

## BOOK REVIEWS

Nikolaj Nottelmann (ed.), *New Essays on Belief: Constitution, Content and Structure*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, xii + 258 pp., GBP 55 (Hardback), ISBN 9781137026514.

This is a collection of 11 papers addressing the latest developments in a number of philosophical debates surrounding the notion of belief. The choice of contributors is excellent and varied, and topics range from the metaphysics, phenomenology and ethics of belief to the role of delusions and self-knowledge in uncovering important aspects of the concept of belief.

We shall briefly describe the content of each chapter and then comment on two chapters in particular. In “Belief Metaphysics: the Basic Questions”, Nikolaj Nottelmann offers a review of the most important metaphysical issues surrounding the notion of belief. In “Belief: A Study of Form, Content and Reference”, Robert Audi addresses key debates about the nature of belief. Daniel Hutto challenges the view that beliefs are necessarily attitudes with content in his “Why Believe in Contentless Beliefs?”. Eric Schwitzgebel’s chapter, “A Dispositional Approach to Attitudes: Thinking outside the Belief Box”, argues that dispositional profiles are central to all propositional attitudes. In “Belief and Belief’s Penumbra”, Robert Matthews asks how we should understand marginal cases of belief, such as the Capgras delusion. Tim Bayne and Anandi Hattiangadi discuss the status of delusions, self-deception and implicit attitudes, in “Belief and its Bedfellows”. In “On Knowing Your Own Beliefs: A Representationalist Account”, Peter Carruthers examines the implications of his theory of self-knowledge for commitments about the nature of belief. Erin Eaker writes about belief ascription and its role in providing an account of belief in “Keeping Attitude Metaphysics out of Attitude Ascription Semantics (and Vice Versa)”. Søren Harnow Klausen argues in “Losing Belief, While Keeping up the Attitudes: The Case for Cognitive Phenomenology” that there are good reasons not to apply phenomenological considerations to belief. In “Belief State Intensity” Dale Jacquette talks about the variable degree of strength with which people believe. In the last chapter, “Some Metaphysical Implications of a Credible Ethics of Belief”, Nikolaj Nottelmann returns to the metaphysics of belief and asks what commitments a credible ethics of belief requires.

The book comprehends several themes each of which would deserve attention: how important content is in identifying beliefs, whether there is a phenomenology

of believing, and whether people are epistemically blameworthy for having false beliefs. In this review, we shall focus on another theme: what marginal cases of belief can tell us about beliefs. The excellent contributions by Matthews and by Bayne and Hattiangadi address this issue head-on. They start with an examination of clinical delusions as marginal cases of belief, and express some doubts about the project of defining delusions as new propositional attitudes or hybrid ones.

We thoroughly enjoyed reading these two chapters and strongly recommend them to anybody interested in the philosophical issues raised by clinical delusions. Matthews's account of the socially constructive genesis and dispositional nature of folk-psychological attributions is inspiring, and Bayne and Hattiangadi make very persuasive objections to the positing of hybrid mental states in the characterization of delusions. Here we shall focus on some critical comments. In section 1, we question the way in which the debate is set up. In section 2, we express a concern about the way in which the alleged encapsulation of delusions is used to threaten their doxastic status. In section 3, we comment on the authors' critique of Schwitzgebel's account of delusions as in-between cases of believing.

### *1. Idealizing non-delusional beliefs*

In both papers, the main question is whether we should consider delusions as beliefs, given that there is a strong intuition that belief attribution in the context of delusional reports is unwarranted. The way of setting up the problem relies on an idealized conception of belief. Our impression is that, if such conception is abandoned, there is no longer a strong intuition that belief attribution is unwarranted in the case of delusions.

In the two papers, the territory is carved up differently. Matthews considers three approaches to the question whether delusions count as beliefs: (1) the doxastic camp downplays differences between delusional believing and ordinary believing and stresses the motivational factors that explain encapsulation; (2) the anti-doxastic camp maintains that delusions and other behaviourally and affectively encapsulated belief-like states are other than belief (either acts of imagination or hybrid states); and (3) the middle-ground view argues that delusions and other encapsulated belief-like states are just one type of belief, suggesting that the common-sense notion of belief is ambiguous and needs unpacking. For Matthews, these three approaches fail to reconcile the encapsulation of delusions with the strong conviction in the delusional claims.

