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Delusions from the perspective of the analytical philosophy of mind

Traditionally, the main aim of the analytical philosophy of mind is to describe a puzzling relationship between the brain and the mind. Philosophers working within this tradition offered a variety of tools and theories in order to explain the abovementioned connection.

Not surprisingly, the philosophy of psychiatry, as strongly connected with the explanation of mental phenomena, has become the point of interest of the analytical philosophers of mind. One of the focal points of interest of philosophy of psychiatry is the phenomenon of the aberrant beliefs. Delusions, crudely defined as false beliefs based on the incorrect inference have occupied the minds of the philosophers of psychiatry for many years, giving rise to a multitude of theories aimed at properly describing the phenomenon.

The main aim of this talk is to explore the metaphysical presuppositions of the doxastic debate i.e. the discussion whether delusions should count as beliefs and offer a metaphilosophical commentary on the debate from the perspective of analytical philosophy of mind.

Adherents of the view that delusions are beliefs, typically use arguments from assertion or from first-person reports to support their position (Bortolotti & Miyazono, 2015). The response to that is that delusions cannot be beliefs because beliefs are rational and delusions do not behave in a rational way (Currie & Ravenscroft 2002). Some theorists offer arguments based on the apparent irrationality of everyday beliefs to conclude that delusions could be beliefs despite their irrationality (Bortolotti, 2010).

Although support for the doxasticism is prevalent among philosophers, a variety of alternatives have been presented in recent literature. Some try to fit delusions somewhere between beliefs and non-belief states while others attempt to find another status for delusions. Thus, scholars of the former kind hold the view that delusions are bimaginations i.e. things located between belief and imagination (Egan, 2009; Currie and Jones, 2006) or that delusions are 'in-between beliefs' (Schwitzgebel, 2012). Arguing for the latter view, some scholars try to prove that we should build a separate category for delusions. According to them, delusions could be perceptual states (Hohwy and Rajan, 2012) or acceptations generated by strong cognitive feelings (Dub, 2015). On the basis of the debate and its metaphysical presuppositions, I would try to unravel the possible connection between the analytical and empirical study of delusions.