Article

Theory & Psychology

Theory & Psychology
2015, Vol. 25(1) 80–95

DOI: 10.1177/0959354314553152
tap.sagepub.com
SAGE

Persecutory delusions and first-person authority

Tsutomu Kumazaki
Toranomon Branch Hospital

Abstract

Although clinical diagnosis of delusions is usually not difficult, defining delusions is more complicated. This study analyzes the concept of delusions, in particular persecutory delusions. Patients with persecutory delusions are convinced of others' malicious intentions and are impervious to counterevidence. Conventionally, expression of intention is accepted at face value unless contradictory evidence is available. First-person authority regarding intention is respected in human society. Contemporary philosophy tends to limit the scope of first-person authority, but it cannot be eliminated. Persecutory delusions contravene first-person authority as one of the fundamental principles of daily life, even in the absence of malicious intention on the part of the patients. Two ways of denying others' first-person authority are investigated. This study adds new insight to Manfred Spitzer's formal definition of delusions.

Keywords

common-sense proposition, content externalism, definition, first-person authority, intention, persecutory delusion, philosophy of psychiatry, schizophrenia

Persecutory delusion is one of the most common types of delusion and is considered a hallmark of various types of psychoses. Although the clinical diagnosis of persecutory delusions is not difficult to make in general, defining persecutory delusions is more complicated. For example, a person may come to a psychiatric clinic and say, "Everyone on TV badmouths me!" This statement will surely be described as a persecutory delusion and regarded as a symptom supporting the diagnosis of psychosis. Usually psychiatrists do not turn on the TV or scan the channels to confirm whether the patient's statement is true, as the implausibility of the patient's conviction can be intuitively judged. However, this does not necessarily mean that psychiatrists can easily explain why they have judged

Corresponding author:
Tsutomu Kumazaki, Department of Psychiatry, Toranomon Branch Hospital, 1-3-1 Kajigaya, Takatsu-ku, Kawasaki, 213-8587, Japan.
Email: tkumazak-tky@umin.ac.jp

that statement as a delusion proper (Cromby & Harper, 2009; Ikuta, 2003; Maher, 1992). The definition of a delusion is difficult to obtain and that of persecutory delusion is no exception.

Comparisons between persecutory delusions and optical illusions show one difficulty in identifying the peculiarities of persecutory delusions. For example, when looking at a Müller-Lyer illusion, one line is perceived as longer than the other. This perception and conviction do not change even if faced with evidence that both lines are equal in length (Coulter, 1989, pp. 43–44; Hohwy, 2013, p. 61; Scholl & Leslie, 1999, p. 133). The conviction that the lines are not equal, which is not true, is strong and impervious to counterevidence. This example is similar to the double bookkeeping of patients with delusions, that is, patients continue to be convinced of a delusional belief even when they acknowledge counterevidence of that belief (see Sass, 2014).[1] However, in the case of the Müller-Lyer illusion, the conviction regarding the difference in the lengths of the lines is not treated as a delusion, but rather as an optical illusion. This is not solely due to the pervasiveness of the Müller-Lyer illusion. It is very unlikely that perceptions of the Müller-Lyer illusion would be treated as delusional even if only one in dozens had the illusion that the lines differed in length.

What is the difference between persecutory delusions and optical illusions? Jaspers described the external criteria of delusions as: (a) subjective certainty, (b) imperviousness (incorrigibility), and (c) impossibility of content (1959, p. 80; 1962/1997, pp. 95–96). Jaspers' criteria do not differentiate between delusions and optical illusions. As mentioned above, the Müller-Lyer illusion also fulfills these criteria. In addition, Jaspers admitted that the above criteria are not clear-cut (Jaspers, 1959, p. 80; see also Brückner, 2009). Jaspers (1959, pp. 88–89) famously described a case in which the patient's jealousy was delusional, even though the partner's infidelity was real. Jaspers' criteria are important, but are neither necessary nor sufficient conditions for delusions (Ikuta, 2003). There should be something more to help define persecutory delusions.

This article endeavors to delineate the properties that make persecutory delusions a symptom of a psychiatric disorder, such as unfavorable features that optical illusions do not have. This study analyzes the concept regarding delusions, and especially persecutory delusions; it will not delve into the biological etiology of persecutory delusions. As Kurt Schneider (1952) remarked, delusions cannot be defined in terms of the patients' biological abnormalities alone (see also Ikuta, 2008). This view is not outdated, as it is compatible with the content externalism of today's philosophy of mind. According to externalism, "[n]ot all mental properties are local properties of individuals" (Nuccetelli, 2003, p. 2). As a result, one's psychic state cannot be determined by assessing only the neural state (Lau & Deutsch, 2012; Talbot, 2011).[2] This line of argument illustrates the characteristics of persecutory delusions within interpersonal and social relationships better than purely neuroscientific studies.

Symptomatic characteristics of persecutory delusions

A persecutory delusion is a delusion that others have malicious intentions toward the patient (Frith, 1992/2008). Persecutory delusions are usually not about things but about a person or group of people, although specific persons are not necessarily involved.

Patients with persecutory delusions attribute malicious intention to others (or others' actions) in cases when the average person would not detect such intentions. The people who are accused of being part of the persecution usually feel at a loss, as they do not have such intentions toward the patient.