Bayne and Hattiangadi distinguish between two approaches to marginal cases of belief, the conservative and the radical one. Conservatives want to explain delusions within the resources of traditional folk-psychology, and they do so either by insisting that delusions are beliefs, or by arguing that they are other than belief, but that their status can be captured by other familiar kinds of propositional

attitudes (e.g., acts of imagination). Radicals, instead, propose a revision to standard folk-psychological categories: either delusions are new types of propositional attitudes (e.g., aliefs or bimaginings), or they force us to rethink drastically the nature of belief (e.g., in-between cases of believing).

Neither way of carving up the territory is very friendly to the modest doxasticist about delusions, who claims that typical delusions are beliefs, and that beliefs are not required to be rational to play their folk-psychological role, that is, to help explain and predict action. For Matthews, the doxastic camp does not account for the difficulties in predicting behaviour on the basis of attributions of delusions as beliefs: delusions do “not bear the sorts of *rational* relations to the subject’s other propositional attitudes which enable prediction of this subject’s behaviour, cognition, and affect” (Matthews 2013, 108, our emphasis). This assumes that rationality has a role in enabling prediction of behaviour. Is rationality necessary for predictability? With some background knowledge, competent observers can easily interpret the behaviour of people with delusions on the basis of their reports, and that is what clinical psychiatrists routinely do.

Bayne and Hattiangadi dismiss quickly the doxastic version of the conservative strategy, on the basis that “the functional roles played by quasi-beliefs often depart from the functional role associated with the concept of belief *in extreme ways*” (Bayne and Hattiangadi 2013, 127, our emphasis), and focus instead on the radical proposals. Conservatives of doxastic inclinations agree that delusions depart to some extent from the ideal functional role associated with the concept of belief, but they press the ‘double standards’ objection. If we strip delusions of their doxastic status because they fail to conform to an ideal conception of belief, then, on the same grounds, we have to strip doxastic status from other mental states which are paradigmatic instances of belief, such as superstitious beliefs that are badly supported by the available evidence, or beliefs in scientific theories that are not responsive to evidence (Bortolotti 2009, 113–158).

## 2. *Encapsulation*

Why are delusions regarded as marginal cases of belief and defined as other than belief? The following argument is often made to support the non-doxastic nature of delusions: (1) beliefs guide action in a consistent way; (2) delusions do not guide action in a consistent way; (3) delusions are not beliefs. In the chapters by Matthews and by Bayne and Hattiangadi, there is a reference to the fact that most people with the Capgras delusion (who believe that one of their loved ones has been replaced by an impostor) do not actively look for the missing person, and that people with the Cotard delusion (who believe that they are dead or disembodied) typically continue to eat, drink and talk as usual. Matthews acknowledges that non-delusional beliefs have a similar disconnection with the person’s other

behavioural and affective responses, and argues that this lack of commitment to one's professed beliefs (which he characterizes as behavioural and affective encapsulation) needs further investigating. Bayne and Hattiangadi consider a number of marginal cases in addition to delusions, such as self-deception, implicit attitudes and self-predictions: in all of the cases they describe, people's explicit belief-like reports badly match the observed behaviour.

But does behavioural and affective encapsulation threaten the doxastic nature of delusions? Matthews recognizes that such encapsulation is not distinctive of delusions, and that we do not standardly review the doxastic status of those beliefs that happen not to exercise influence on behaviour. Moreover, as clinical psychiatrists know, the alleged 'behavioural inertness' of delusions is not a very common phenomenon. Typically, people with delusions are massively preoccupied with the content of their delusions and act on them (or they would not come to the attention of healthcare professionals in the first place). A plausible claim is that some delusions are *more* behaviourally and affectively encapsulated *than* non-delusional beliefs, but this could be easily explained by the fact that in people with delusions the motivation to act is compromised for independent reasons. It might be that we can appeal to 'relevant non-standard factors', and say that the content of the reports is genuinely believed – "non-standard perceptual and affective conditions may be thought to excuse the patient from manifesting the cognitive dispositions stereotypically associated with their belief" (Bayne and Pacherie 2005, 184). For instance, we can say that though delusional patients really do believe what they say, they lack motivation to act on it due to the meta-representational deficits and the flat affect associated with schizophrenia (see Bortolotti and Broome 2012). In the light of these remarks, the fact that delusions may be more behaviourally and affectively encapsulated than other beliefs does not offer sufficient reason to question the doxastic status of delusions.

