes things to stand in the world. If I merely *say*, "The bridge over the ravine is safe", I don't personally risk anything if I am wrong (although I may be misinforming somebody else). If I manifest that belief by crossing the bridge, I am risking rather a lot. I can say one thing and physically act contrary to what I have said. I can claim the bridge is safe, but refuse to use it (even though, we may suppose, it is much in my interest to get across it). But I

⁹ Namely, when I wrongly say that "Bruce Wayne is not Batman", I am not expressing a belief that actually has this content. That would require me to think that an individual is not self-identical, and that cannot be believed. I am in fact mistaken about the content of my utterance. And what that utterance betrays is my ignorance that, among other things, the linguistic entities, the names "Batman" and "Bruce Wayne", name the same individual.

cannot physically act in two opposing ways; I cannot perform an action whose success depends on one and the same state of affairs both obtaining and not obtaining.¹⁰ To put it another way, when people act in ways that conflict with their professed beliefs, we take their actions to betray what they “really” believe. As Marcus writes, “actions might belie the agent’s words and sincere assenting might not be the privileged marker of believing” (1990, 145).

Unlike the language-centered view, this allows, plausibly, that we can discover what it is that we really believe: “Verbalization as a necessary *condition* of believing precludes our discovering and then reporting what we believe” (1990, 139). It also allows that others may at times be better placed to know one’s beliefs than oneself.

All of this conflicts with language-centered views, but not necessarily with the internal representation-centered views. Currie and Egan, for example, clearly subscribe to the latter, but allow that one can be mistaken about one’s beliefs, and that others can be better placed to know what one believes. Indeed they claim that they themselves are better placed than the delusional subjects that they write about. However, note that being wrong about one’s own beliefs in their view amounts to failing to correctly identify one’s own mental representations. For Marcus, on the other hand, it’s simply a failure to be aware of one’s dispositions to action (in the relevant circumstances), and to put them accurately into words.

II. Dispositional and conscious believing

On Marcus’s view of belief, there is no problem with dispositional beliefs, namely, things that you believe but aren’t currently “in mind”, since belief has nothing to do with conscious assent of any kind. In fact, dispositional belief just is belief. Conscious, occurrent belief is, if anything, what is less obvious. Presumably, conscious belief is a belief of which you are conscious. It is becoming aware that you take the world to be a certain way (and that will be manifested in your dispositions to action). But a conscious belief would then actually give rise to second-order belief: the belief that you believe. When I say “I believe that this cup is in front of me” (or “This cup is in front of me”) I am actually, through my linguistic action, manifesting my belief that I believe that the cup is in front of me. Sincere, non-conceptually confused assertion manifests second-order belief, not first-order belief.

This also is not in conflict with Currie’s view. In fact, it is Currie’s adherence to this that enables the metacognitive view. If I believe that I believe that p , that will suffice to produce a sincere assertion: “ p ”. Or, to view it from the other angle, if I assert sincerely and without “conceptual confusion”, “ p ”, that is only a sure indication that I believe that I believe that p . It is not a sure indication that I believe that p .

The following two consequences of Marcus’s view of belief are in conflict with Currie’s view since they are not only incompatible with a language-centered view, but also with an internal-representation centered view.

¹⁰ I can be hesitant, but here I unambiguously manifest the belief that the bridge might break. Whether epistemic modals are built into the content or the attitude is a contentious issue that I won’t get into here. For a neat and plausible treatment of epistemic modals within the possible worlds framework see Yalcin (2011).

III. *The totality of what a subject believes*

On Marcus's view, the question "How many beliefs has a subject got?" has no determinate answer. There is perhaps a fact about *what* is believed, how the subject takes the world to be (what Stalnaker (1984) called the belief-set) but that is not the aggregate of individual beliefs: it is holistic. Rather, a subject can be truly said to have "a belief" if a certain belief attribution accurately captures relevant elements of the subject's belief-set. In stark contrast, on a Fodorian view, for example, the number of beliefs I have is simply the number of sentences in a language of thought that I have stored in my belief box. The totality of what I believe is simply the aggregate of these beliefs. The same applies for any view that takes *a* belief to be a "*discrete* representational item in the head" (see Egan 2008, quoted above), whether it is language-like or not.

To put it another way, on Marcus's view, what is believed has theoretical primacy over discrete things we call beliefs. If you look carefully, she almost never writes about *a* belief, or beliefs. She prefers to talk about belief and believing.¹¹ And indeed when she pluralizes belief, she writes "believings" not "beliefs" (e.g. see her "Dispositional View", quoted above). Belief (believing) is a phenomenon that subjects exhibit, it is not a thing that they have.