Currently there are three major theories of persecutory delusion in the sphere of cognitive psychology—probabilistic inference, causal attribution, and theory of mind (ToM)—and each postulates a deficit in cognitive function. With probabilistic inference, patients with delusions are said to draw a conclusion even when average people feel that sufficient evidence is not available and withhold judgment (Garety & Hemsley, 1994). With causal attribution, patients with persecutory delusions are said to attribute negative events to external and personal factors (Bentall, Corcoran, Howard, Blackwood, & Kinderman, 2001). With ToM, patients with persecutory delusions are said to have certain deficits in making inferences about others' mental states (Frith, 1992/2008).[3]

Cognitive psychological studies on persecutory delusions are compatible with the symptomatic characteristics of persecutory delusions. Langdon, Ward, and Coltheart (2010, p. 322) state that the bias in probabilistic inference is theoretically related to delusions in general, whereas the bias in causal attribution and ToM deficit are both theoretically related to the theme of persecutory delusions. If one tends to attribute a cause of bad events to other people, one is likely to attribute malicious intention to others. If one is not good at sensing or inferring others' intentions, one is likely to misinterpret those intentions. If the subjective probability attributed to a judgment is extremely high, that judgment cannot be corrected. None of these theories is in conflict with the symptomatic characteristics of persecutory delusion described above.[4]

However, studies in cognitive psychology do not address the problem stated at the beginning of this paper; that is, the difference between persecutory delusions and optical illusions. Optical illusions reflect incomplete cognitive function. In terms of the cognitive bias of persecutory delusions, they are no different from optical illusions. Nevertheless, optical illusions are not regarded as a disorder, whereas persecutory delusions are regarded as a symptom of a psychiatric disorder. Other approaches are needed to illustrate the peculiarity of persecutory delusions.

The present paper will first reconsider the concept of incorrigibility, referring to Manfred Spitzer's seminal work (1988). Second, it will analyze the concept of intention and the attributions of intention from a different perspective. This article will not, however, aim to deny empirical facts found in cognitive psychological studies.

Manfred Spitzer's redefinition of the incorrigibility of delusion

Spitzer (1988) analyzed the concept of delusion in general, comparing delusional and non-delusional statements. Spitzer pointed out that there are some non-delusional statements "of which a person is certain and incorrigible by others" (p. 131). Statements like "I'm in pain" and "I'm thinking," which Spitzer called "*mental states*," are normally incorrigible (p. 130).[5] In contrast, a patient with delusions extends such a certainty "in an inadmissible way to intersubjectively accessible facts," and is "incorrigible about facts which do *not* lie within the scope of his mental states: things, events, other persons" (p. 131). Thus, Spitzer

defined delusions as "*statements which are uttered formally like statements about a mental state, whose contents, however, are not mental states but rather intersubjectively accessible ('objective') facts*" (p. 132). This definition has merit in that it depicts a formal characteristic that does not depend on the veracity of the specific content of statements.

Spitzer's aim was to revise Jaspers' criteria of delusions, which included conditions that were neither necessary nor sufficient. However, Spitzer's definition is not sufficient because the converse of his definition is not necessarily true. Many common-sense propositions seem impossible for us to doubt, even though such propositions are not logically proven truths (Ikuta, 2003; Moore, 1925/1993; Wittgenstein, 1969). Below are some examples of such propositions:

> There exists at present a living human body, which is *my* body. This body was born at a certain time in the past, and has existed continuously ever since … . [A]t every moment since it was born, there have also existed many other things … . But the earth had existed also for many years before my body was born … . I am a human being, and I have … had many different experiences … . [I]n the case of very many of the other human bodies which have lived upon the earth, each has been the body of a different human being, who has … had many different experiences … . (Moore, 1925/1993, pp. 107–108)

Nevertheless, such common-sense propositions are not regarded as delusions (Ikuta, 2003; Kumazaki, 2008). In addition, Spitzer's definition sometimes fails to exclude obviously wrong beliefs that are not considered delusions. The case of optical illusions presented above is an example. Ikuta (2003) and Murphy (2013) also presented cases in which wrong beliefs were not treated as delusions.

First-person authority as a convention

First-person expression of one's own state has been investigated in philosophy. Wittgenstein investigated first-person utterances as a type of language game. In his *Philosophical Investigations* (1953/2001), Wittgenstein took the example of the experience and expression of one's pain:

> When I say "I am in pain" I am at any rate justified *before myself*. … To use a word without a justification does not mean to use it without right. (1953/2001, §289)
>
> What I do is not, of course, to identify my sensation by criteria. (§290)

Wittgenstein also took the expression of intention as an example:

> It was not on the ground of observations of my behaviour that I said I was going to take two powders. (§631)
>
> I do not want to say that in the case of the expression of intention "I am going to take two powders" the prediction is a cause—and its fulfilment the effect. … So much, however, is true: we can often predict a man's actions from his expression of a decision. An important language game. (§632)
>
> I reveal to him something of myself when I tell him what I was going to do. Not, however, on grounds of self-observation, but by way of a response (it might also be called an intuition). (§659)

In both cases, first-person utterances are regarded as far more certain than third-person observations.

However, our expression of so-called mental states is not "private language"; expression of intention cannot be adequately conceived as private language (§653). Intention is embedded in the surrounding context (§652). Treatment of first-person utterances within the social context is carefully illustrated by Coulter, a Wittgensteinian sociologist:

> We are taught criteria for the attribution of mental and experiential predicates to others in a variety of ways, but we do not learn criteria for our own initial first-person uses of such predicates. This is the basis of the widely discussed "asymmetry" thesis, according to which first-person uses differ from second-and third-person uses of such predicates in virtue of the different role played by "criteria"… . [O]ne's avowals, produced without using criteria, become *themselves* (among the various) criteria, the satisfaction of which others can appeal to or subsequently use in ratifying the intelligibility, truthfulness or appropriateness of any claim about our "psychological" status. (Coulter, 1989, p. 89)

One can express one's mental state without observation, but this does not mean others cannot judge these expressions at all.

