Sanja Dembic is a postdoctoral researcher and the academic coordinator at Human Abilities – Centre for Advanced Studies in the Humanities (a cooperation between Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin and Freie Universität Berlin). She received her PhD at the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin (2020) and was a research associate at the Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg (2017 -2020). Her research focuses on topics in the philosophy of psychiatry and philosophy of action. In her dissertation, she developed an ability-based approach to mental disorder. More recently, she has developed an interest in questions of moral and legal responsibility.

What is it to have a mental disorder? In this talk, I present and argue for the following view: an individual S has a mental disorder if and only if S is unable to respond adequately to some of her reasons in some of her thinking, feeling, or acting (in view of her mental constitution), and is harmed by the condition that results from that inability. On this view, mental disorders are primarily deviations from the norms of reasons. I elaborate on the concepts of ability, reasons, and harm and illustrate the view with an example: addictive disorder. I argue that the presented view is preferable to a biological dysfunction conception of mental disorder, because it allows us to capture the fact that mental disorders are personal-level phenomena while remaining neutral with regards to questions of explanation.