

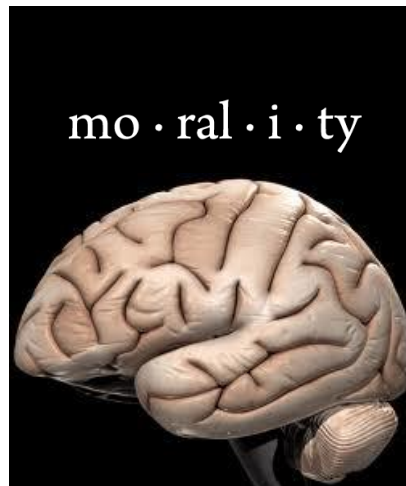


university of
 groningen

faculty of behavioural
 and social sciences

theory and history of
 psychology

Personhood, Immorality, and the History of Brain Science



Felix Schirmann

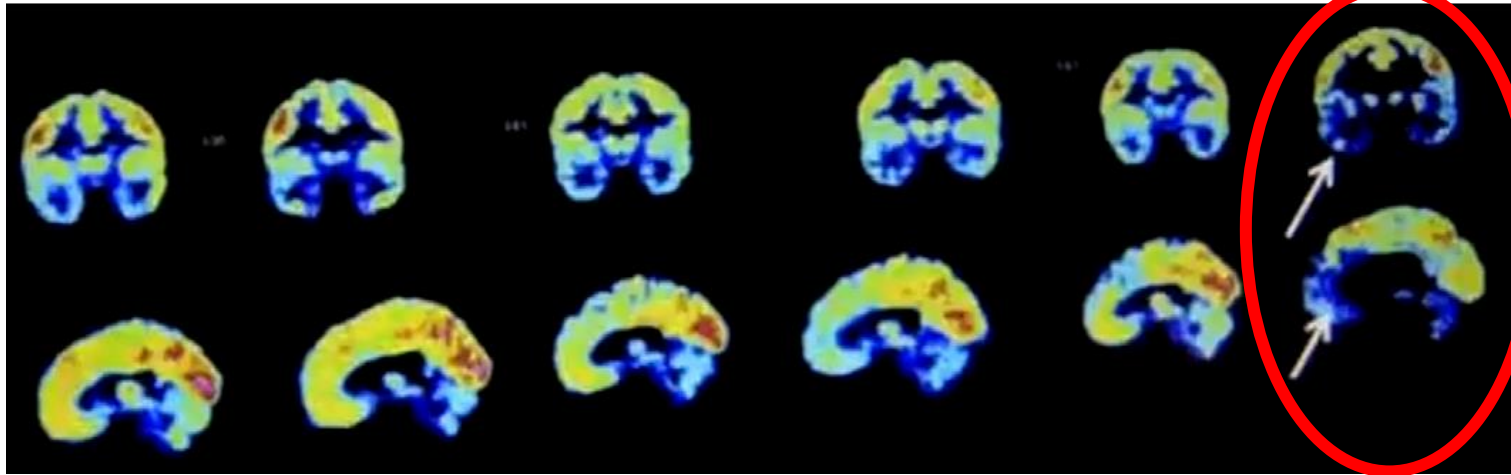
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www.moralpsychology.eu

Good persons & bad brains?



Fallon: “PET scan of a killer”



