Delusions and Not-Quite-Beliefs

Maura Tumulty

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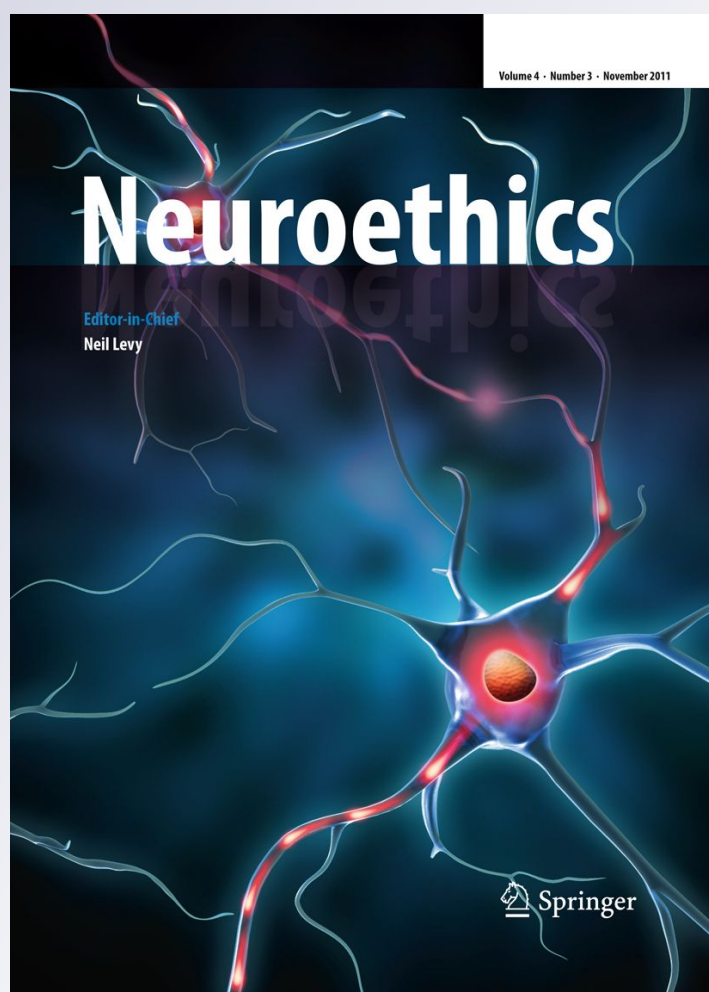
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ORIGINAL PAPER

Delusions and Not-Quite-Beliefs

Maura Tumulty

Abstract Bortolotti argues that the irrationality of many delusions is no different in kind from the irrationality that marks many non-pathological states typically treated as beliefs. She takes this to secure the doxastic status of those delusions. Bortolotti's approach has many benefits. For example, it accounts for the fact that we can often make some sense of what deluded subjects are up to, and helps explain why some deluded subjects are helped by cognitive behavioral therapy. But there is an alternative approach that secures the same benefits as Bortolotti's account while bringing additional benefits. The alternative approach treats both many delusions and many of the non-pathological states to which Bortolotti compares them as in-between states. Subjects in in-between states don't fully believe the beliefs which it is sometimes convenient to ascribe to them. This alternative approach to belief and belief-ascription fits well with an independently attractive account of the varied purposes of our ordinary attitude ascriptions. It also makes it easier to make fine-grained distinctions between intentional attitudes of different kinds.

Keywords Beliefs · Bortolotti · Delusions ·
Dispositionalism · Folk-psychology · Regulative ·
Schwitzgebel

Bortolotti argues that any constitutive connection between rationality and belief strong enough to deny

M. Tumulty (✉)
Colgate University,
13 Oak Drive,
Hamilton, NY 13346, USA
e-mail: mtumulty@colgate.edu

doxastic character to delusions will be too strong. It will end up denying doxastic character to many non-pathological states that are treated—in philosophy, scientific psychology, and folk-psychology—as beliefs. Bortolotti concludes that we should continue to treat these non-pathological, but nevertheless imperfectly rational, states as beliefs. We should also grant that most delusions are beliefs, and reject the contention that there are any constitutive connections between rationality (or norms of rationality) and belief.

