Problem-Sustaining Patterns and Self-Illness Ambiguity

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In a previous paper, Voerman et al. (2025) proposed a revision of the concept of mental disorders into a concept of “problem sustaining patterns” (PSP). According to this idea, people need mental health care when their problems are sustained by patterns of biopsychosocial interactions that undermine their own attempts to solve those problems. In this presentation we explore how such a revision might affect the phenomenon of “self-illness ambiguity” (Sadler 2007). We will draw on some empirical pilot projects that we have been involved with at Parnassia Groep, as well as on philosophical reflection on reification, agency, the interpretation of patterns, and the difference between destructive and constructive ambiguity.