



A METAPHYSICS OF PSYCHOPATHOLOGY (PHILOSOPHICAL PSYCHOPATHOLOGY)

Peter Zachar

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review by Lovro Savić

The first thing that comes to mind after reading Peter Zachar's new book titled *A Metaphysics of Psychopathology* is: Peter Zachar and MIT press did it again! Aside from Oxford's University Press *International Perspectives in Philosophy & Psychiatry* series, MIT press continues to do an excellent job in publishing the most interesting, relevant and up to date scholarly and philosophical work in the continuously expanding field of philosophy of psychiatry. Zachar's book presents one of the latest additions to the *Philosophical Psychopathology* series, and indeed a good one. The other thought that immediately follows is that MIT press continues to complement its philosophical work on pragmatism. After *Pragmatic Neuroethics* (Racine, 2010) and *Pragmatic Bioethics* (McGee, 2003), Zachar's book can be regarded as a fresh newcomer to MIT press publication list with an interesting implementation of the american pragmatist theory to the domain of psychiatry and to its philosophical counterpart. This in part serves as a new complement to the interesting remark made by Natalie F. Banner and Tim Thornton that "philosophy of psychiatry in the english speaking world has broad historical roots, ranging across many traditions of thought in Europe, UK and the USA" (Banner and Thornton, 2007).

Zachar's book is by no means introductory either to philosophy of psychiatry or metaphysics. It does indeed cover and explain some of the most important theories in metaphysics, but does it in a manner that is significantly far from 'introductory level'. In the light of this, it is worth noting that some background knowledge in metaphysics and philosophy of science is needed to engage in this book. However, even if you are a newcomer to both fields (metaphysics and philosophy of psychiatry), Zachar has provided a glossary at the end of the book. It includes definitions and meanings of the most important philosophical concepts employed in the book.

This 288 pages long book is divided in 12 chapters. Interestingly, keeping in mind the title of the book, the first two chapters (excluding introduction) barely cover anything strictly related to psychiatric classification or psychopathology – two of the most prevailing and longest standing topics in philosophical investigation of psychiatry. However, the author notes that

“[t]he amount of psychiatric material generally increases thereafter, with chapter 8 being the point at which psychiatric topics take center stage” (p. 17). Up to that moment, the reader is not left in a research darkness as for the author engages into interesting philosophical and historical exploration. Indeed, exploration and clarification of theories such as scientifically inspired pragmatism (Chapter 2), instrumental nominalism (Chapter 3), essentialism (Chapter 4) are significantly important for the later parts of the book where the author deals with classification and the concept of mental disorder (Chapter 8), narcissistic personality disorder (Chapter 11) and human condition such as grief (Chapter 10). This book explores the most important metaphysical concepts such as “real”, “true” and “objective” and advocates the stance that “in addition to using these metaphysical concepts to think philosophically about other concepts, we should also think philosophically about them” (p. 21). In other words, as Zachar notes, we should “refrain from assuming that the meaning of those concepts is self-evident” (p. 210). In that way, both psychiatry and related clinical psychology could benefit from such intellectual activity which is characteristic to philosophy in general and metaphysics in particular.

However, one question arises: Why should philosophers and psychiatrist engage in this kind of activity and endeavour at all? Some authors list several reasons which somewhat closely resemble Zachar’s motivation for metaphysical investigation of psychiatry: “the presence of a priori assumptions and matters such as categorization, causation and explanation” (Ralston, 2013, p. 399).

Zachar’s recent book adds on and broadens this list: “As already said, both psychiatrists and philosophers use terms such as “objective”, “reality” and “truth” in their everyday discourses and “instead of assuming that metaphysical questions about the reality of psychiatric disorders are self-evident, I have offered some cognitive resources for making such ideas a little less obscure” (Zachar, 2014, p. 229). This cognitive resources now (as hinted by Banner and Thornton) have their roots in American philosophical thoughts. Zachar makes it explicit and relies on what he calls scientifically inspired pragmatism for which it gives an informative overview in first two chapters.

It is worth noting that this book abounds with exploration and confrontation with most important contemporary (e.g. Wakefield’s account of mental disorders) and (fortunately) now historical concepts (e.g. *drapetomania* and *dysaesthesia aesthiopis*) and theories of psychiatric conditions, still relevant natural kinds theories and contrasted social construct theories, and always interesting ideas linked to the newest (fifth) edition of *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorder* and particular human conditions such as grief and narcissistic personality disorder.

Innovative nature of this book lies in Zachar attempt to come up with a new theory which he names *imperfect community model*. In short, and in Zachar’s words, it is based on the idea “that various symptom configurations that are classified by psychiatrists resemble each other in a number of ways, but there is no property or group of properties that all of them share in common as a class” (p. 19) which directly contrast essentialist account of mental disorder and sides somewhat to Kazem Sadegh-Zadeh *prototype resemblance theory of mental disorder* (Sadegh-Zadeh, 2008).

To conclude, it is worth noting that this book is written very well, includes a broad range of the most important ideas, concepts, theories and achievements in the philosophy of psychiatry and deals with the several very controversial issues in the psychiatric classification systems. After *Psychological Concepts and Biological Psychiatry: A philosophical analysis* (Zachar, 2000), it marks another remarkable contribution to the field of philosophy of psychi-

etry made by Peter Zachar.

I would like to end this somewhat concise review with not so excessively optimistic response to “remain[ing] worries about the accessibility of work in the philosophy of psychiatry to the average practitioner” (Ralston, 2013, p. 399). Zachar’s book, armed with both sophisticated theories and vocabulary on the one hand, and basic concepts and their clarification on the other, with enough perserverence from psychiatric practitioners might in the near future transmit its significant relevance from philosophy to psychiatry. That being said, *A Metaphysics of Psychopathology* is a must-read and deserves a place on a bookshelf of anyone interested in new advancements in philosophy, psychiatry and philosophy of psychiatry.

References

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