Bortolotti is right that no good account of belief will deny doxastic character to *all* delusions. She is also right that the status of some delusions should stand or fall with the status of non-pathological states that seem in other ways similar. But she assumes that adhering to these commitments will result in our increasing the number of beliefs we acknowledge. That is, she assumes that once we've paid careful attention to the similarities between delusions and various non-pathological (but irrational) belief-like states, we'll maintain our confidence that the non-pathological belief-like states are indeed beliefs, and conclude that relevantly similar delusions are beliefs as well. She doesn't consider seriously the possibility that the similarities between some delusions and some non-pathological, irrational states should lead us to conclude that none of them is really a belief. That other possibility is attractive, however. It accounts for the empirical data Bortolotti presents, which make clear how badly rational norms are violated by many of the states we label beliefs. And it pays the right kind of respect to the rational (and other) norms with which we are concerned when we think about belief.

Here's how to make it palatable to give up the doxastic status of some of these states. First, suppose that beliefs are dispositions to think, feel, and behave in certain ways (see [1–3]). A particular belief is identified with the set of dispositions stereotypically associated with it in folk-psychology. Someone has a belief if she has the relevant set of dispositions.[1] To assess this, we look first at the dispositions she manifests. We also consider whether some factor may excuse her for failing to manifest a disposition she nevertheless has. (For example, my remaining silent in your presence about the plans for your surprise birthday party is an excused non-manifestation of a disposition I nevertheless have: to avow my beliefs when asked.) The stereotypical association between a belief and various cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dispositions is normative in two senses. First, many of the dispositions in the stereotype set for a particular belief will be dispositions to follow certain norms—such as 'when affirming p, don't affirm not-p'. Secondly, on such an account, having a belief just is a matter of living up to the folk-psychological expectations for believers of that content—the expectations that one match the stereotype, and that one live up to the other folk-psychological norms governing believers of that content.

It isn't always clear when someone does match a relevant stereotype. That's because there are two different ways of relieving our puzzlement about why someone isn't acting in accordance with a stereotype we expect her to match, and it isn't always clear which is operative. Sometimes, an explanation of why someone fails to manifest a disposition in an apparently appropriate way works by showing that she *has* the disposition (and hence matches the stereotype in that respect) even though something inhibits her from acting on it. Sometimes, however, it works by laying out the reasons why she entirely lacks a relevant disposition. In that case, we see that she deviates from the stereotype in a particular respect. Such a subject is in what Eric Schwitzgebel calls a state of in-between belief.[2] The question of whether she does or doesn't have the belief in question has no determinate answer. Such indeterminacy also applies in cases in which there is no clear distinction between the inhibition of a nevertheless present disposition, and the absence of the relevant disposition. Subjects in those cases are also in in-between states.[3]

On this account, when a subject violates a norm that shapes an important part of the dispositional

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[1] Strictly speaking, the dispositions in question are those that are *apt* to be associated with the belief. Competence with folk-psychology means we can associate dispositions even with novel beliefs on first hearing them (see [2], p. 251). Some of these dispositions are ones we would associate with almost any belief. But others will be particular to beliefs with certain contents. Either kind of disposition will likely be characterized in conditional form: to have the belief is to be disposed to think, feel, or behave thusly, if certain conditions hold. Thus, to believe that grandma's delcious chocolate cake is on the kitchen table ready to be served is to be disposed to come to the kitchen *if* one desires a piece of such a cake (see [2], p. 251, and pp. 253–7 (on the role of *ceteris paribus* clauses in dispositional specifications)). Many dispositions in a stereotypical profile will be specified by conditional statements whose antecedents refer to other propositional attitudes. (So this account of attitudes is non-reductive.) The account can therefore handle the fact that two subjects who both believe that p will behave differently in the same circumstances, because they differ in their other propositional attitudes.

[2] The label 'in-between belief' does not function to pick out a special state that someone is determinately in. It is a convenient way of referring to the fact that a particular subject fails fully to meet *any* relevant folk-psychological stereotype. A subject is in a state of in-between belief when, for example, she does not fully fit the stereotype for believing that p, but also fails to fully fit the stereotypes for other intentional attitudes in the neighborhood—such as the stereotypes for believing that not-p, or imagining that p.