New ways of knowing immorality in the brain

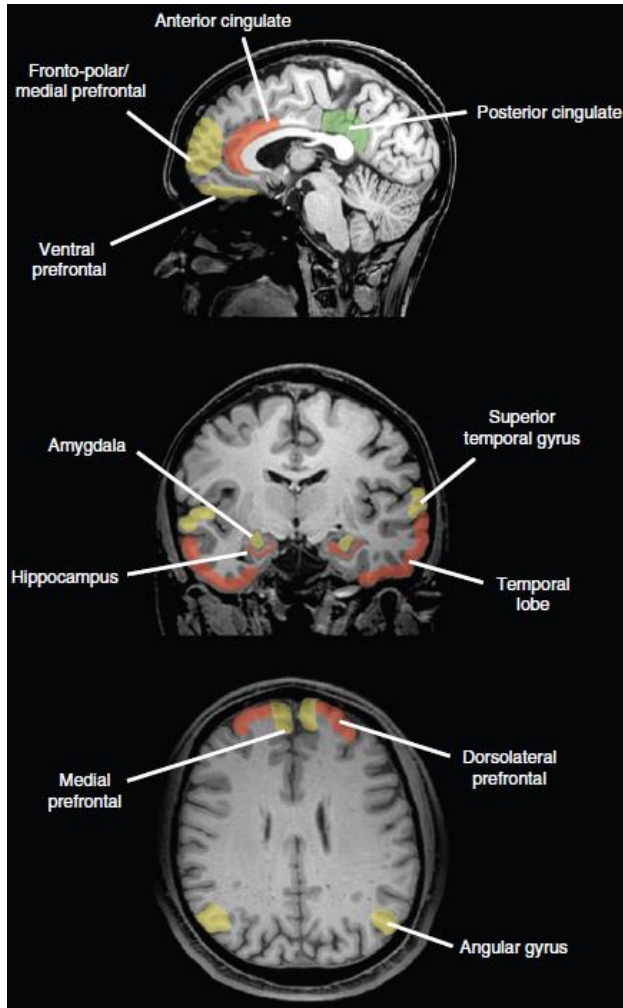


Fig. 1 A schematic diagram of brain regions impaired only in antisocial groups (red), activated only in moral decision-making (green) and regions common to both antisocial behavior and moral decision-making (yellow).