IV. *Rationality as Coherence, not Consistency*

Any view that takes beliefs to be discrete and sentential will derive the laws of rationality from those of logical *consistency*. Beliefs, like well-formed sentences, will be attributed logical properties like "consistent, contradictory, logically true, or related by deducibility and the like" (1990, 138).

Marcus, on the other hand, in taking belief to not be discrete or sentential, thinks of rationality in terms of coherent action of both physical and linguistic varieties. She speaks of "the irrationality of the subject who sincerely avows that S or holds 'S' true, yet his non-verbal actions belie it" (1990, 138). Earlier she states, in a way that will be crucial to our examination of some delusional patients,

We will say that an agent is perfectly rational if *all* the behavioural indicators of belief are "coherent" with one another. We may say of someone who avows that he loves another, yet treats cruelly the one he claims to love [...] that his behaviour is incoherent, "dissonant", that he is being irrational. (1983, 334)

5. *Downstream Idiosyncrasies and "Incoherence"*

Let us return to the functional idiosyncrasies (viz. i-iii above) that Currie pointed out. These divide into "upstream" and "downstream" idiosyncrasies. That delusions are not supported by evidence in their initial formation, and not responsive to review in the face of contrary evidence, are upstream idiosyncrasies (in the sense that in attempting to correct the delusion, you are providing *input* for judgment). That they don't guide action or subsequent reasoning, or elicit emotional responses, is a downstream idiosyncrasy (they are consequences of the subject's beliefs).

¹¹ A very clear illustration of this is in the titles of her three main papers on belief: "Rationality and *Believing* the Impossible", "Some Revisionary Proposals About *Belief and Believing*", "The Anti-naturalism of Some Language Centered Accounts of *Belief*".

On Marcus's object-centered, dispositional view, it seems doubtful whether any upstream idiosyncrasies prevent something from being a case of belief. Although it seems plausible that upstream issues answer questions about whether something is good or bad believing, e.g. questions concerning epistemic evaluation regarding whether it is warranted or justified, it is less clear whether they are relevant to whether it is to qualify as believing at all. In other words, these upstream issues about sensitivity to evidence describe the functional role of *good* belief, not belief *tout court*.

What interests us in determining whether something is a case of believing is whether an organism takes the world to be a certain way, takes a certain state of affairs to obtain, and if it does, what that state of affairs is and how best to characterize it. It is not strictly relevant (although it is clearly an interesting question) how it is that the organism came to have this belief. Indeed the idea of a mad scientist manipulating your brain so as to "implant" a certain belief (a disposition to action) is not *prima facie* ruled out by our concept of belief. This would be a prime case of unjustified, unsupported belief, but nonetheless it would count as belief, for example, if the subject were disposed to act upon it in the relevant circumstances.

The consequence that this has for the question of whether delusions are beliefs is clear. Contrary to the claims of Currie and Egan, if we want to claim that delusional patients don't really believe what they assert, it is not to resistance in the face of contradictory evidence, or to lack of supporting evidence during formation, that we should turn. This tells us whether they are believing *badly* (and actually presupposes that they are *believing*). Rather, we need to show that the delusional patient is, all things considered, failing to act or reason in accordance with her professed beliefs. In other words, we need to demonstrate "incoherence" in Marcus's sense, on the part of the subject. Only then should we say that she doesn't truly believe what she appears to. The delusional patient would then be (but for very different reasons) like a boss who claims that he believes in the equality of the sexes, but then goes on to employ a demonstrably sexist hiring policy. In short, we need to find downstream idiosyncrasies, such as a disparity between action and utterance. The fact that delusions are unsupported (*viz.* i) and are resistant to counter-evidence (*viz.* ii) cannot serve to rob them of belief-status.

6. *Towards a different anti-doxasticism*

Now let's turn to the patients. Do they display the "incoherence" that Marcus speaks of? Do they fail to act and reason in accordance with their claims? It is generally accepted that Capgras patients often fail to show concern for the replaced loved one. Patient DS (Hirstein and Ramachandran 1997) for example, exhibits a striking lack of concern for the welfare or whereabouts of his real father. Speaking of his father's impostor, he calmly says: "He's a nice guy, doctor, but he's not my father" (p. 438). Granted, it is not always the case that *no* concern is shown for the replaced loved one. However, there is still the problem of how fleeting this concern is. Lucchelli and Spinnler (2007) give us the case of patient "Fred" and his wife "Wilma" (both, of course, fictitious names):

On another occasion, he urged her [his wife, Wilma] to go with him to report Wilma's disappearance. *Most of the times*, however, he was quite pleased to see her as the "double" Wilma and addressed her in a very gentle way. His wife [viz. Wilma] described his manner as "courting as when we were dating" (189, emphasis added).