[3] Bortolotti briefly considers what she terms a 'sliding scale' approach to belief, on which subjects who deviate from norms of rationality may count as having partial rather than full beliefs, and on which it may sometimes be indeterminate whether a subject's behavior "can be legitimately characterised by the ascription of beliefs" ([4], p. 21). She rejects it for her purposes on pragmatic grounds, however, because it makes it harder to give yes or no answers to questions about the intentionality of behavior, and hence makes it harder to apply the intentionality test in ethical and other contexts (p. 21). Now, if one *simply* wants ease of application, one could decide to treat all cases of in-between believing as sufficient (or not) for passing the test for intentional behavior. Ease of application isn't Bortolotti's ultimate concern, however. She does express concern about approaches that require us to look beyond what is observable in the moment of ascription (p. 91). But in her treatment of authorship, it becomes clear that decisions about whether to count someone as a believer will involve taking a fairly wide-angle look at a subject's current and potential behavior. She also allows that authorship—the capacity to defend a current belief with reasons—comes in degrees. Her discussion of the difficulty of ascribing insufficiently authored beliefs to others suggests she might allow that in some cases it is indeterminate whether a particular delusional content is appropriately ascribed as a belief (see 252). Bortolotti might, therefore, be more sympathetic to an in-between approach than her initial discussion of the sliding scale option suggests.

profile for a belief, she fails fully to have the belief in question. An ascription of that belief to her isn't flatly true, though it may be convenient. Provided one's audience isn't going to expect manifestations of the dispositions this subject lacks, it can be easier—and not illegitimate—to attribute a belief to her, rather than laboriously list all the dispositions she in fact has. With this option on the table, we can question the status of some of the ascriptions of belief we make in non-pathological cases marked by irrationality. Perhaps some of those ascriptions are merely convenient shorthand ways of referring to a group of dispositions a subject has. They may not rest on the recognition of full conformity to dispositional stereotype that issues in a flatly true ascription. It is possible that the subjects in those cases don't measure up to key folk-psychological norms and therefore (on this account of belief) don't fully believe the beliefs in question.[4]

But just because it is possible to take this tack doesn't mean we should. Bortolotti's approach has serious benefits. Among other things, it accounts for the fact that we can often make some sense of what deluded subjects are up to. It accounts for the fact that some subjects suffering from delusions are helped by cognitive behavioral therapy, and gives us reason to encourage the use of that approach whenever possible. It enables us to get a clear view of some striking similarities between how deluded subjects treat their delusions and how non-deluded subjects treat some of their beliefs. Most generally, it gives us a way of thinking about belief that doesn't deny the extent to which all of us are, quite regularly and sometimes spectacularly, irrational. What would we gain by taking the alternative tack I'm recommending? As I will argue, we wouldn't lose any of the benefits of Bortolotti's account by taking this tack. We would also acquire two additional benefits. We would have an account of belief and belief-ascription that fit well with an independently attractive account of the varied

purposes of our ordinary attitude ascriptions. And we would have an easier time making fine-grained distinctions between intentional attitudes of different kinds.[5]

To begin, let me explain why the benefits of Bortolotti's account can be preserved on a dispositional account of belief that allows some belief-ascriptions to lack a determinate truth-value. When a deluded subject has some of the dispositions in the stereotype set for a belief in the content of her delusion, she is in those respects like someone with the relevant belief. The degree to which we understand her reflects that fact. Such an individual could be helped by cognitive behavioral therapy. Such therapy might help her to acquire some of the dispositions she currently lacks that are relevant to the belief in question. (At that point, one hopes, she might realize she doesn't want to have that belief anymore—she wants to abandon all the dispositions in the relevant set). Alternatively, it could help her see that precisely because she lacks many of the dispositions in the relevant stereotype set, she ought to get rid of the few she does have.[6] Both in ordinary efforts at understanding, and in clinical therapeutic contexts, we are pragmatically permitted to ascribe the content of a delusion to a subject as a belief if our audience won't be misled by that language into expecting more compliance with the stereotype than the subject will actually display. So if a therapist finds it convenient to ascribe the content of a delusion to her patient as a belief, nothing on this account rules that out.

Such pragmatic permission extends to our ways of talking about non-deluded subjects who fail to match stereotypes for beliefs we might be inclined to ascribe to them. Furthermore, some of our ordinary ascriptive activity is like an informal version of cognitive behavioral therapy: we try to help one another better match the stereotypical dispositional profiles for the attitudes we are ascribed (this will be further discussed below). Similar tools for recognizing, marking, and correcting failures to fit stereotypes are available both when discussing deluded subjects and subjects whose failures don't appear to stem from any pathology. So on the in-between account, we are still able to attend

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[4] I have presented, and will continue to present, the idea of in-between belief in concert with a dispositional model of belief. But any account of belief on which it is possible for a subject to satisfy some but not all of the criteria for believing that *p* could be developed into an account on which it is sometimes indeterminate whether a subject believes that *p*. (Schwitzgebel explains how to generate in-between belief on both representationalist and functionalist accounts of belief ([3], p. 535–36).) So a non-dispositionalist about belief could still deny full doxastic status to many delusions (and some other irrational states), and construe them instead as in-between beliefs.