Usually each person is thought to be authoritative about his or her own thoughts and feelings, although such authority is not necessarily absolute (Gertler, 2011, p. 3). In daily life, neither absolute authority of first-person utterances nor its radical denial is at stake. We do not inquire whether someone's avowal is absolutely infallible. We disregard the expression if there is contradictory behavior or a contradictory situation. Nevertheless, we usually regard an avowal at face value when there is no counterevidence for that avowal (Shoemaker, 1963, p. 216; see also Davidson, 1984/2001a; Hohwy, 2002, p. 238).

In philosophical arguments, "[m]ost philosophers agree that we have *some* type of first-person authority about *some* of our mental states," although some philosophers "deny even this" (Gertler, 2011, p. 3). According to Moran (2001), first-person authority has been investigated in relation to other philosophical issues and recently received attention in its own right. Currently, there are several theories regarding first-person authority. Gertler (2011) classified these theories into three major categories: acquaintance view, inner sense view, and rationalist view. According to the acquaintance view, the relationship between one's own state and one's self-knowledge is metaphysical, and that metaphysical directness guarantees the truth of self-knowledge. According to the inner sense view, the relationship between one's own state and one's self-knowledge is causal. In this view, self-knowledge is akin to perception. According to rationalist view, one rationally constitutes one's own state.[6]

Compatibility of first-person authority with content externalism is one of the major problems in philosophy of mind. Many studies on this compatibility problem apply the twin earth thought experiment or its modified versions (Putnam, 1975, cited in Nuccetelli, 2003). These studies focus on whether first-person authority would be tenable even if someone was suddenly moved to a radically different natural environment or linguistic community (Lau & Deutsch, 2012; Nuccetelli, 2003; Owens, 2003). There are many versions of such arguments, and each of them carries out sophisticated technical analyses.

Many of these thought experiments hypothesize counterfactual situations that are highly unlikely to take place in the actual world. It is hardly conceivable that someone would suddenly move to an earth-like planet where water is not H_2O or the meaning of the word

"water" is different. Although the remoteness from the actual world does not undermine the worth of thought experiments, such remoteness casts doubt on what degree these thought experiments explain first-person authority in ordinary situations in the actual world.[7] These thought experiments can offer some help in investigating a transcultural context in which someone moves to a vastly different culture, but it is questionable whether these experiments clarify how first-person authority is treated within a relatively stable society.

Indeed, detailed philosophical studies do not successfully disprove first-person authority. An incompatibility argument combined with externalism logically entails denial of first-person authority, but such arguments still fail to unambiguously refute folk-psychological understanding of first-person authority. Paradoxically, such subtlety of arguments reflects how it is difficult to argue against the commonsensical and folk-psychological view of first-person authority.

We cannot deny first-person authority as a convention. People respect one another's first-person utterances not because first-person authority is proved to be logically valid. If we all doubt each other's first-person authority all the time, expression in first-person would no longer serve any function in our society (see Coulter, 1973, p. 131; Davidson, 1984/2001a, p. 14, 1987/2001c, p. 38). It is one of the basic principles of everyday life.

First-person authority of intention

In her famous monograph, Anscombe (1963) critically reviewed the folk-psychological understanding of intention. According to folk-psychological understanding, intention resides "purely in the sphere of mind," and "it can easily seem that in general the question what a man's intentions are is only authoritatively settled by him" (Anscombe, 1963, p. 9). "Very often, when a man says 'I am going to do such-and-such,' we should say that this was an expression of intention" (Anscombe, 1963, p. 1), and such first-person expression tends to be regarded as infallible.

Anscombe's own view on intention is different, as she did not think that the study of expression of intention was fruitful. Anscombe investigated intention mainly in terms of action. In addition to "expression of intention for the future," Anscombe listed two other kinds of intention: "intentional action and intention in acting" (Anscombe, 1963, p. iii). This grouping of intention is still current (Bratman, 1999; Setiya, 2011).

Anscombe limited intentional action to "the actions to which a certain sense of the question 'Why?' is given application" (Anscombe, 1963, p. 9). If one's action was not intentional, one cannot answer the question "Why?" With regard to intentional action, a person presents a reason for his/her action in answer to the question "Why?" Sometimes the answer "For no particular reason" (Anscombe, 1963, p. 25) is permissible, but this is not a representative case. Thus intentional action is placed in "some chains of reasons for acting" (Anscombe, 1963, p. vi), and intentional action is subsumed under "intention *with which*" (Anscombe, 1963, p. 34).

Anscombe presents some examples of such chain of reasons for acting. One famous example is:

> "Why are you moving your arm up and down?" "To operate the pump," and he is operating the pump. "Why are you pumping?" "To replenish the water-supply" and he is replenishing the

> water-supply. "Why are you replenishing the water-supply?" "To poison the inhabitants" and he is poisoning the inhabitants. (Anscombe, 1963, p. 40)

Once described as such, others can confirm whether the described actions are actually taking place. Anscombe presented a case in which first-person statement of one's intention is not justified in the light of the situation the speaker is in.[8] Anscombe did not grant absolute authority to avowal of one's intention, so Anscombe is said to have a "deflationary view of self-awareness" (Gertler, 2011, p. 224).[9]

On the other hand, Anscombe did not insist that the first-person expression of intention is not important at all. When someone intends to do X, he/she does not have to observe or infer his/her intention (Anscombe, 1963, p. 50), whereas others have to observe his/her action or listen to his/her words. In addition, Anscombe acknowledged the case in which the answer "I am Y-ing" to the question "Why are you X-ing?" should be accepted at face value:

> Let the answer contain a further description Y, then sometimes it is correct to say not merely: the man is X-ing, but also: "the man is Y-ing"—if that is, nothing falsifying the statement "He is Y-ing" can be observed. (Anscombe, 1963, p. 38)

> In some cases his own statement that he is Y-ing may, at a certain stage of the proceedings, be needed for anybody else to be able to say he is Y-ing, since not enough has gone on for that to be evident. (Anscombe, 1963, p. 39)

> There comes a point where a man can say "This is my intention," and no one else can contribute anything to settle the matter. (Anscombe, 1963, p. 48)

Anscombe admitted that first-person authority of intention should not be rejected without falsifying evidence. Even in the deflationary view of first-person authority, first-person authority of intention cannot be eliminated.

