



As part of our popular Lunch Talk Series, McLaughlin College proudly presents:

Are the Depressed Capable of Rational Suicide?

Presented by
Ariane Bakhtiar



In this paper, I argue that some of the suicidally depressed have decision-making capacity and can commit what is known as “rational suicide”. Rational suicide, while having different definitions, generally means that a person makes a decision about dying while not impaired by a psychiatric disorder. There is some consensus in the literature on medical assistance in dying (MAiD) that the suicidally depressed requesting for assistance in death cannot have decisional authority regarding their wish to die. This is because the patient requesting to die is not medically competent given the nature of depressive psychopathology, e.g., depression as a lack of self-regard or concern for oneself, alienation from future possibilities, depletion of mental resources, and/or *épuisement*. Any of these theories might indicate a lack of insight into one’s condition in the context of decision-making capacity assessments, i.e., a physician’s assessment of a patient’s ability to make decisions about their medical condition and related treatment options (like decisions about MAiD). Drawing on the clinical case of Janet who suffers from treatment-resistant depression, as well as theories on the nature of capacity, I argue that the suicidally depressed can have insight into their condition insofar as they have accurate appraisals about their wish to die separate from their symptomology. Thus, having a disorder does not necessarily preclude one from rational suicide. The mental disorder need not be all-encompassing and can allow for decisions about suicide that are not related to symptomology but to a well-reasoned decision about life with a grievous condition.

ARIANE BAKHTIAR is a *Ph.D. candidate in philosophy at York University. Her area of interest includes philosophy of psychiatry and bioethics. Her dissertation focuses on the topic of decision-making capacity in the context of major depressive disorder and physician-assisted suicide. Some of her related interests include phenomenological accounts of the mental disorder, patient narrative, and the use of psychedelics in psychiatric treatment.*

THURSDAY, JANUARY 20, 2022

FROM 12:30 TO 1:30 PM, EST, via Zoom

Registration: https://yorku.zoom.us/meeting/register/tJYrfuiprTkoG9dSsuJgHQIGbTIH_Vqe1U9F