



**Health Humanities Lecture Series:  
Non-Western approaches to  
health & illness**

**Serife Tekin**

(University of Texas, San Antonio, UTSA)

**'Ethics of distributing  
psychotherapy chatbots to  
refugees: stuff weird people do'**

March 18, 2021, 4 PM  
Online via Zoom

The lecture is open to everyone, but registration is necessary!

[Register here](#)

### Abstract

In this talk, taking cues from Joseph Heinrich's examination of the characteristics of WEIRD (Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic) people, as individualistic, self-obsessed, control-oriented, nonconformist, and analytical (Heinrich 2020), I raise epistemic and ethical concerns about addressing refugees' mental health problems with psychotherapy chatbots. I focus on the specific features of smartphone psychotherapy chatbots designed to address Syrian refugees' mental health (such as an Arabic speaking bot Karim). For example, the very proposal that a psychotherapy chatbot can address mental health problems hinges on the assumption that WEIRD people's mental health and well-being needs are universally applicable to people from different cultures and backgrounds. In addition to epistemic and ethical constraints of bots in addressing mental health challenges, I worry that motivating the development of this technology to address the growing needs of refugee populations medicalizes social and political problems. It encourages masking these instead of offering solutions.

### Bio

Dr. Şerife Tekin is an Assistant Professor of Philosophy and Medical Humanities at the University of Texas, San Antonio (UTSA) at the Department of Philosophy and Classics. Her work in philosophy of psychiatry takes place at the intersection of philosophy of science, philosophy of mind, and bioethics. She is the co-editor for *Companion to Philosophy of Psychiatry* (Bloomsbury 2019) and the *Extraordinary Science and Psychiatry: Responses to the Crisis in Mental Health Research* (MIT 2017). Her work has appeared in journals such as *Synthese*; *Philosophy Compass*; *Philosophy, Psychiatry and Psychology*; *Public Affairs Quarterly*; *Journal of Medical Ethics*; *American Journal of Bioethics*; *American Journal of Bioethics – Neuroscience*; *Philosophical Psychology*; and books such as *The Routledge Handbook of the Philosophy and Science of Addiction* (Routledge University Press) and *Classifying Psychopathology: Mental Kinds and Natural Kinds* (MIT Press). She is in the Executive Board of the Association for the Advancement of Philosophy and Psychiatry.