Persecutory delusion as denial of first-person authority

Studies of first-person authority and intention help analyze the concept of persecutory delusions. As seen above, patients with persecutory delusions attribute malicious intentions to others even in circumstances where the average person would not attribute such intentions. Attitude toward others' intentions is vastly different between patients with persecutory delusion and average people.

Ordinarily, we respect each other's expression of intention. When we hear another's expression of intention, we take it at face value unless there is counterevidence. We doubt another's expression of intention only when the circumstances and his/her actions evidently contradict that expression. In usual communication, people respect first-person authority of each other's expression of intention.

When a patient with persecutory delusion attributes malicious intention to another person, that persecutory delusion conflicts with the targeted person's actual intention (or absence of intention). Whether the patient consciously does so or not, the expression of persecutory delusions results in the denial of the targeted person's first-person authority over his/her intention. Persecutory delusions axiomatically entail the denial of others' first-person authority with regard to intention.

This is not to say that average people never doubt others' expression of intention. Neither is it to say that average people always judge others' intentions neutrally. It is well known that people commonly have biases in causal attribution; that is, people tend to attribute undesirable events to external causes (Knobe, 2003). Such biased judgments nevertheless are understandable from our common interpretation of intentional actions and therefore not regarded as persecutory delusions.

Persecutory delusions within social interactions

Denial of first-person authority violates basic social conventions. Each of us avows our own feelings, intentions, and so on freely, and respects each other's avowals. If someone denies others' expression of intention without any counterevidence, it is tantamount to the denial of another's right to express oneself freely.

This argument clarifies why persecutory delusions are dysfunctional in our society and regarded as pathological. Persecutory delusions result in denying others' right to express their own intention and therefore disobey a basic social convention. This does not mean that patients with persecutory delusions *intentionally* violate others' rights. Denial of first-person authority occurs regardless of whether the patient is aware of it, as it is a logical consequence of persecutory delusions.

Persecutory delusions have some similarities to the "epistemic injustice" defined by Fricker (2007), although these terms differ in some important respects. Epistemic injustice "wrongs someone in their capacity as a subject of knowledge, and thus in a capacity essential to human value" (Fricker, 2007, p. 5). Persecutory delusions result in denying the first-person authority over one's own intention of the targeted person. However, patients with persecutory delusions do not purposefully deny others' first-person authority. In addition, persecutory delusions are not approved by other observers. Rather, once a certain statement is labeled a delusion, the speaker ceases to be believed by others, even when he/she talks about a subject not related to that delusion.[10] This is different from the case of epistemic injustice in which the undervalued judgment gets support from a third party and thus becomes threatening toward the targeted person. Therefore persecutory delusions cannot be properly called an injustice.

Psychoanalytically, persecutory delusions are interpreted as an expression of repressed, and thus projected, aggression (see Sass, 1994, pp. 118–119). However, this is a plausible, but highly theory-laden view. The present argument demonstrates, without theoretical assumptions, that persecutory delusions themselves can be damaging to others.

The argument above indicates that persecutory delusions are inevitably associated with conflicts of interest between the patients and the surroundings. Those kinds of conflicts have both ethical and therapeutic implications. If a persecutory delusion is approved without limit, and others advocate that delusion, that situation becomes threatening to the target of the delusion. There arises the possibility that the persecutory delusion might become the epistemic injustice described above.[11] Therefore, it is undesirable if expressions of persecutory delusions are fully approved.

On the other hand, from both an ethical and therapeutic standpoint, the total oppression of the patients' thoughts and beliefs is not advisable either. As Mundt (1996) remarked, it would not be better to deny delusions outright. Such denial by others is no

use and sometimes strengthens patients' beliefs further (Sadock & Sadock, 2005, p. 137). In addition, communication unrelated to delusions is important to mitigate delusions (Mundt, 1996). Therefore, it is unfortunate that patients with persecutory delusions tend not to be believed even when they talk about subjects not related to the delusions. A certain middle point between approbation and oppression is warranted.

This argument is in line with recent studies on whether patients have the right to hold delusions. The principle of self-determination seems to entail the freedom to have irrational thoughts and beliefs including delusions (Radoilska, 2012, p. xxi; Stenlund, 2011). However, Stenlund (2011, 2014) observes that there are several ways of defining freedom and therefore the question regarding the freedom to have delusions cannot be answered straightaway. Even though the right to hold opinions has been seen as an absolute right, Stenlund (2014, p. 88) remarks that the right to believe some specific contents and the right to undergo a certain process of forming an opinion are different matters. In addition, "there has been a need to restrict expressing such opinions which may damage somebody else" (Stenlund, 2014, p. 80). Stenlund (2014, p. 331) withholds any one-sided conclusion and advocates dialogue among diverse standpoints.

