

**COGNITIVE NEURO-PSYCHOLOGY AND THE
PSYCHOLOGICAL EXPLANATION OF DELUSIONAL
BELIEF**

A thesis
submitted in fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree
of
Master of Arts in Philosophy
at
The University of Waikato
by
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The University of Waikato
2005

Abstract

Delusions have long been considered paradigmatic examples of irrational belief. If delusions are irrational beliefs and there is a requirement of rationality for psychological explanation, then it would seem to be the case that we cannot offer a psychological explanation of delusion on analytic grounds. While some theorists have accepted this conclusion recent findings from the cognitive neuro-sciences have fueled interest in ‘bottom-up’ empirical models that may have prospects for explaining delusions. These models offer physical level / neurological explanations and / or design level cognitive explanations, and thus more must be said in order to explain delusions from the psychological level. If cognitive neurological abnormality produces a person level anomalous experience for the delusional subject then there may be prospects for a psychological explanation of delusion, however. We may be able to explain delusional beliefs from the psychological level by recourse to a prior psychological state: that of a certain kind of anomalous experience.

Two-factor theorists maintain that in addition to an anomalous experience people with delusions must have some kind of bias and / or deficit in rationality. Various biases / deficits have been proposed in order to explain why it is that some people develop delusions in response to anomalous experience while others do not. I would like to consider that if we can specify the content / nature of the anomalous experience in more depth then we may not need to appeal to a second factor in the psychological explanation of delusion. It may be that delusions are inevitable responses to certain kinds of anomalous experience. In order to explain the apparent irrationality of delusional beliefs it might be necessary to reinterpret delusions as reports / explanations of certain kinds of anomalous experience rather than as false and implausible claims about the external world, however. In some cases it would seem that we do have to consider the delusional subject to be making a false and implausible claim about the external world. It might be the case that we can still understand something of how they are led to this even though their

delusional belief seems far from normal. It may turn out that the delusional subject is 'rational' in the sense that *given* a certain kind of physical breakdown in a certain kind of cognitive mechanism that produces a certain kind of psychological experience... delusions are inevitable, understandable, or 'rational' responses. While I do not solve the problem of delusions, I hope that delusional utterances are rendered more understandable as a result of considering some of the cognitive neuro-psychological factors that I shall show to be relevant to a psychological explanation of delusional belief.

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge Martin Davies for introducing me to the topic of delusions and fostering my interest in them in my time as a Summer Research Scholar prior to undertaking this project.

I would also like to acknowledge the University of Waikato in providing me with a Masters Thesis Award. The University of Waikato in general, and the Philosophy Department in particular has been most generous with assistance for conference attendance which was a source of helpful comments and suggestions.

I would like to acknowledge the assistance of Justine Kingsbury, Samuel Charlton, Tery Hardwicke, Anna Kirkness, Kelvin Shaw, and Talia Walker who all put up with me going on (and on) about delusions over the past two years. All of these people have offered a number of helpful comments and criticisms. I have also benefited from discussions with students, and especially in regard to the Cartesian interpretation of the Cotard delusion, and delusional certainty / conviction.

More in particular I would like to acknowledge the assistance of my supervisor David Lumsden who has taught / supervised me for a number of years now. He first introduced me to Philosophy of Mind all the way back in first year, and from then on I was hooked. David has been an invaluable source of ideas, criticisms, suggestions, and advice. I appreciate that he has always given me free reign to investigate topics on the fringes of Philosophy of Mind that he didn't necessarily have a prior interest in. I have learned a great deal from him over the years, and have benefited immensely from his moral support and encouragement.

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