

Thomas Schramme (red.), 2014, *Being Amoral: Psychopathy and Moral Incapacity*, Cambridge, MA.: The MIT Press, ss. 344

How philosophy can deal with psychopathy and mental disorders? What are the issues that philosophy may find interesting within psychopathy? These are some of the questions that the book tries to answer. Moreover the book goes deeper when it reaches the core topic: to consider the question of what psychopaths lack. The contributors focus on specific moral deficiencies and dysfunctions, observing the distinction between people who possess certain capacities to be moral and people who seem to lack those capacities.

Graham and Stephens (1994) distinguish three ways of doing philosophical psychopathology: using clinical findings to support ideas in philosophy of mind; concern with the experiential and ethical dimensions of psychopathology and methodological issues in the scientific field of psychopathology. Although the book embraces all three, it apparently focuses on the second way: “It is obvious that we will not make progress in philosophy when using a phenomenon like psychopathy in order to bear evidence for theoretical claims – for instance, regarding moral

motivation or responsibility – unless we have a clear grasp of its empirical basis” (p. 321).

Since psychopathology is a relatively new field of studies, the scientific explanation of psychopathy is based on several concepts that require analysis. This can be done from a philosophical perspective with support of empirical data. Indeed, the terms discussed in the book include: “personality”, “emotions”, “character”, “cognition”, “rationality”, “empathy”, “moral judgment”, “moral knowledge”. For philosophy psychopathy serves as a test case against theoretical assumptions, e.g. in metaethics. Psychopathy has been described as an affective deficit, in relation with lack of empathy, and interpreted as a condition that exhibits a lack of morality. In this regard the test case is whether human morality is due to reason or an affect. But, again, it would be necessary to define what “morality” and “empathy” mean in order to provide a good grounds for a philosophical investigation. *Being Amoral* attempts at a more clear view on this scarcely outlined domain, pur-

suings the question of what psychopaths lack and what their incapacities are. Thereby it delineates capacities needed for a moral person or for moral agency.

While clarifying “psychopathy” in the philosophical debate, the book focuses on four disputes: the problem of justifying morality, the problem of moral motivation, the problem of the origin and nature of moral judgments, and moral responsibility (p. 11). Although many philosophers are interested in psychopathy, because it seems to provide a real case of amorality, it is important to distinguish between *amoralist* and *immoralist*. An immoralist is someone who recognizes moral considerations, but acts against them, because regards other motives to be more important and relevant. An amoral person, on the contrary, ignores morality and moral standards altogether. An amoralist, however, could either reject moral considerations or lacks the capacity to take moral requirements into account. These two aspects are addressed in the book.

A second issue debated in moral philosophy is whether moral requirements are intrinsically motivating. In other words, if a judgement that something is right to do, will motivate the agent to act accordingly. There are two main positions in this debate. Motivational *internalism* states that there is an internal connection between moral motivation and judgments regarding moral obligation. The opposite position is called *externalism*, which does not recognize the internal connection and claims that people can

accept something as morally required without being motivated to act accordingly. Psychopaths are a good taste case, since they seem to know what is morally appropriate, but they lack the inclination to follow it. It might seem to support the externalist view, but it is uncertain that psychopaths have a clear understanding of what is morally required. They might even lack an understanding of what “morally required” means. Thus, the debate between internalism and externalism remains unresolved.

The third issue discussed in moral philosophy regards the problem of the origin and nature of moral judgments – whether moral distinctions and judgments are due to sympathy (and consequent feelings) or to reason. Two opposite positions: moral sentimentalism and moral rationalism were taken by such philosophers as: I. Kant, D. Hume, F. Hutcheson, A. Smith and R. Cudworth. Recent studies, however, are inclined to admit that psychopaths lack both affective and cognitive or rational capacity. One of the main statements regarding psychopathy is that psychopaths lack “empathy”. The editor of the book seems to take for granted that psychopaths lack empathic concern, but the question is what are the bases of this lack of concern and whether they are related to any deficit of empathy. As studies have shown, it is possible to distinguish two kinds of empathy: cognitive and affective. An interesting comparison has been done with autism. People who suffer from severe autism lack the ability to read

other people's mind, although they do not lack certain feelings and affective empathy. Psychopaths, on the contrary, do not have problems with cognitive empathy: they often use their mind reading and manipulation for cruel behaviour. What psychopaths seem to lack is affective empathy, since they are unable to understand what other people may feel when treated in certain ways and in particular situations. Therefore, they cannot identify with others, which is a necessary condition for being able to take the moral point of view (p. 16).