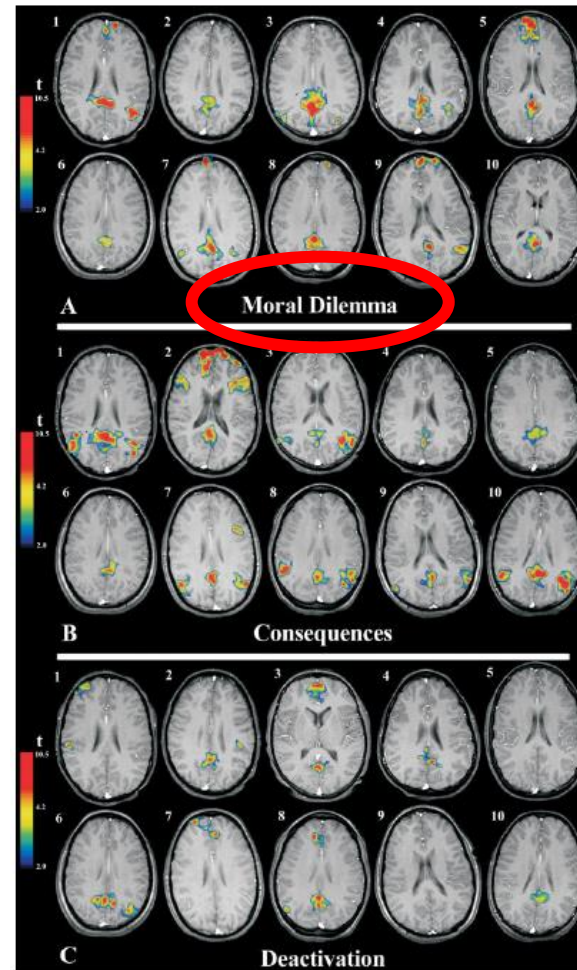
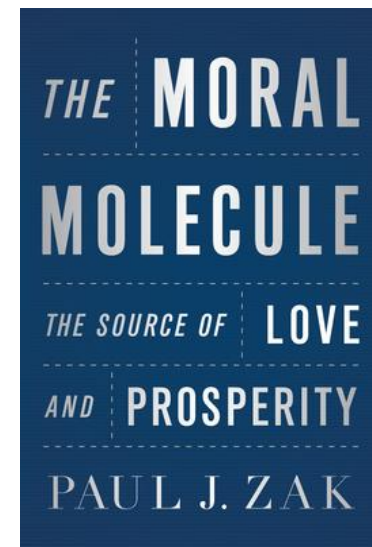
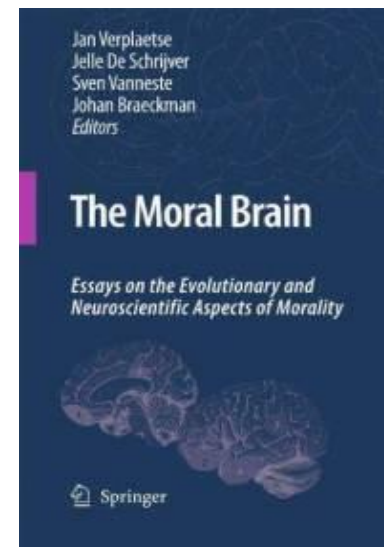
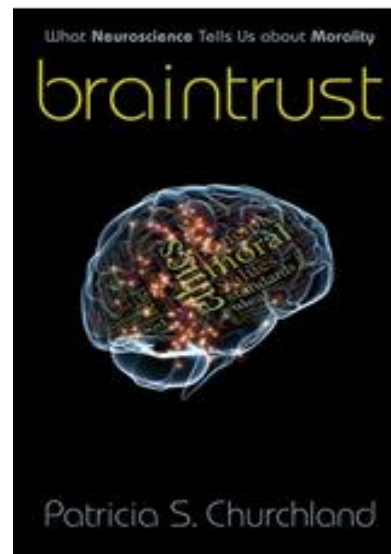
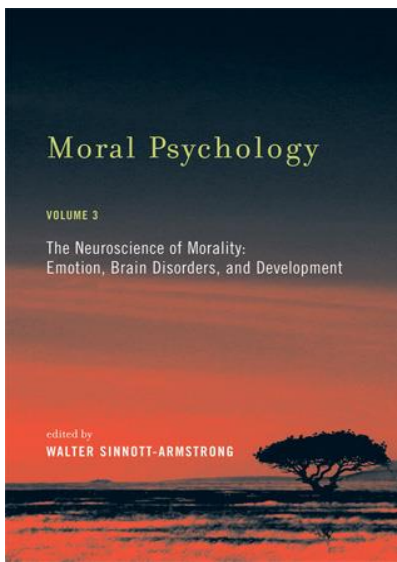
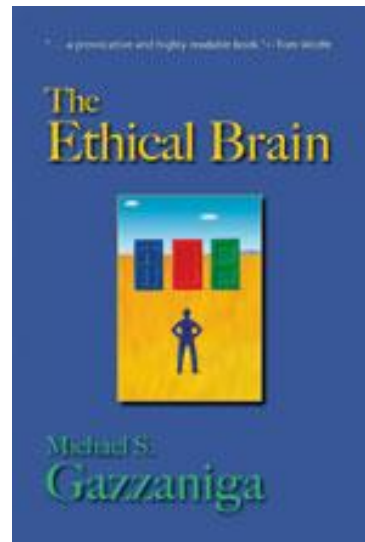
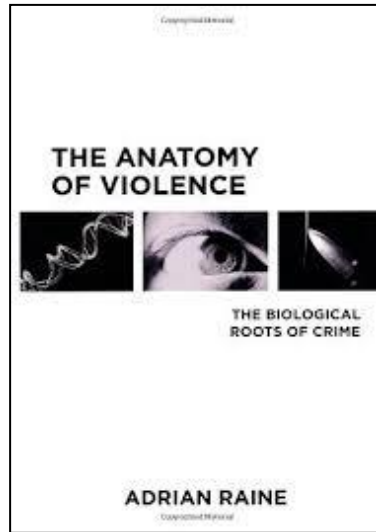


Figure 3. Individual subject activations of the posterior cingulate cortex. (A) (top): transverse images showing the magnitude and extent of peak activations in all 10 subjects during the moral dilemma condition. (B) (middle): transverse images showing the magnitude and extent of peak activations in all 10 subjects during the consequence of judgment condition. (C) (bottom): transverse images showing the magnitude and extent of peak deactivations in six of the ten subjects with the contrast "visual-fixation" minus "simple answer condition." In all images, functional activations correspond to t values greater than 4.2, $P < 0.0001$ (uncorrected). Images are displayed in radiological format. Subjects 2, 6, 7, and 8 – female subjects. [Color figure can be viewed in the online issue, which is available at www.interscience.wiley.com.]

A current surge...



Personhood & Brain

- Homo cerebralis (Hagner, 2008)
- Brainhood (Vidal, 2010)
- Cerebral subject (Ehrenberg, 2004)
- Neurochemical selves (Rose, 2003)

Being an immoral person

=

having a disordered brain?