[6] I don't mean that the clinician would have to employ Schwitzgebel's vocabulary during therapy sessions—only that the work of such therapy can be described on his model.

closely to relevant similarities between subjects with and subjects without various pathologies.

The last benefit of Bortolotti's account—of avoiding an overly rationalized account of belief—might appear harder to secure on the account I'm recommending. After all, I'm suggesting that the serious failures in procedural, epistemic, and agential rationality that Bortolotti finds in both deluded and non-deluded subjects are reasons *not* to treat ascriptions of the relevant beliefs to them as flatly true. A concern Bortolotti raised for competing rationalist accounts seems pressing here: if one denies that these states are beliefs, one has to develop some new account of what they are instead (73). But the in-between account can handle this. When a subject fails to fit the dispositional profile for believing that *p*, we have a choice. We can decide it is best to view her as mostly fitting a different profile (e.g. for imagining that *p*, or for believing that not-*p*). Alternatively, we can decide that it is best to view her as fitting poorly the profile for believing that *p*. In the latter case, we are not pressed to find any non-doxastic account of her state. We can simply say that she's not-quite-believing that *p*, or believing-badly that *p*.[7] We need not assume she is determinately in some non-doxastic intentional state, any more than noting that you aren't quite managing to carry the tune of "Tea for Two" requires us to find some other song you are managing to sing.

It is true that failure to meet rational norms is, on this account, a failure to fully believe. But to the extent that other norms were crucial to the profile of a particular belief—norms connected to the feeling of certain emotions, or the possession of certain immediate reactive tendencies—failure to come up to scratch on those scores would also put a subject in the category of failing to fully believe. So while the account is deeply normative, it isn't exclusively privileging *rational* norms.

The benefits of Bortolotti's account, then, could still be realized if we adopted the in-between alternative. It must now be argued that declining to give full doxastic status to many delusions, and to some states of subjects whose irrationality doesn't appear to stem from pathology, is not just possible but desirable. Being stringent about what counts as full belief enables us to individuate belief from other attitudes in an adequately fine-grained way. And thinking more expansively about the aims of our ascriptive practices allows us to combine that stringency with the recognition that it can be acceptable to ascribe belief to one another even in the face of violations of rational norms. The explanations of how each benefit is secured bolster one another. A number of theorists have suggested that believing, like the possession of other intentional attitudes, is a matter of exercising a kind of virtual control over one's attitudes and behaviors.[8] A common example comes from the same work of Richard Moran's on which Bortolotti usefully draws: a person who believes that her boss is kind need not have deliberatively formed that belief on the basis of reasons that actually justify it, and she may not be offering any reasons in its favor right now. But (the story goes) if she does have the belief, then, if she were challenged to defend her belief with reasons, she could do so; and if facts that looked bad for her belief were to come her way, she would investigate them; and so on.

Exercising virtual control effectively is something we learn how to do, in the course of normal development. Even in maturity, it is an enterprise with which others often assist us. Victoria McGeer has argued that much folk-psychological practice, ascrip-

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[7] These are not propositional attitude types by means of which a subject has a determinate content in her control. (See note 2 above.) As with the phrase 'in-between-belief', these are labels for a range of conditions in which a subject's dispositions are such that no determinate ascription of any relevant attitude/content pair is appropriate. In-betweeness, and the consequent indeterminacy of ascription, affects the appropriateness of content- as well as attitude-specification. Consider, for example, a person suffering from the Capgras delusion. Suppose she deviates in various ways from the dispositional profile associated with believing that one's beloved spouse has been kidnapped and replaced with an imposter. The pattern of odd behavior (failing to report the kidnapping to the police, calmly sharing a bed with the supposed imposter) that makes a flatly true ascription of *belief* inappropriate also makes it inappropriate to take 'my beloved spouse has been kidnapped and replaced with an imposter' as a determinately adequate content-specification for some attitude she has. We may need to appeal to that content in specifying some of her dispositions—such as her disposition to assert that content, for example. But that doesn't mean she has that very content in her grasp, such that we now just need to cast about for the propositional attitude by means of which she does so.