Persecutory delusions are of course different from philosophical arguments aiming to deny first-person authority. Philosophers recognize folk-psychological beliefs in first-person authority and present fine-grained arguments to counter such beliefs. In addition, philosophers do not deny others' avowals in their everyday lives. Patients with persecutory delusions presume that their convictions are justified and fail to make room for others' beliefs.[12]

This argument also illuminates the difference between persecutory delusions and optical illusions. Experiences of optical illusions do not deny others' avowals. Such experiences never violate our social conventions. This is why optical illusions are not treated as a disorder.

Recapturing persecutory delusions and its clinical implications

This analysis of persecutory delusions in terms of first-person authority is an expansion of Spitzer's argument. As seen above, Spitzer construed delusions as statements about the external world with the same degree of certainty as statements about one's own first-person experiences. Spitzer's definition has formal clarity, but fails to exclude some non-delusional statements and even common-sense propositions. The present argument proposes ways to differentiate statements about others' first-person authority from those about the non-human physical world. We are expected to respect others' first-person statements more than others' statements about the external world. If one denies others' first-person authority, it is regarded as more pathological than denying others' statements about the external world.

The above analysis implies that the advisable response to persecutory delusions from the second-person perspective differs from that of the third-person perspective. As discussed earlier, it would not be better to deny delusions outright; on the other hand, approval of persecutory delusions is not desirable either (Sadock & Sadock, 2005, p. 137). It is reasonable to state that nobody is in an authoritative position to speak definitively about another's intention. Similarly, nobody is fundamentally in a better position

than a patient with a persecutory delusion to determine the intention of the target of such a delusion. It is preferable for the third party to neither approve nor oppose persecutory delusions. From this principle, it would be better to acknowledge that the patient is convinced of the content of the delusion but at the same time avoid admitting that the contents of the delusion represent a solid fact (Sadock & Sadock, 2005, p. 137). In contrast, it can sound unnatural and strange that the target of a persecutory delusion may say, "So you feel I have malicious intention toward you." He/she is also entitled to say, "I don't mean to ill-treat you," as first-person authority over one's own intention is commonly acknowledged.

The present study illuminates why persecutory delusions tend to be seen as severe delusions even when the delusion does not actually cause harm to others. In contrast, delusions seen with mood disorders tend to be regarded as milder delusions, even though these delusions often deteriorate quality of life. Delusions of poverty, delusions of guilt, and hypochondriacal delusions, seen with depression, are sometimes severe and life-threatening. Delusions of grandeur, seen with mania, tend to cause overspending or interpersonal issues. However, these delusions are always convictions regarding the patient's own state and are related to the patient's self-appraisal (Kocha & Furuno, 2009); therefore, these delusions do not violate others' first-person authority.[13] Themes of delusions reflect how those delusions deviate from ordinary thoughts and judgments, but the severity of dysfunction is not determined solely by the themes of said delusions.

Two ways of denying others' first-person authority can be construed. First, a patient complies with first-person authority as a general principle, but he/she attributes malicious intention to others in some specific circumstances, denying their first-person authority. Second, the principle of first-person authority does not seem to operate properly within the patient. The first type of denial applies to persecutory delusions in general, regardless of precipitating psychiatric disorders. The second type of denial indicates a more profound abnormality than the first one.

The second type of abnormality can be explained as an expression of psychopathology of schizophrenia. Sass (1994) posited that patients with schizophrenia experience a "quasi-solipsistic" world in which personal experiences are also irrefutable facts. According to this schema, patients lose the boundary between the realm of first-person authority and the realm of the external world (Ikuta, 2004; Sass, 1994). In addition, other people, animals, and inanimate objects do not have distinguishable characteristics within this schema. Therefore, it is likely that some patients with schizophrenia have lost the sense of others' ego boundary and become unable to distinguish the realm of others' first-person authority.

In fact, some patients with schizophrenia have persecutory delusions about animals or machines. Usually people do not attribute intentions to machines.[14] Even when people do so, they acknowledge that such expressions are metaphorical (Gigerenzer, 1997, p. 275). Usually intentions are not attributed to animals unless they show evident movements, as they do not avow intentions (see Anscombe, 1963, pp. 86–87; Moran & Stone, 2011, section 5). Attributing intention to animals or machines violates our conventions regarding intention. If an abnormality with first-person authority is assumed, the attribution of intention to animals or machines can be explained.[15]

Delusions cannot be evaluated via a single aspect. The argument above illuminates several distinct levels of deviation of patients' thoughts, though these deviations are different from dysfunction in the pragmatic sense. Apart from practical undesirability, themes of delusions are not the sole indicator of the abnormality of delusions. There are distinct levels of underlying pathology within persecutory delusions. Although themes of delusions are important, just labeling patients' thoughts as persecutory delusions, delusions of grandeur, and so on is often insufficient. If clinicians listen to patients carefully and describe each patient's delusion in detail, it serves to characterize each patient's psychopathology better.

Conclusion

The characteristics of persecutory delusions have been investigated. Patients with persecutory delusions attribute malicious intention to others. Treatment of others' intention is different between patients with persecutory delusions and people without such delusions. Conventionally, expression of intention is accepted at face value unless some falsifying evidence is available. The first-person authority over expression of intention is respected in human society. This respect is one of the indispensable elements of human life. Persecutory delusions axiomatically violate first-person authority as one of the fundamental principles of daily life, even though patients with persecutory delusions are not conscious of this.[16]

This analysis of persecutory delusions in terms of first-person authority is an expansion of Spitzer's argument. Spitzer construed delusions as statements about the external world with the same degree of certainty as statements about one's first-person experiences. This argument adds that persecutory delusions are statements about others' first-person authority with absolute certainty.

