

Psychopathology from an Anti-representational Perspective. A Critical Analysis

One of the key questions in philosophy is: “What is thinking?” To answer this question, philosophers predominantly treat rationally acting people as model cases for their analyses. As a result, it was assumed that there can be no thinking in the full sense of the word in young children, animals and people with mental illness or brain damage.

In the modern philosophy of psychiatry, such an assumption, however, was at least partly undermined with the recognition that people suffering from various types of psychopathology can entertain beliefs and can generally have thoughts about various things. It is an open question, however, whether their thoughts, including hallucinatory and delusional states, really have content or whether observers merely ascribe their content to them as based on their external behavior. Maybe a person suffering from amnesia who unwittingly confabulates has already lost the ability to really think?

The aim of this research is to determine whether it is justified to adopt a perspective that denies certain mental states are contentful, i.e., are not representational. Thus, the anti-representational account of cognitive disorders will be under analysis. The analyses will appeal to the account of mental representations previously developed by the Principal Investigator, according to which, representation is a function of the mental mechanisms that can detect inconsistencies in their information. This account is particularly well suited to the task, as delusional patients often lose the ability to critically evaluate the content of their thoughts. Do their thoughts therefore lose their content? Are these thoughts only in a figurative sense? Or maybe these disorders are even more complex in nature?

The research will focus on cognitive disorders, including hallucinations, confabulations, and psychoses, as well as on partially cognitive disorders, such as certain disorders of empathy, obsessive-compulsive disorders or aphantasia (the inability to create mental images).