So, although Fred occasionally acted as if his wife was missing, he was mostly perfectly happy with the double Wilma. But if the double Wilma, isn't the "real" Wilma, then where is the real Wilma? Surely these are not the actions one expects from a man who asserts that his wife, whom he loved very much, is missing.

Just as it is partly constitutive, for example, of your believing that something is deadly poisonous that you should refrain from eating it if you want to stay alive, so it seems to be partly constitutive of your believing that a loved one has been replaced by an impostor that you should be concerned for the welfare or whereabouts of the loved one in question. One might say that if you are not concerned then it either can't be a "loved one" that you believe is missing (and here there are two possibilities: either you don't really believe that it is *that person* that's missing, or you can't have *loved* them very much), or you can't really *believe* that they are missing (i.e. it is some other attitude that falls short of belief, like imagining). In other words, you can locate the deviance at the level either of content or of attitude. Currie does the latter and that is why he proposes that delusions are actually imaginings mistaken by the subject for beliefs (his "metacognitive view").

The crucial point is therefore that, although that utterance, however sincere, is not a guaranteed indicator of belief, on the Standard Approach it must be explained in terms of some other discrete representational state. For Currie this is an imagining, whereas for Egan it is a *sui generis* state, a "bimagining". If that utterance doesn't give voice to a belief, it must be giving voice to something else.

But on Marcus's object-centred view, such a claim would be confusing. Linguistic behaviour has no special status. I can utter all sorts of things that don't correspond to anything in my mental economy, just as when I wave my arms about, that doesn't correspond to a mental state. Furthermore, it seems that, aside from being a multifarious thing (propositional, imagistic etc), imagination is *categorically* different from belief as Marcus conceives of it. Unlike believing, imagining is episodic and conscious; you don't have dispositional or unconscious imaginings. Furthermore, sometimes we can come to believe on the basis of an imaginative episode. Imagination can be input for judgment. Consider the following exchange between a hallucinating subject and his friend.

- Why are you cowering in the corner?
- Because there's a Lion in the room
- No there isn't; you're just imagining it.

Here the subject both imagines *and* believes, or rather, believes on the basis of an imaginative episode. They are not exclusive states of the same kind.

As a result of these categorical differences between belief and imagination it is confused to ask whether a state is a belief or an imagining. Nor should we, like Egan (2008), say that it is somewhere in between (a “bimagining”). Rather, we want to know *what* is believed, what state of affairs the subject takes to obtain, as manifested in dispositions to action.

Now, some people might say, “Look, there has to be more to belief than mere dispositions to action, since there are states that fall short of belief, but which have similar behavioural consequences.” Note, however, that the objector is confusing the individuation conditions of action and mere behaviour. Actions aren’t simply endogenous bodily movements. You individuate actions by their goals or intentions. Part of what makes something imagination or make-believe, rather than belief, is not, as Currie emphasizes, that it’s not responsive to epistemic reasons, but rather that the action on the basis of which you ascribe the merely imaginative episode in question is different from the action on the basis of which you would ascribe a state of believing (even if the *behaviour* is superficially the same). An actor on stage who runs away from something dangerous in the play doesn’t believe that he is in danger, but rather believes that he is acting in a play, wants to give the audience the impression of being in danger, and that this is how that’s done. He therefore isn’t literally performing the action of running away from danger, however convincing he may be in his acting.

If a Capgras patient were to frantically call the police, and insist on the absence of her loved ones, insist in desperation that her claims be taken more seriously, this abundantly indicates that she takes herself to inhabit a world where her parents are missing. If this belief is resistant to correction, or not formed on the basis of good epistemic reasons, it’s still a *belief*. Sure, it’s an epistemically *bad*, ill-founded belief, but it’s still a belief and, indeed, that evaluation presupposes that what we are talking about is belief.

So, to sum up, not only is Marcus’s view of the nature of belief very different from that which is implicit in the Standard Approach, it also means that different considerations are taken into account when it comes to deciding whether a given case is a case of belief. In particular, upstream considerations do not matter for an object-centered, dispositional view. What matters is how the subject takes the world to be, not how she came to take the world to be that way. Furthermore, when there is incoherence of the sort that prevents us from ascribing belief on the basis of the subject’s assertions, there is no need to think that there is some other state with that content, some underlying representational state that isn’t belief. All we can say is that the patient doesn’t really take the world to be the way suggested by her utterances. The subject is performing an inaccurate self-ascription. What causes the utterances, and what prevents them from being acted upon, is an interesting, but ultimately empirical, question.