[8] The phrase "virtual control" is from [5], p. 106. In addition to [6], see [7] for another account that would be sympathetic to the view suggested by the phrase.

tive and otherwise, serves a *regulative* function.[9] We not only use folk-psychology to predict and descriptively explain one another. We use it to shape our own and others' behavior, to chastise and encourage one another [8]. We call each other out when our subsequent behavior doesn't match an ascription on the table (regardless of who made the ascription initially). We expect one another to be able to take corrective action in response to such a calling-out: either to bring our behavior into better conformity with the folk-psychological expectations for the ascribed attitude, or to work to make it the case that the ascription no longer even partially applies to us. (The limit case of corrective action is, perhaps, a sincere apology admitting a need to take particular corrective actions combined with a confession of a current inability to take them.[10]) The folk-psychological norms in light of which we exercise virtual control also individuate the intentional attitudes to which they apply. This individuation happens at both the theoretical and the practical levels.[11] These norms shape dispositional profiles, and attitude possession is constituted by profile fit. The social pressure to conform to these norms is one reason why many of our would-be attitudes in fact fit relevant folk-psychological profiles. On the regulative view, folk-psychology describes us as correctly as it does because it does so much more than describe us.

When we are challenged about what we are doing with one of our attitudes, or about our entitlement to a particular attitude-ascription, the kind of corrective action we take depends on the kind of state in question. Getting to believe better is a different project from getting to desire better, or getting to imagine better.[12] When we see someone isn't quite living up to the norms that individuate some attitude, but is trying to do so and has a good chance of success, our ascription of the relevant attitude to her isn't merely a matter of pragmatic convenience. It has real weight, because the subject in question is on her way to a kind of norm-compliance that will make the ascription of the relevant belief to her flatly true. The regulative view of folk-psychology highlights the fact that such a subject may be doing better at complying with the relevant norms precisely because of the attention we've paid her, and the ascriptions she knows we've made to her. Making such ascriptions helps make them true. Allowing that people are sometimes in states of in-between belief, and that ascriptions can be appropriately used outside of flatly true ascriptions, means one can allow norms (rational and otherwise) to play a large role in individuating attitudes. And one can make this allowance without having to think we are simply misguided to use the ascriptive language we so often do, in cases in which subjects are failing to meet relevant norms.[13]

Why, however, be so concerned about individuation (particularly of the fine-grained sort), or suspect Bortolotti's account can't address that concern? After all, she opens the book by explaining that she wants to distinguish features that individuate beliefs from features that make beliefs rational (pp. 12–14; see also 59). There is reason to suspect that those two sets of

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[9] I won't try to make the case in support of the regulative view here. But it is attractive for a number of reasons. It copes very well with the fact that we sometimes get a grip on what others are up to by applying a tacit theory to them, and sometimes by simulating them [8]. It highlights and makes sense of links between folk-psychology and ordinary moral assessment [5,8]. And it appears to fit nicely with some recent work on the evolutionary origins of folk-psychology, and on the way children develop competence with it ([9], [8] and [10]).

[10] [6] discusses cases of this kind, and argues that subjects in such conditions have lost any distinctive first-person authority over the states in question.

[11] That is why this account differs from one Bortolotti considers and rejects, on which rational norms play a constitutive role in *ideal* interpretation but have no serious role in the actual practice of interpretation (109). On the account presented in this paper, ascriptive activity is not just passively recording subjects' degree of (non)compliance with norms. It actively helps prod subjects into greater compliance with those norms.

[12] Getting to believe better—getting to believe in the full-blooded sense—means trying to acquire some of the dispositions one currently lacks from the profile for the target belief. For example, aiming to believe better that one's family life is more important than one's career advancement could involve aiming to acquire (if one lacked it) the disposition to leave one's office every day at five o'clock. (See [3] for arguments that such dispositions are as important to belief as are dispositions to avow the content of the belief when asked.) Since many dispositions central to belief profiles are such that a person could coherently undertake to cultivate them, it is possible for believing-better to be an aim a person sets herself.