There are two ways of denying others' first-person authority. First, a patient complies with first-person authority as a general principle, but he/she attributes malicious intention to others, denying their first-person authority, in some specific circumstances. This applies to persecutory delusions as a whole, regardless of precipitating psychiatric disorders. Second, the principle of first-person authority does not seem to operate properly within the patient. In this case, the patient ceases to appreciate the distinction between the realm of others' first-person authority and the external, physical world. This is true of some schizophrenic delusions.

It cannot be said whether there might be a neural correlate to first-person authority. However, it appears that a certain pattern of thought and behavior is regarded as pathological in human society.

Acknowledgements

I express my gratitude to Takashi Ikuta, Katsufumi Matsunami, Hiroyuki Ogino, Susumu Ohmae, and Hitoshi Tsuda for indicating relevant works in the field. This paper was checked by a native English-speaking editor at Forte Inc. in Tokyo, Japan.

Funding

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Notes

1. Hohwy (2013, pp. 61–64) lists many more similarities between delusions and optical illusions.
2. Ikuta (2003, 2004, 2008) emphasized that the delusions can only be determined intersubjectively. Gallagher (2009) also criticized the "internalistic bias" (p. 245) of current arguments on delusions.
3. This argument does not mean that patients with persecutory delusions suffer a total deficit of ToM. Total deficit of ToM would not lead to the belief that someone has malicious intentions (Frith, 1992/2008; Langdon, 2005). Researchers seek more specific abnormalities of ToM in patients with persecutory delusions (Frith, 2004; Langdon, 2005). Mehl et al. (2010) indicated that ToM ability in inferring others' intentions is negatively correlated with persecutory delusions, although this finding is not conclusive (Scherzer, Leveillé, Achim, Boisseau, & Stip, 2012).
4. Symptom-level compatibility does not guarantee that the accounts presented here are true etiologies of delusions (Maher, 1992, pp. 262, 266). For example, Berrios (1996, p. 114) remarked that probabilistic accounts of delusions neither definitively identify a single etiology of delusion nor differentiate patients with delusions from ordinary subjects. Gigerenzer (2000) also demonstrated that ordinary participants revealed both overconfidence and underconfidence depending on the experimental settings, which undermines the credibility of modeling delusions on biased probabilistic inferences.
5. One might doubt whether these statements are really infallible and incorrigible. This issue will be investigated in the latter part of this article.
6. Classification of views on first-person authority is equivocal. Several monographs have been published in recent decades (Bar-on, 2004; Finkelstein, 2003; Gallois, 1996; Gertler, 2011; Moran, 2001), and each classifies views on first-person authority differently.
7. Hohwy argues from the standpoint of the "contextualist approach" that first-person authority is defendable without denying externalism in general "by properly ignoring Twin Earth and Social Semantic shuffles" (2002, p. 248).
8. Anscombe's example was about the pumper who had been hired by another "to pump the water, knowing it was poisoned" (1963, p. 44). In this case, "unless he takes steps to cheat his hirer … it is not an acceptable account if he says 'I wasn't intending to pump poisoned water, only to pump water and get my hire'" (p. 44). She summarized that "he cannot profess not to have had the intention of doing the thing that was a means to an end of his" (p. 44). Although Anscombe herself avoided legal or ethical connotations (p. 45), this argument is associated with legal implications of intentional action. Currently, the arguments on the relationship between intentional action and its responsibility are diverse (see Bertelsen, 2012; Kozakai, 2007, 2008).
9. Though he highly appreciated the significance of Anscombe's *Intention* (Stoutland, 2011), Davidson developed a different account for intention. He pursued "pure intending" that can be a cause of action but "may occur without reasoning, action, or consequence" (Davidson, 1978/2001b, p. 83). Moran and Stone (2011) endeavored to reconcile Anscombe's argument with Davidson's.
10. Coulter (1973, p. 129) remarked on a similar matter with thought disorders in a broader sense.
11. This argument is also applicable to disagreements between non-psychotic individuals. Accusing another person harshly just because his/her intentions do not seem to be always perfectly good can sometimes be an insult to him/her, even when the content of that accusation is not bizarre or delusional.
12. Reimer (2010) pointed out a similar contrast between nihilistic delusions and philosophical skepticism.

13. It is hard to say whether these delusions can properly be called delusions, and this issue cannot be resolved straightaway (Kumazaki, 2011). Characteristics of these delusions should be investigated separately.
14. Due to the rapid advancement of computers and robots, a difficult problem arises regarding whether we can attribute intention to machines; however, some patients with schizophrenia had persecutory delusions about machines even before the development of information technologies.
15. Some delusional perceptions can be construed as the result of such an abnormality.
16. This article adds novel analyses of first-person authority, intention, and cognitive psychological studies on delusions to my preliminary idea (Kumazaki, 2008).

References

Anscombe, G. E. M. (1963). *Intention* (2nd ed.). Oxford, UK: Basil Blackwell.

Bar-on, D. (2004). *Speaking my mind: Expression and self-knowledge*. Oxford, UK: Clarendon.

Bentall, R. P., Corcoran, R., Howard, R., Blackwood, N., & Kinderman, P. (2001). Persecutory delusions: A review and theoretical integration. *Clinical Psychology Review*, *21*, 1143–1192.

