

The indication of absence of rationality by the psychopath's presence

[Psychology](#), [Behaviorism](#)



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What the majority of us would consider to be rational, expected, and proper behavior may not be so intuitive to someone who suffers from psychopathy. When we consider the building blocks of what our moral stances are, there are often rational reasons behind many of our actions. We will consider whether or not this is truly what the rationale is behind the mind of a psychopath. Do they understand the essential difference between right and wrong, and furthermore do they understand the consequences of their actions if they decide to act in a way that is knowingly wrong?

Based on Nichols' psychopathy research, he has found that there is not necessarily a direct correlation between understanding right and wrong, and acting accordingly. There are many reasons that people make choices they do, but mostly these are based on what their beliefs and morals are. Do psychopaths follow these same steps? If someone who has been diagnosed a psychopath is faced with a moral dilemma, often they will do the wrong thing, but this is not always because there is an absence of guilt or remorse. They may be fully aware that what they are doing is wrong, but they are simply choosing to ignore it. Rationally, they can define what separates their actions from those of others. They do not always act with an intent to hurt somebody, because they are mostly selfish and unaware of how their actions affect those around them.

To address the first objection, that psychopaths do suffer relevant rational defects, we will see that there is actually an affective deficit. There are different types of physiological responses to certain distress triggers that would cause any normal person to behave in a predictable manner. There

are circumstances that will change the outcome, whether or not there is someone being hurt or not for example. There is the argument that empathy plays a much bigger role in determining the response from psychopaths instead of reason. This is an argument that would support sentimentalism instead of rationalism.

The second objection, that affective deficits make it harder for the psychopath to develop rational capacities that are essential to moral judgment and moral agency, begins all the way in childhood and examines how we begin to see our choices as rational. Do we always need to have a normal set of morals if we are expected to be successful, functioning adults? There is the belief that there are some basic requirements that will be built upon throughout adolescence, and that they are imperative to a proper functioning brain. Children begin to feel sympathy at a very young age, I can personally remember this feeling resonating from the age of a primary school student. I definitely believe that the ability to feel sympathetic is a cornerstone of what makes us human, and what helps to guide us in our decision making throughout the entirety of our lives. Could psychopaths be missing this ability to feel sympathetic?

Many of us go through our lives making decisions based on reason, that is, rational choices. I would say that I make decisions based on the morality of them, and how they make me feel emotionally, instead of as a response to any consequences or harm that may come my way if I make a morally poor choice. I believe that psychopaths fully understand that their actions are wrong, and that they do in fact have rational decision making skills. Their

lack of sympathy or empathy indicates a strong presence of selfish behavior. Perhaps though it is not simply a lack of these emotions, but rather a disregard for them and their importance. Children begin to show psychopathic tendencies very young, which leads us to believe that the brain activity and behavior of very young children is indicative of a behavior problem that begins in infancy and continues to grow from there.

I think that the current literature better supports sentimentalism over rationalism, although there is a compelling argument against this idea. I believe that there is a more significant emotional response to our circumstances on a daily basis than there is a response to our rational moral thought. There are many emotions that human beings experience, and I believe that we allow these to guide us towards the decision that is ultimately the moral choice to be made. Rationalism would be a more compelling argument, in my opinion, if there were more research to show that human beings are able to remove their highly manipulative emotions from the equation when faced with a difficult choice. There are cases where there is a direct causation between the moral judgment of somebody and their response, and this can make the case for rationalism very appealing, but ultimately I think there has been a stronger argument against it for me.