[13] Bortolotti's argumentative strategy depends on the fact that we do use belief-ascriptive language with many subjects who violate rational norms. But combining the in-between view of belief with the regulative view of ascription means there is no easy move from 'belief-ascription is licensed in this context' to 'the state in question is really a belief'. Belief-status may just be a matter of living up to relevant folk-psychological norms. But not all licensed ascriptions are simple reports that subjects are currently living up to those norms.

features are more entwined than Bortolotti supposes. Here's how to flesh out that suspicion. We care, in a number of moral contexts, about the difference between believing that p and imagining that p, or hypothesizing that p. We also take it that people are liable to different kinds of criticism in each of two kinds of case. In the first kind of case, they really believe p, but believe for bad reasons, fail to take some action that is made practically rational by the truth of p, or otherwise violate rational norms relevant to the maintenance of belief that p. In the second kind of case, they do not fully believe that p when doing so would be appropriate (either because p is true and they are in a position to justifiably believe it, or (more minimally) because they are failing to have *any* determinate attitude about p when it would be appropriate to do so).

Bortolotti identifies four characteristic features of beliefs. They have some degree of inferential connection with a subject's other intentional attitudes; they have some sensitivity to evidence or argument; they have some degree of manifestation in behaviour; and believing subjects can self-ascribe and author their beliefs—they have some ability to offer reasons for believing (262–5). Bortolotti's account should allow us to distinguish between (1) someone who engages in the four kinds of behavior that are for her distinctive of belief, albeit while violating intersubjective norms of rationality; and (2) someone who fails to engage in those behaviors sufficiently to count as a believer of the relevant content. But Bortolotti has to treat as genuine attempts at belief-individuative behaviors even efforts that are very far from counting as intersubjectively good efforts.[14] Otherwise she can't count as believers all the deluded subjects she wants to count. She doesn't, however, provide a detailed account of what keeps subjects' efforts in the category of 'behavior distinctive of believers', and prevents them from drifting into a category of behavior that distinguishes some non-doxastic intentional attitude.[15]

Part of the difficulty is that, of the four features Bortolotti takes to be characteristic of believing subjects, only two are even potentially distinctive of belief as against other attitudes. Inferential connectivity, at least the minimal kind Bortolotti lays out (on 262), won't distinguish believing from hypothesizing, nor from desiring. Likewise with manifestation in action—at least not without further qualifications of the kind Bortolotti doesn't want to give (lest they rule out such things as mere verbal report, which she wants to count as sufficient entries in this category). What looks more robustly individuating is responsiveness to evidence, and the capacity to offer some current reasons in favor of one's belief. But even here, the dispositions need to be tied more tightly to norms of rationality than Bortolotti might like. That's because, to take the latter case for example, one needs to be able to give reasons that are reasons for *belief*. It is notoriously difficult to give a non-circular positive account of the nature of those reasons. It suffices here to make the negative point that providing what would be, from the subject's own perspective, a strategic or aesthetic reason for believing that p would not be a display of the capacity for authorship that Bortolotti has in mind.[16] A subject who provides only instrumental reasons in support of believing that p doesn't have the kind of concern with the truth of p that distinguishes belief from other attitudes of acceptance. Spelling out the kind of reasons one must be offering in order to count as authoring an attitude as a belief will make some reference to the norms of rationality that govern intersubjectively good justification, so that the authoring subject can be viewed as attempting to engage in *belief* justification, rather than some other activity.

As Bortolotti notes, it is notoriously difficult to distinguish between someone doing a particular activity *badly*, and someone who isn't managing to

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[14] This could make it too easy to count a pattern of behaviors as a belief. The danger is that by being so relaxed about what is required to count as believing the content of one's delusion, Bortolotti will be faced with many deluded subjects who will also count as believing a content *opposed* to the content of their delusion. Attributing lots of directly contradictory—as opposed to just poorly integrated—beliefs to deluded subjects might make the irrationality of those subjects appear to differ in kind, and not just in degree, from garden-variety irrationality.

[15] Bortolotti first talks about an individual "manifest[ing] the pattern of behaviour of a *subject with beliefs*" on p. 156 (italics original), with reference to epistemic rationality. The final portion of the book is where Bortolotti lays out at once all four of the belief-distinguishing patterns of behavior she recognizes.
[16] See [11] and [7,12].

engage in that particular activity at all (19, 182). When she discusses the activity of offering (what seem to the subject to be) good current reasons for belief, Bortolotti explicitly allows that someone doing that badly enough won't count as doing it at all, and hence couldn't usefully be ascribed the relevant belief (242). Analogous points could be made for the other activities she proposes as distinctive of belief. That is, with respect to making inferential connections, being sensitive to incoming (counter) evidence, and planning future action, it is possible that someone's attempts at them could misfire so badly that belief ascription is undermined. We would move from describing the relevant subject as an irrational believer that *p* to no longer describing him as a believer that *p* at all. And it would be for the same reason Bortolotti gives in the case of authorship: such a subject isn't seeing himself as a believer that *p*. That means he won't reliably guide his future behavior around *p* in the ways that would make it useful for us to ascribe that content to him as a belief.

