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***The future of 'zoon logikon'***

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Professor Jan Bransen is chair of “Philosophy of Behavioural Science” at the Faculty of Philosophy, Theology & Religious Studies of the University of Nijmegen. He is also teaching at the Behavioural Science Institute, a research institute of the Faculty of Social Sciences at the same university.

Professor Bransen studies the conceptual frameworks underlying our general view of man, in which we consider ourselves to be rational, autonomous and morally responsible individuals. He pays special attention to the significance of current behavioural science research for these conceptual frameworks and focuses on: the nature and significance of motives, freedom of choice and moral responsibility; the role and development of self-knowledge; the behavioural science interpretation of childhood.

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As the ancient Greeks thought human beings are "zoon logikon", animals that talk about what they do, i.e. that give reasons for what they do. The term "logikon" initially referred to the practice of articulating the logic of our behaviour. It was at once both a linguistic and a rational affair, something that showed itself in conversation or dialogue. But over the centuries these connotations changed and we ended up believing that what makes us human is the individual capacity to take up a disengaged perspective, to control our emotions, and to make rational choices.

Much contemporary psychology shows us that we are not all that rational. Our behaviour is sensitive to bias, activated by arbitrary circumstances and seriously emotional.

I shall argue, however, that (1) these are not very novel insights, and (2) they do not mean at all that we are not rational. For "rational", as the Greek already knew, is mainly the capacity to talk about what we do, to search, in conversation, for the logic of our behaviour.