

KEEPING IT RATIONAL: ON PERSONS AND RATIONALITY IN PHILOSOPHY OF PSYCHIATRY

In this talk I emphasise the need, in philosophy of psychiatry, to bring some clarity on the role played by rationality in understanding mental disorders. This inquiry is framed within the idea that mental disorders are conditions that affect a person in their entirety, and that a proper understanding of the role of rationality is needed if theorising about psychiatry ultimately aims at furnishing insights into the factual, lived reality of psychiatric conditions. In fact, rationality has long been considered a central feature when characterising what constitute persons and the way they function, and a pivotal element when discussing mental disorders. I ultimately argue that rationality is an important feature that should be recognised and accounted for when theorising about mental disorders, although it is important not to overly emphasise its role as the identifying feature of the person. In particular, I focus on one significant tendency in the philosophy of psychiatry to adopt an approach that, going back to Davidson (1985, 2002) considers rationality as a constitutive feature of persons, without which we simply cannot make sense of our interlocutors as persons altogether.

I develop my case in four steps.

First, I present George Graham's (2020) account of mental disorders as an exemplary approach that gives room to rationality without downplaying other important factors. I emphasise that Graham's framework is attractive insofar as it recognises rationality as a matter of degree rather than an all-or-nothing capacity, thereby offering a more nuanced understanding of mental disorders. I then proceed to show that Graham's framework draws on a Davidsonian view of rationality, according to which every intentional attitude must be to some degree rational.

Second, I observe that the Davidsonian position according to which all intentional attitudes must exhibit some degree of rationality for someone to qualify as a person seems to be, *prima facie*, too strong. I present three counterexamples in which intentional attitudes are not responsive to norms of rationality in different ways and yet we would not question, because of this lack of rationality, that they belong to a person. The cases I present are the following: delusions, belief-like states typically understood, at least to a certain extent, in terms of their irrationality; conspiracy theories, which constitute interesting cases precisely because of their irrational recalcitrance to counterevidence; and *aliefs*, arational, affect-laden intentional attitudes that happen as automatic responses and generate actions that are "belief-discordant" (Gendler 2008).

Third, I consider a defence of a Davidsonian approach to delusions which shows in what sense a rationalist account of intentional agency is valid and in fact advantageous when accounting for delusions (Reimer 2011). I go back to my examples and show that this counter-objection also applies to conspiracy theories. However, it does not seem to hold in the case of aliefs.

Fourth, admitting that the notion of alief is controversial, I observe that even giving it a very minimal reading, the important difference with the other cases is that aliefs are not just irrational attitudes, they are “a-rational”. In other words, they happen beyond the scope of the rational. The Davidsonian approach to rationality, being originally an interpretivist view, focuses on propositional attitudes, which are formulated within the domain of rationality (whether they are rational or irrational). However, I argue that there are reasons to distinguish intentional attitudes from propositional attitudes, where the former are not always bounded to norms of rationality. To show the importance of this distinction, I present the example of Mrs T, a woman affected by a neurodegenerative disease who progressively loses her capacity to formulate propositional attitudes (Stich 1996). Nonetheless, she is still capable of intentional interactions with the world. The example shows that all the intentional attitudes that are not propositional attitudes are not necessarily rational and that, following a Davidsonian rationalistic approach to intentional attitudes, we would need to not consider Mrs T a person.

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