Berrios, G. E. (1996). Delusions. In *The history of mental symptoms: Descriptive psychopathology since the nineteenth century* (pp. 85–139). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Bertelsen, P. (2012). Intentional activity and free will as core concepts in criminal law and psychology. *Theory & Psychology*, *22*, 46–66. doi:10.1177/0959354310384759

Bratman, M. E. (1999). Intention. In R. Audi (Ed.), *The Cambridge dictionary of philosophy* (2nd ed., p. 440). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Brückner, B. (2009). Geschichtlichkeit und Aktualität der Theorie des Wahns in der *Allgemeinen Psychopathologie* von Karl Jaspers [Historicity and actuality of the theory of delusion in *General Psychopathology* by Karl Jaspers]. *Journal für Philosophie & Psychiatrie*, *2*(2). Retrieved from http://www.jfpp.org/jfpp-2-2009-03+M544f671c0ee.html

Coulter, J. (1973). *Approaches to insanity*. London, UK: Martin Robertson.

Coulter, J. (1989). *Mind in action*. Cambridge, UK: Polity.

Cromby, J., & Harper, D. J. (2009). Paranoia: A social account. *Theory & Psychology*, *19*, 335–361. doi:10.1177/0959354309104158

Davidson, D. (2001a). First person authority. In *Subjective, intersubjective, objective* (pp. 3–14). Oxford, UK: Clarendon. (Original work published 1984)

Davidson, D. (2001b). Intending. In *Essays on actions and events* (2nd ed., pp. 83–102). Oxford, UK: Clarendon. (Original work published 1978)

Davidson, D. (2001c). Knowing one's own mind. In *Subjective, intersubjective, objective* (pp. 15–38). Oxford, UK: Clarendon. (Original work published 1987)

Finkelstein, D. H. (2003). *Expression and the inner*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Fricker, M. (2007). *Epistemic injustice: Power and the ethics of knowing*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Frith, C. D. (2004). Schizophrenia and theory of mind. *Psychological Medicine*, *34*, 385–389. doi:10.1017/S0033291703001326

Frith, C. D. (2008). *The cognitive neuropsychology of schizophrenia*. Hove, UK: Psychology Press. (Original work published 1992)

Gallagher, S. (2009). Delusional realities. In M. R. Broome & L. Bortolotti (Eds.), *Psychiatry as cognitive neuroscience* (pp. 245–266). Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Gallois, A. (1996). *The world without, the mind within: An essay on first-person authority*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Garety, P. A., & Hemsley, D. R. (1994). *Delusions: Investigations into the psychology of delusional reasoning*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Gertler, B. (2011). *Self-knowledge*. London, UK: Routledge.

Gigerenzer, G. (1997). The modularity of social intelligence. In A. Whiten & R. W. Byrne (Eds.), *Machavellian intelligence II: Extensions and evaluations* (pp. 265–288). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Gigerenzer, G. (2000). Probabilistic mental models. In *Chapter 7, Adaptive thinking: Rationality in the real world*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Hohwy, J. (2002). Privileged self-knowledge and externalism: A contextualist approach. *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly*, *83*, 235–252.

Hohwy, J. (2013). Delusions, illusions and inference under uncertainty. *Mind & Language*, *28*, 57–71.

Ikuta, T. (2003). Tougou-shitchou-shou no mousou ni okeru kakushin no kouzou: Mousou to "han"-joushiki [On the structure of conviction in schizophrenic delusions: Delusion and "anti"-common knowledge]. *Japanese Journal of Psychopathology*, *24*, 3–19.

Ikuta, T. (2004). Tougou-shitchou-shou ni okeru mousou no kouzou [On the structure of delusion in schizophrenia]. *Japanese Journal of Psychopathology*, *25*, 111–118.

Ikuta, T. (2008). Mousou: Rinshou-teki sokumen [Delusion: Clinical aspects]. In M. Matsushita, S. Kato, & S. Kanba (Eds.), *Seishin-igaku taiwa* [Dialogues on psychiatry] (pp. 3–18). Tokyo, Japan: Koubundou.

Jaspers, K. (1959). *Allgemeine Psychopathologie* [General psychopathology] (7th ed.). Berlin, Germany: Springer.

Jaspers, K. (1997). *General psychopathology* (J. J. Hoenig & M. W. Hamilton, Trans.). Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press. (Original work published 1962)

Knobe, J. (2003). Intentional action and side effects in ordinary language. *Analysis*, *63*, 190–193.

Kocha, H., & Furuno, T. (2009). Taikou-ki melancholy ni tsuite [A study on involutional melancholia]. *Psychiatria et Neurologia Japonica*, *111*, 373–387.

Kozakai, T. (2007). Moral responsibility and social fiction. In T. Sugiman, K. J. Gergen, W. Wagner, & Y. Yamada (Eds.), *Meaning in action: Constructions, narratives, and representations* (pp. 289–302). New York, NY: Springer.

Kozakai, T. (2008). *Sekinin to iu kyokou* [Moral responsibility and social fiction]. Tokyo, Japan: University of Tokyo Press.

Kumazaki, T. (2008). Mousou to ichininshou-tokken [Delusions and first-person authority]. *Japanese Journal of Psychopathology*, *29*, 61–71.

Kumazaki, T. (2011). What is a "mood-congruent" delusion? History and conceptual problems. *History of Psychiatry*, *22*, 315–331. doi:10.1177/0957154X10390438

Langdon, R. (2005). Theory of mind in schizophrenia. In B. F. Malle & S. D. Hodges (Eds.), *Other minds: How humans bridge the divide between self and others* (pp. 323–342). New York, NY: Guilford.

Langdon, R., Ward, P. B., & Coltheart, M. (2010). Reasoning anomalies associated with delusions in schizophrenia. *Schizophrenia Bulletin*, *36*, 321–330.