Barack Around The Clock

Behind the scenes in the war for Iowa

The Stem-Cell Breakthrough

New methods could mean cures without controversy

Holiday Hits And Misses

Tinseltown gets serious; here's how to still have fun



TIME



What Makes Us Good/Evil

Humans are the planet's most noble creatures—and its most savage. Science is discovering why

BY JEFFREY KLUGER



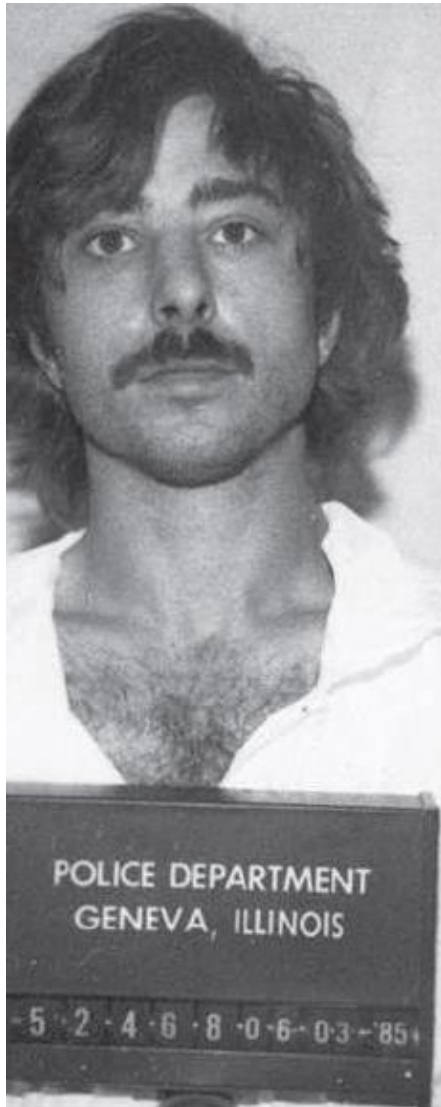
HEAD CASE

Last year, functional magnetic resonance imaging made its debut in court.

“Without the brain imaging stuff the jury would have been back in an hour,”

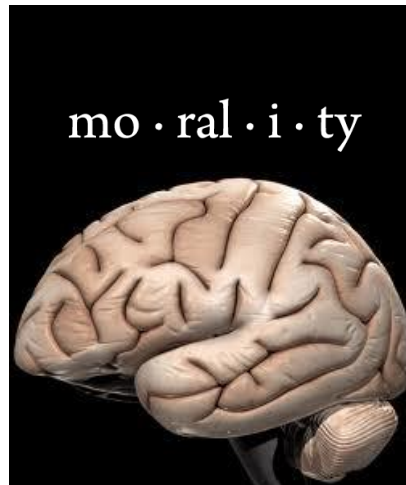
Dugan’s defense attorney, Steve Greenberg

