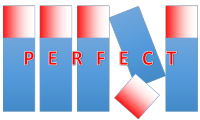




## Philosophy of Mind Workshop Series 3. Beliefs





European  
Research  
Council



Workshop series developed by Sophie Stammers, research fellow at Project PERFECT, University of Birmingham, and conceived of in partnership with Mind in Camden in 2017. Email [s.stammers@bham.ac.uk](mailto:s.stammers@bham.ac.uk)

### Guiding questions

1. What is the “naïve model” of unusual and unshared beliefs?
2. How do we form beliefs? And what are they for?
3. What does our discussion about 2, as above, mean for the naïve model?

## 1) Naïve model of unusual and unshared beliefs

The naïve model makes 2 claims.

- 1) It associates these beliefs with **illness** or **malfunctioning**
- 2) It says these beliefs are **bad** for us.

## Naïve model of unusual and unshared beliefs

- 2) It says these beliefs are **bad** for us.

### i) **Psychological costs:**

These beliefs make us *feel* bad.

### ii) **“Epistemic” (knowledge) costs:**

These beliefs do not depict reality. So they harm our *knowledge* of ourselves and the world.

## 2) Group discussion

What is a belief?

What's the relation between  
beliefs and experiences?

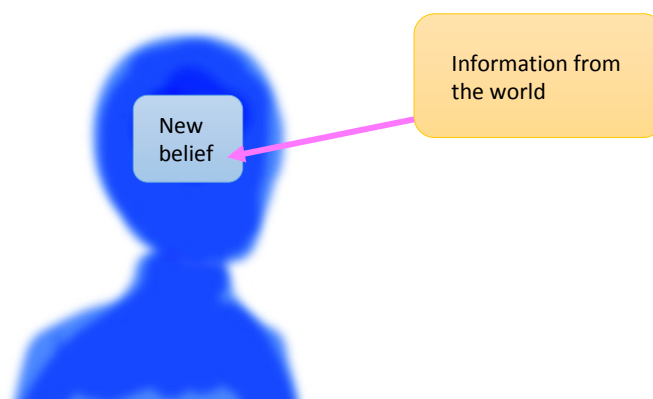
### The Dress (a reminder!)



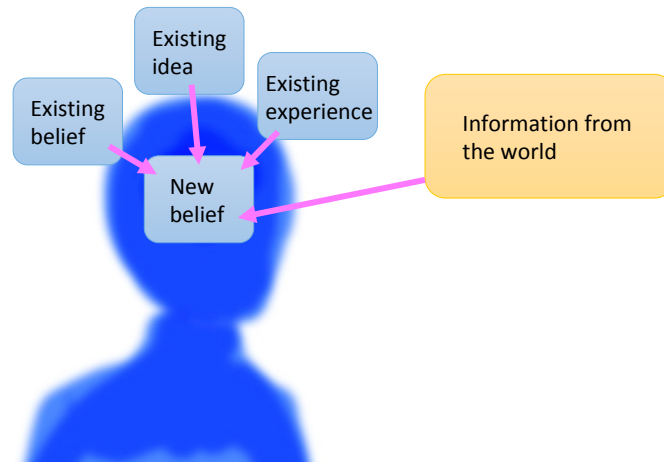
Matt Hendrick, Creative Commons, cropped.  
<https://tinyurl.com/thedresscc>

## The sources of beliefs

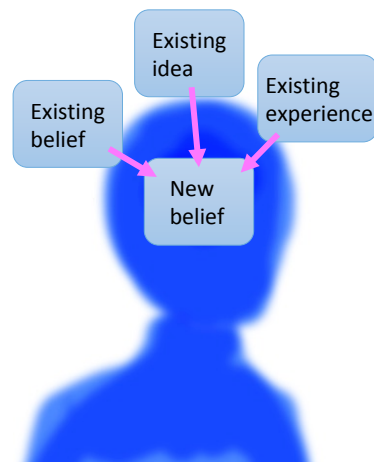
### 1) Outer world as source



## 2) Inner and outer world as source



## 3) Inner world only as source?



Are there cases when we should use **only** information from the world to form our beliefs?

If we rely on existing ideas that are not shared by others, or which do not reflect shared reality to form our beliefs, is this bad?

Or is it sometimes helpful?

When the world doesn't match beliefs:  
e.g. **"Unrealistic optimism"**

94% of college professors believe that they do  
above-average work.<sup>1</sup>

People tend to underestimate the likelihood that  
their marriage will end in divorce.<sup>2</sup>

1. Cross, K. P. (1997) Not can, but will college-teaching be improved, *New Directions for Higher Education*, 17, pp. 1-15.
2. Weinstein, N. D. (1980) Unrealistic optimism about future life events, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 39 (5), pp. 806-820.

Taken from Jefferson, A. Bortolotti, B., Kuzmanovic, B. (2017) What is unrealistic optimism? *Consciousness and Cognition* 50 (April), pp. 3-11.

When the world doesn't match beliefs:  
e.g. **"Unrealistic optimism"**

Do you think these beliefs can be valuable or  
helpful even though they don't match the  
world?

Any other examples of unusual and unshared  
beliefs that can be helpful?

### 3. Reassessing the naïve model of unusual and unshared beliefs

#### Reminder of the naïve model of unusual and unshared beliefs

The naïve model makes 2 claims.

- 1) It associates these beliefs with **illness** or **malfunctioning**
- 2) It says these beliefs are **bad** for us.



## Naïve model of unusual and unshared beliefs

2) It says these beliefs are **bad** for us.

**i) Psychological costs:**

These beliefs make us *feel* bad.

**ii) “Epistemic” (knowledge) costs:**

These beliefs do not depict reality. So they harm our *knowledge* of ourselves and the world.

## Is the naïve model right?

**What should we say instead?**

## Optional reading and listening for next session

**1. “The Irrationality Within Us”**

<https://tinyurl.com/m3reading1>

**2. Philosophy Bites podcast: “Irrationality”**

<https://tinyurl.com/m3listening>

**3. Cognitive bias codex** (not really “reading”, but have a look at this, and feel free to do an internet search for some of these biases if they interest you)

<https://tinyurl.com/m3reading2>