Lau, J., & Deutsch, M. (2012). Externalism about mental content. In E. N. Zalta (Ed.), *The Stanford encyclopedia of philosophy* (Winter 2012 ed.), Retrieved from http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2012/entries/content-externalism/

Maher, B. A. (1992). Delusions: Contemporary etiological hypotheses. *Psychiatric Annals*, *22*, 260–268.

Mehl, S., Rief, W., Lüllmann, E., Ziegler, M., Kesting, M-L., & Lincoln, T. M. (2010). Are theory of mind deficits in understanding intentions of others associated with

persecutory delusions? *The Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease*, *198*, 516–519. doi:10.1097/NMD.0b013e3181e4c8d2

Moore, G. E. (1993). A defense of common sense. In T. Baldwin (Ed.), *G. E. Moore: Selected writings* (pp. 106–133). London, UK: Routledge. (Original work published 1925)

Moran, R. (2001). *Authority and estrangement: An essay on self-knowledge*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Moran, R., & Stone, M. J. (2011). Anscombe on expression of intention: An exegesis. In A. Ford, J. Hornsby, & F. Stoutland (Eds.), *Essays on Anscombe's* Intention (pp. 33–75). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Mundt, C. (1996). Zur Psychotherapie des Wahns [Psychotherapy for delusion]. *Nervenarzt*, *67*, 515–523.

Murphy, D. (2013). Delusions, modernist epistemology and irrational belief. *Mind & Language*, *28*, 113–124.

Nuccetelli, S. (2003). Introduction. In S. Nuccetelli (Ed.), *New essays on semantic externalism and self-knowledge* (pp. 1–21). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Owens, J. (2003). Externalism, Davidson, and knowledge of comparative content. In S. Nuccetelli (Ed.), *New essays on semantic externalism and self-knowledge* (pp. 201–218). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Putnam, H. (1975). The meaning of "meaning". In *Mind, language and reality. Philosophical papers: Vol. 2* (pp. 215–271). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Radoilska, L. (2012). Introduction: Personal autonomy, decisional capacity, and mental disorder. In L. Radoilska (Ed.), *Autonomy and mental disorder* (pp. ix-xli). Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Reimer, M. (2010). Only a philosopher or a madman: Impractical delusions in philosophy and psychiatry. *Philosophy, Psychiatry & Psychology*, *17*, 315–328.

Sadock, B. J., & Sadock, V. A. (2005). *Kaplan & Sadock's pocket handbook of clinical psychiatry* (4th ed.). Philadelphia, PA: Lippincott Williams & Wilkins.

Sass, L. A. (1994). *The paradoxes of delusion: Wittgenstein, Schreber, and the schizophrenic mind*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Sass, L. A. (2014). Delusion and double book-keeping. In T. Fuchs, T. Breyer, & C. Mundt (Eds.), *Karl Jaspers' philosophy and psychopathology* (pp. 125–147). New York, NY: Springer.

Scherzer, P., Leveillé, E., Achim, A., Boisseau, E., & Stip, E. (2012). A study of theory of mind in paranoid schizophrenia: A theory or many theories? *Frontiers in Psychology*, *3*, 432. doi:10.3389/fpsyg.2012.00432

Schneider, K. (1952). *Über den Wahn* [On delusion]. Stuttgart, Germany: Georg Thieme.

Scholl, B. J., & Leslie, A. M. (1999). Modularity, development and "theory of mind". *Mind & Language*, 14, 131–153.

Setiya, K. (2011). Intention. In E. N. Zalta (Ed.), *The Stanford encyclopedia of philosophy* (Spring 2011 ed.). Retrieved from http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2011/entries/intention/

Shoemaker, S. (1963). *Self-knowledge and self-identity*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Spitzer, M. (1988). Karl Jaspers, mental states, and delusional beliefs: A redefinition and its implications. In M. Spitzer, F. A. Uehlein, & G. Oepen (Eds.), *Psychopathology and philosophy* (pp. 128–142). Berlin, Germany: Springer.

Stenlund, M. (2011). Involuntary antipsychotic medication and freedom of thought. *Dialogues in Philosophy, Mental and Neuro Sciences*, *4*, 31–33.

Stenlund, M. (2014). *Freedom of delusion: Interdisciplinary views concerning freedom of belief and opinion meet the individual with psychosis* (Doctoral dissertation). University of Helsinki,

Finland. Retrieved from https://helda.helsinki.fi/bitstream/handle/10138/42872/freedomo.pdf?sequence=1

Stoutland, F. (2011). Introduction: Anscombe's *Intention* in context. In A. Ford, J. Hornsby, & F. Stoutland (Eds.), *Essays on Anscombe's* Intention (pp. 1–22). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Talbot, M. (2011, November 26–27). *A romp through the philosophy of mind: Part 4. Are we asking the wrong questions?* Retrieved from http://media.podcasts.ox.ac.uk/conted/romp_mind/2011-11-27_mind_04.pdf

Wittgenstein, L. (2001). *Philosophical investigations* (3rd ed., G. E. M. Anscombe, Trans.). Oxford, UK: Basil Blackwell. (Original work published 1953)

Wittgenstein, L. (1969). *On certainty* (G. E. M. Anscombe & G. H. von Wright, Eds., D. Paul & G. E.M. Anscombe, Trans.). Oxford, UK: Basil Blackwell.

Author biography

Tsutomu Kumazaki is a psychiatrist at the Department of Psychiatry, Toranomon Branch Hospital, Japan. His research interest is the analysis of the concepts used in psychiatry, which offers insights for improving clinical practice. He is the author of "The theoretical root of Karl Jaspers' *General Psychopathology*" (*History of Psychiatry*, 2013).