Neuroscientific knowledge → social action

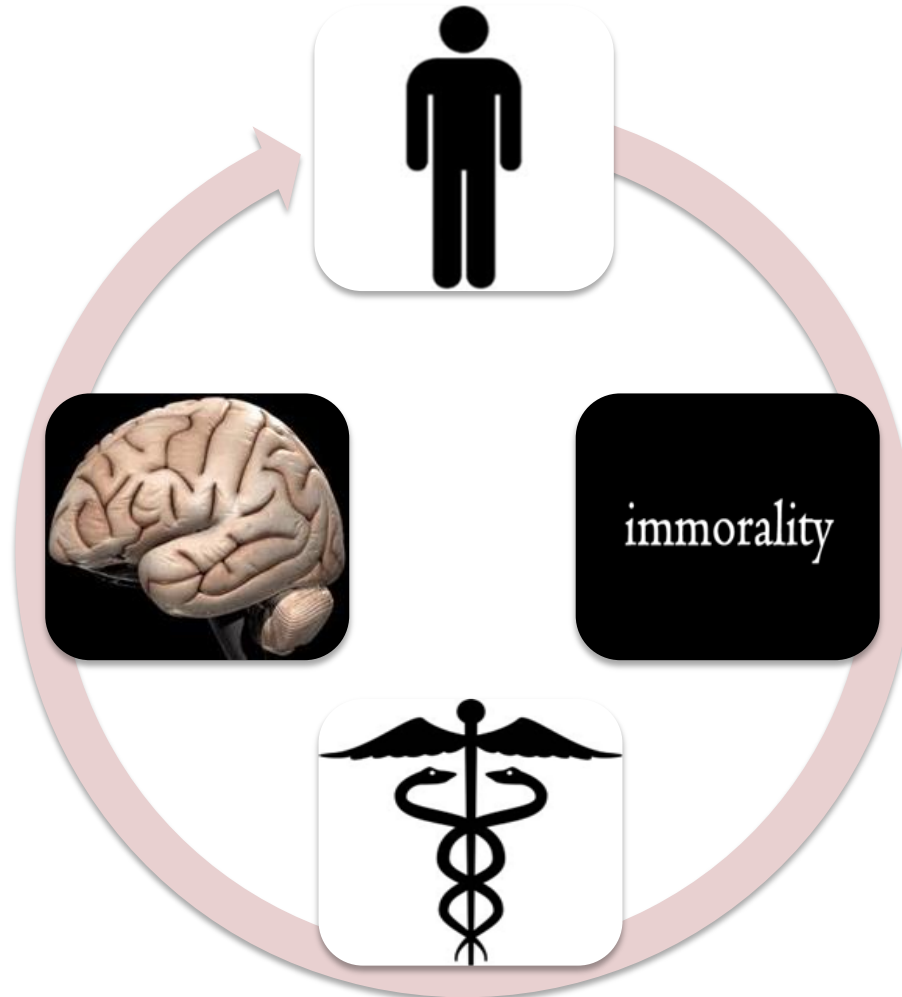


Performativity/co-construction of science and society

- Consequences for understanding, evaluating, judging immoral persons
- modes of interpretation determine courses of action

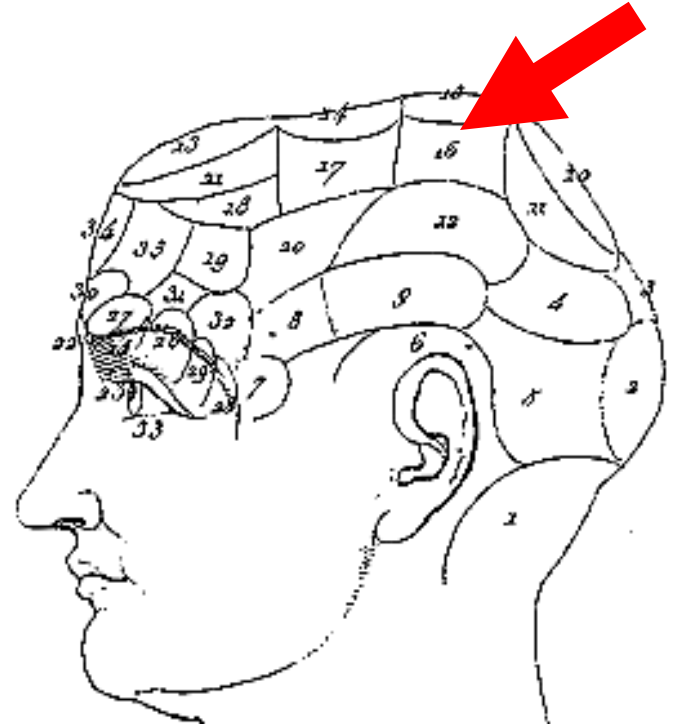
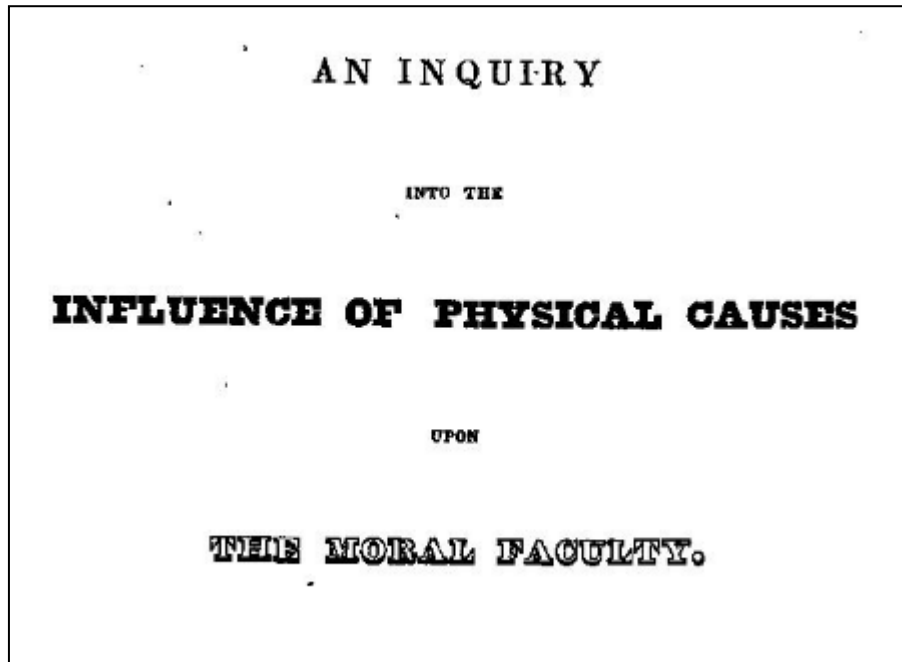