7. Conclusion

If we adopt Marcus's view of belief, we no longer ask, as the Standard Approach does, "Is this discrete representational state a belief, or is it something else?" Rather, we ask "What is believed?", "How does the patient take things to stand in the world?" From this perspective, the philosophically interesting problem with delusional patients is not only that we find it hard to understand how it is that they come to make the claims that they do (these upstream considerations are what make us call them delusional, what makes us say that their assertions are *bad* assertions, and if believed would be *bad* belief) but also that we sometimes find it hard to understand how they actually take the world to be.¹² They sometimes claim one thing, and act in a way that is not coherent with what they claim. This gets to the heart of what is really perplexing about delusional patients, and why we can't simply read what they believe off their assertions. The question of whether a discrete representational state, "the delusion", is "a belief" comes with a great deal of theoretical baggage that Marcus would have found implausible.

REFERENCES

- Bortolotti, Lisa. 2009. *Delusions and Other Irrational Beliefs*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Bayne, Tim and Pacherie, Elisabeth. 2005. In defence of the doxastic conception of delusion. *Mind & Language*, 20 (2): 163-188.
- Bayne, Tim. 2011. Delusions as Doxastic States: Contexts, Compartments, and Commitments. *Philosophy, Psychiatry, and Psychology* 17 (4): 429-436.
- Currie, Gregory. 2000. Imagination, delusion and hallucinations. In M. Coltheart and M. Davies (eds.) *Pathologies of Belief*, Oxford: Blackwell, 167-182.
- . and Jureidini, Jon. 2001. Delusions, rationality, empathy, *Philosophy, Psychiatry and Psychology*, 8 (2-3): 159-162.
- . and Ravenscroft, Ian. 2002. *Recreative Minds: Imagination in Philosophy and Psychology*, Oxford: Oxford University Press
- Davies, Martin and Coltheart, Max. 2000. Introduction. In Max Coltheart and Martin Davies (eds.), *Pathologies of Belief*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1-46.
- . Coltheart, Max, Langdon, Robyn and Breen, Nora. 2001. Monothematic delusions: Towards a two-factor account, *Philosophy, Psychiatry and Psychology*, 8(2/3): 133-158.
- Dennett, Daniel. 1981. Cure for the Common Code. In *Brainstorms: Philosophical Essays on Mind and Psychology*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press.
- Egan, Andy. 2008. Imagination, Delusion and Self-Deception. In Tim Bayne and Jordi Fernández (eds.), *Delusion and Self-deception: Affective and Motivational Influences on Belief Formation*, Hove: Psychology Press.
- Ellis, Haydn and Young, Andy. 1990. Accounting for delusional misidentifications. *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 157: 239-248.
- Fodor, Jerry. 1975. *The Language of Thought*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.
- Gallagher, Shaun. 2009. Delusional realities. In Matthew Broome and Lisa Bortolotti (eds.) *Psychiatry as Cognitive Neuroscience: Philosophical Perspectives*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 245-268.
- Maher, Brendan. 1974. Delusional thinking and perceptual disorder. *Journal of Individual Psychology*, 30: 98-113.

¹² Sass (1994) approaches the question in a similar way. What we have is the subject engaging in what Sass calls "a solipsistic mode of experience", which leads to "double bookkeeping". In other words, the subject doesn't locate himself in one possible world, but switches readily from one to the other, from the real to delusional realities. Gallagher (2009), also talks of "delusional realities". However, these accounts apply more clearly to schizophrenia patients than brain-damaged patients.

- Marcus, Ruth Barcan. 1990 Some Revisionary Proposals About Belief and Believing. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 50:133-153.
- . 1983. Rationality and Believing the Impossible. *Journal of Philosophy* 80 (6):321-338.
- . 1995 The Anti-naturalism of Some Language Centered Accounts of Belief. *Dialectica* 49: 113-130.
- Reimer, Marga. 2009. Is the Impostor Hypothesis Really so Preposterous? Understanding the Capgras Experience, *Philosophical Psychology*, 22 (6): 669-686.
- Sass, Louis. 1994. *The Paradoxes of Delusion: Wittgenstein, Schreber, and the Schizophrenic Mind*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Stalnaker, Robert. 1984. *Inquiry*. Cambridge MA: MIT Press.
- Tumulty, Maura. 2012. Delusions and Not-Quite-Beliefs. *Neuroethics* 5 (1): 29-37.
- Yalcin, Seth. 2011. Nonfactualism About Epistemic Modality. In Andy Egan & Brian Weatherson (eds.), *Epistemic Modality*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

SAM WILKINSON is a Postdoctoral Research Fellow in Philosophy at Durham University, working within a Wellcome Trust funded project that examines voice hearing in pathological and non-pathological contexts. He received his PhD from the University of Edinburgh for a thesis entitled *Monothematic Delusions and the Nature of Belief*.

ADDRESS: Department of Philosophy, Durham University, 50 Old Elvet, Durham DH1 3HN, UK.
E-mail: sam.l.j.wilkinson@gmail.com