The fourth issue that relates philosophy and psychopathology is the problem of moral responsibility. This debate opens also to legal concerns, such as whether psychopaths lack responsibility for their behaviour and whether they should not be treated as "normal criminals". The term actually used is "dangerous or severe personality disorder", but has little to do with psychiatry, rather this is a purely legal classificatory term to serve certain interests of society.

In order to understand what psychopaths lack chapter 2 focuses on the concept of "psychopathy" and its conceptions. The concept of psychopathy is analyzed in French, German and Anglo-American psychiatric traditions, with an overview of the main conceptual milestones. The word and the concept "psychopathy" – as understood today – has been influenced by many earlier concepts from different countries. In studying the roots of the term there are two interesting results

to underline. First, that there has been a link between mental development and moral capacities. The link is not only due to psychiatric perspectives, but is also visible in the tradition of virtue ethics. The book precisely points out the problem of linking psychopathy with nonmedical types of deviation, which led to a fusion of social values judgements and medical terminology (p. 19). The second result is methodological. It is essential to define psychopathy according to categorical versus dimensional models in order to make theoretical progress by acknowledging different ways of categorizing psychopathy.

The book chapters are then divided in 3 macro-areas in order to examine psychopathy under three points of view: Moral Capacities and Incapacities; Issues in Moral Psychology; Social Aspects: Blame, Transgression, and Dangerousness. The first macro-area focuses on the main question of the book: what psychopaths lack? The book claims that some deficits can be connected to psychopathy. They consist of impairments in rationality, fellow feelings, language, volition and evaluation, and sympathy. The essays show that it is not plausible to identify the deficit of psychopaths. Regarding the psychopaths' concept of rationality Matthews argues against Kantian impersonal concept of moral rationality – the view that to act for moral reasons is to act in accordance with a rule, which can be universally applied to any rational being, regardless of whether that being is human or

not. Rather, moral rationality, in the Aristotelian sense, seems to depend on certain human features, such as feeling empathy, benevolence and resistance to cause harm to others. Hence, according to this view, some psychopaths may lack other kinds of rationality. More importantly, psychopaths seem to lack those abilities, which enable most people to be morally rational.

The second macro-area concerns moral motivation, moral emotion and moral character. The book claims that both internalists and externalists are wrong regarding moral motivation, because internalists see an internal connection between moral judgement and motivation, and externalists they reject the internalist view. Psychopaths are not needed in order to refute conceptual versions of internalism or even psychological versions of overriding-motivation internalism about moral judgment. For psychopaths to refute psychological some-motivation internalism, we would need to know that (1) psychopaths make real moral judgments and (2) psychopaths do not have some motivation to be moral. The survey of current scientific research reveals little evidence for either (1) and (2).

The third macro-area regards social aspects of psychopathy, such as the basis of ascriptions of moral responsibility, the justification of moral blame, and the social response toward perceived dangerousness of people. The issue of moral and legal responsibility has been widely discussed among philosophers as moral-conventional

distinction regarding psychopaths and their behaviour. The theory of moral-conventional distinction is based on the fact that human beings are able to distinguish moral and conventional rules and transgressions. The book supports the view that there is no moral-conventional distinction, bringing out two conceptual domains. Rather, there is a set of different distinctions that may not overlap. However, there is still some kind of distinction that psychopaths apparently cannot track. The reason why psychopaths fail to track such a distinction is because they fail to recognize authority-based reasons altogether, due to their empathic and emotional incapacities.

At attempt to summarize a complex topic of psychopathy is not an easy task, especially given its interdisciplinary character. It is impossible to find an overarching theme or conceptual unity of the different disciplines (p. 322). However, *Being Amoral* provides a very challenging insight of various aspects of psychopathy and it serves as an incentive to all scholars and researches interested not only in philosophical psychopathology, but also in moral philosophy, philosophy of law and social psychology.

References

Graham G., Stephens L. (1994), *Philosophical Psychopathology*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.

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