### 3. *The critique of Schwitzgebel's account*

Both chapters take issue with Schwitzgebel's proposal that what makes something a belief is its functional profile, characterized as a set of dispositions. We also prefer an account of believing according to which being a belief does not come in degrees, but we think the arguments against Schwitzgebel's account offered in the two chapters are too quick. For Schwitzgebel, typical delusions do not fully meet the dispositional profile of beliefs, and thus they are neither beliefs nor non-beliefs, but something in-between. Matthews's objection is that accounting for delusions as cases of vagueness leaves unexplained why there is a strong temptation to describe delusions as beliefs: "There is [...] a serious difficulty with Schwitzgebel's dispositional proposal, namely, that it doesn't seem to explain why we should have the predilection that we do to describe delusions in propositional

attitude terms” (Matthews 2013, 114). Bayne and Hattiangadi’s objection is that Schwitzgebel’s account is not able to tell us how to predict action on the basis of in-between cases of beliefs. If one ‘in-between believes’ that  $p$ , will one be disposed to act on  $p$ ? “We know that citing a belief-desire pair rationalizes a subject’s behaviour, but can citing a fuzzy-belief-desire pair also rationalize a subject’s behaviour?”. And again: “It is not clear [. . .] how the fuzzy conception of belief might accommodate the rational dimension of belief-talk” (Bayne and Hattiangadi 2013, 139, 140).

There is room in Schwitzgebel’s account to respond to both of these objections, and, to some extent, the objections betray (again) an idealized conception of what beliefs are like. First, Schwitzgebel is not committed to the view that all cases of delusions are in-between cases. When delusions match the dispositional stereotype of belief to a very large extent, then we take a doxastic stance towards them. When delusions match the stereotype of belief fairly poorly, then, we take a non-doxastic stance towards them, and Schwitzgebel’s account has the resources to explain this. This seems to provide a rejoinder to Matthews’s concerns because via Schwitzgebel’s account we can perfectly diagnose our ‘being in two minds’ about the status of delusions. The framework has the flexibility to accommodate the variety of features we find both in clinical delusions and in other plausible examples of borderline beliefs.

Second, it is true that some work needs to be done to map out the dispositional outcomes of in-between cases of belief, and this might interfere with the clear-cut description often offered for the folk-psychological role of beliefs in the explanation and prediction of behaviour. Schwitzgebel seems to be aware of this, and embraces fuzziness not just in the characterization of in-between beliefs, but also in their contribution to explaining and predicting action (Schwitzgebel 2012). He says: “One virtue of a dispositional account of belief is that by discouraging the pursuit of a further truth about the subject’s real state of believing underlying his mixed dispositional profile, it allows us easily and appropriately to settle with in-between answers to questions about belief” (Schwitzgebel 2001, 82), and similarly, “once the dispositional profile of the subject is made clear, it is a mistake to think that there is still some further question to be answered, namely, what does the subject *really* believe?” (Schwitzgebel 2002, 266). For Schwitzgebel, behavioural dispositions associated with a given belief are defeasible, such that if a situation is non-standard, we cannot expect the manifestation of the stereotypical dispositions associated with a given belief (Ib., 253). For Schwitzgebel, “the manifestation of stereotypical dispositions depends on the satisfaction of both a range of explicit conditions and a range of tacit, *ceteris paribus* conditions” (Ib., 256).

Let us consider the person who fuzzily believes that  $p$  and is disposed to behave just like someone who believes that  $p$  in some respects, or in some contexts, but not

in all respects, or in all contexts. Having some information about the explicit conditions and *ceteris paribus* conditions for a given belief, and the respects and the contexts in which the mental state meets the dispositional profile of that belief, one could use ascriptions in propositional attitude terms to explain and predict the person's behaviour. The in-between belief that *p* will have the same relations as a full-blown belief that *p* to some intentional states or actions, and will have different relations from the full-blown belief that *p* to other intentional states or actions. The in-between belief that *p* will match some of the dispositional stereotype for the full-blown belief that *p*. Explanation and prediction of behaviour in terms of propositional attitudes is obviously more complicated in this framework, but it is probably also more psychologically realistic than the idealized version of our folk-psychological practices, according to which beliefs have rational relations to other intentional states and to action.

As the discussion of the two papers we have selected shows, the book includes excellent contributions to the literature on belief which philosophers of mind and epistemologists need to be acquainted with.

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