

PHL / NEU 251 — DAY 1: WHAT IS NEUROETHICS?

Joshua May, Neuroethics, ch. 1 (pp. 3–14)

- Ethics of neuroscience — How should we research, measure, treat, enhance, predict, and govern brains?
- Neuroscience of ethics — What can brain science teach us about agency, responsibility, moral judgment, and the self?

BASIC ISSUES

- Autonomy — Freedom, responsibility, consent, and the effects of manipulating brains.
- Care — Mental disorder, addiction, treatment, stigma, and patient self-direction.
- Character — Moral judgment, bias, rationalization, and moral enhancement.
- Justice — Brain reading, privacy, unequal access, discrimination, and institutional power.

KEY TERMS

- Agency / autonomy — Capacities for choice, control, responsiveness to reasons, and self-direction.
- Neurotechnology — A tool that measures, predicts, or alters neural activity.
- Descriptive / normative — What happens and causes it versus what ought to be done.
- Bridge principle — The moral premise connecting evidence to a normative conclusion.

MAY'S APPROACH

- Case-first — Begin with difficult people and practices.
- Empirically informed — Inspect methods, uncertainty, effect sizes, and alternative explanations.
- Anti-alarmist — Avoid both neuro-hype and blanket skepticism about brain science.
- Continuity-minded — Agency is less conscious and reliable, yet more diverse and flexible than assumed.

FOUR QUESTIONS

- 1) Evidence — What was measured or changed, and how strong is the causal inference?
- 2) Concept — Which capacity or category is at issue?
- 3) Norm — Which moral principle connects the evidence to the proposed conclusion?
- 4) Stakes — Who receives the benefits, burdens, risks, authority, and opportunity to object?

RETURN TO KEVIN

- What evidence or account of capacity would change your judgment about blame?