Bortolotti is right that the inappropriateness of belief-ascription in such a case is not due to the subject's present failure to obey a particular norm of agential rationality. But she doesn't sufficiently explain what is involved in a subject's construing himself as a believer of a particular content. One option is to say: subjects construe themselves as believers in the relevant way *by* exercising belief-typical virtual control over the attitude in question. But exercising virtual control is a dynamic process, and includes subjects' efforts to correct their errors. It doesn't guarantee that a subject is living up to all relevant norms at every point in time at which an ascription is in some sense appropriate. This reintroduces the difficult question of how to navigate the distinction between doing something badly and failing to do it at all. How poor could a subject's virtual control be, before it ceased to be the kind of control that individuates attitudes and makes ascriptions appropriate?

There isn't a one-size-fits-all answer to that question, in part because it is a question that is asked and answered in the midst of folk practice as well as in more general reflections on the nature of that practice. How do we work out in ordinary cases when a license to ascribe belief, in the face of some violation of belief-relevant norms, is

appropriate? To some extent that is an empirical question. But we could expand a portion of Bortolotti's view to develop a plausible sketch of how we might appropriately work that question out. We could apply to our capacity for self-correction a distinction that Bortolotti wants to make in other contexts.

When Bortolotti discusses procedural, epistemic, and agential rationality, she distinguishes activity that would seem to an agent like a proper engagement with the relevant norms from activity that would count as *intersubjectively good* engagement with the relevant norms. (Thus, using a pattern of lit lamps as evidence of one's partner's unfaithfulness might count as an engagement, though not an intersubjectively good one, with epistemic norms of rationality (179, 182).) Bortolotti discusses the capacity of subjects to take corrective action when some of their beliefs violate norms of procedural rationality (86–8). She notes how many people are unwilling to alter their reported beliefs even after they've been told that those beliefs are poorly integrated, or actually inconsistent. She reports anecdotally on undergraduates who, when shown that their answers on a reasoning test violated the principle of descriptive invariance, "are keen to find faults with the ecological validity of the reasoning tasks and refuse to concede that 'they made a mistake'" (87). Bortolotti doesn't count those students as taking corrective action, because they don't move to the pattern of belief that it would in fact be intersubjectively rational to have. But attacking the validity of evidence purporting to show that one is irrational is, from one's *own* point of view, a way of responding to a challenge to one's entitlement to certain belief-ascriptions. It counts as corrective action, guided by norms relevant to belief, even though it isn't intersubjectively correct corrective action.

When someone is doing an activity badly, we care about whether or not they can (with help) try and do it better. Someone who is capable of appreciating, to some extent, the applicability of our criticism, and sees a need to do something in response, is exercising virtual control over her attitudes. When a subject doesn't realize that she appears to others to be doing a belief-individuative activity *badly*, that raises serious questions about whether she is doing that activity at all. The more flexible and on-going someone's corrective action can be, the more likely it is that

they are exercising virtual control over their attitudes with reference to the folk-psychological norms that help individuate those attitudes. (That's true even if the corrective action isn't, at any given point in time, the corrective action that ought (by intersubjectively accessible standards) to be taken.) Ascriptions of relevant attitudes to such a person are likely to be seriously appropriate and not just conversationally convenient. The less flexible and responsive corrective action appears, the less likely it is that ascription of e.g. belief is appropriate. Bortolotti's own point about future usefulness applies here. After all, it isn't plausible that much of a subject's future behavior will be guided, in a belief-like way, by the content p if the subject isn't taking (however minimal) corrective action to handle the non-belief-like aspects of her current relation to that content. For example, suppose Smith isn't responding at all when people propose serious objections to her claim that p. She doesn't (for example) even insist that their apparent counter-evidence isn't *good* counter-evidence. In that case, we shouldn't have high confidence that her future actions, emotions, and patterns of thought will be shaped in the ways dictated by the belief that p. Inability to correct her current deviation from the behavior of a believer-that-p raises suspicions about her ability to avoid or adequately correct for such deviations in the future.

Of course, the question of which kinds of subjects are able to exercise sufficient virtual control to be ascribed beliefs in the flatly true sense, which exercise enough virtual control to count as on-their-way to full belief, and which are in an in-between state or worse, is a largely empirical question. One of the great benefits of Bortolotti's work is to have shown how frequently subjects with a pathologizing label are engaged in belief-related failures of rationality that are no worse (in degree or kind) than are subjects without that label. Nothing I'm proposing forces us back to a model where we assume that the greatest failures of rationality will always go with the greatest pathology.[17] It is relevant, however, that many subjects presenting with delusions *don't* seem to be exercising much virtual control of the kind that

would make a belief-ascription appropriate.[18] In talking about subjects like that, then, our ascriptions of belief may be merely convenient short-hand. The ascriptions signal that these subjects possess a certain cluster of dispositions, relevant in this conversational context, but don't commit us further on the questions of how belief-like their behavior will be in general, or in the future, or in dramatically different contexts.[19]

When someone's pattern of corrective action suggests they are moving towards full belief (and out of in-between-believing), it is seriously appropriate (and not just conversationally convenient) to ascribe full belief to them. Bortolotti is right to turn our focus to the question of whether or not subjects see themselves as believers of certain kinds, and hence whether or not they incorporate certain beliefs into their self-narratives in ways that will have

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[17] This leaves open the question of what *does* distinguish significant pathology.

[18] For example, clinicians sometimes present deluded subjects with potential confounders for their delusion (see [13] for examples of such conversations). Buchanan and his colleagues [14] report that nine out of 33 subjects who sometimes acted on their delusions, and 45 of 56 subjects who did not so act, ignored an interviewer's presentation of a potential confounder for the content of their delusion. Twelve and eight in each group did alter (at least during the interview) their conviction in their delusion in response to the presented confounder. (That is, those individuals not only engaged in corrective action, but in intersubjectively rational corrective action.) Interestingly, only one of the actors, and none of the non-actors, responded by giving a delusion-consistent explanation of the confounding statement. Even though such an explanation wouldn't be an intersubjectively rational one, making it counts as taking corrective action in the broad sense. That subject was attempting to show that apparent counter-evidence against a potential belief wasn't *good* counter-evidence. He or she was (in that respect) exercising the kind of virtual control distinctive of belief.

[19] I have discussed the exercise of virtual control in terms consistent with a dispositional view of belief that highlighted the possibility of in-between beliefs. But that isn't obligatory. One could agree that virtual control mattered for the individuation of attitudes, and for subjects' possession of them, while holding that any belief ascription is always determinately true or determinately false. One would, however, have to allow that in cases where virtual control was inadequate, relevant belief-ascriptions were flatly *false*. One would also have to allow that we often make flatly false ascriptions to one another for pragmatic reasons (when we are, for example, exhorting someone towards having a particular attitude). If one made those allowances, one could agree that it is useful to assess deluded subjects' degree and kind of virtual control over the contents of their delusions while denying that deluded subjects (or others) are ever in in-between states.

appreciable and intelligible effects on their future action. But the kind of virtual control one exercises over the attitudes one takes oneself to have is indebted to intersubjective norms. Constructing a narrative of oneself as a believer that *p* involves an awareness of what it is to look to others like a believer that *p*. That's because the individuative norms for belief refer to statuses that in principle aren't private. *Being good evidence for*, *being made practically rational by*, and so on, are all such that if you understand them, you understand that while you can disagree with others about what counts as particular instances of them, you should at least in principle be able to make your point of view on them accessible to someone else. (That is, you should be able to present lines of thought like this: "You don't think the unlit lamps are good evidence of my wife's infidelity, but that's because you don't believe that the government uses those lamps to communicate with me, and that's because….") Ascription is bound up with conversation, with our attempts to make ourselves understandable in folk-psychological terms. Someone who fails to see that, or can note that others don't understand her without being moved to change her situation, isn't doing with ascriptions and avowals what folk-psychological practice asks. Even ineffectual corrective action, if conceived *as* corrective action, manifests an awareness of the need to make sense by lights other than one's own. Bortolotti is right that neither freedom from pathology nor present freedom from rational errors is the key issue when it comes to the appropriateness of belief ascription. But self-narratives aren't sustained in isolation. Believing subjects realize they need to appear as believers in others' narratives about them. It isn't useful to ascribe beliefs to subjects who can't exercise the virtual control that makes such appearance possible.[20]

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