How have we come to think of immoral persons in terms of disordered brains?



Morality in the brain?

Rush, 1786



Spurzheim, 1818 “conscientiousness”

19th century: Immorality as mental disorder

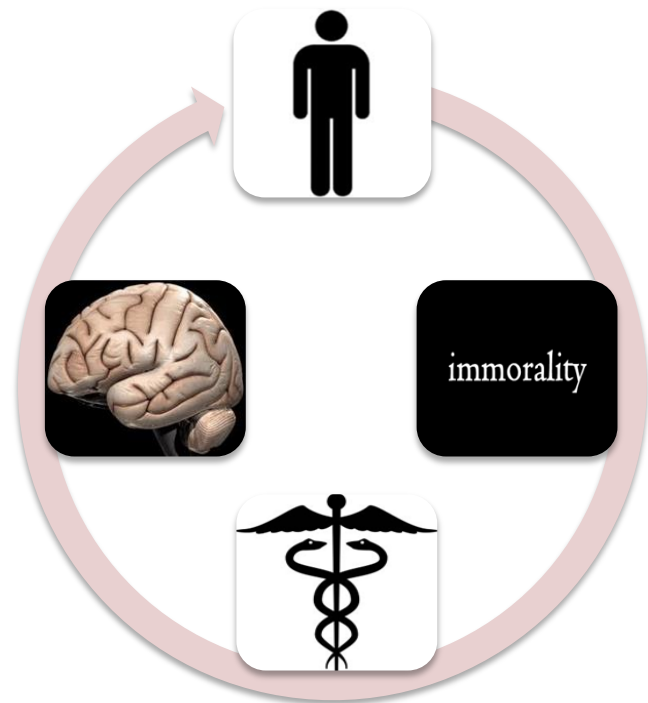
- Moral derangement (Rush, 1812)
- Moral insanity* (Prichard, 1835)
- Moral mania (Ray, 1838)
- Moral imbecility (Krafft-Ebbing, 1890)
- Moral idiocy (Bleuler, 1893)
- ...
- **Render immoral persons as sick**
- **Transfer from sin to mental disorder**
- **“medical model of vice as pathology”** (Rimke & Hunt, 2002)

19th century

- Rise of bio-medical experts
- Medico-legal evaluation
 - Crime → Criminal
 - What have you done? → Who are you?
- Causes obscure
 - Environment
 - Degeneration, Heredity, Brain Disorder

Immoral persons: exemplary cases

- Brain scientific descriptions of immoral persons
- Cerebral seats for morality
- Cases
 - Charles J. Guiteau
 - Patient E.
 - Iberger
 - Millard Wright



Charles J. Guiteau



CHARLES J. GUITEAU

From photographs taken by C. M. Bell, Washington, D. C., July 4, 1881.
Copyright, 1882, by C. M. Bell.

Patient E.

Ueber moralische Idiotie.

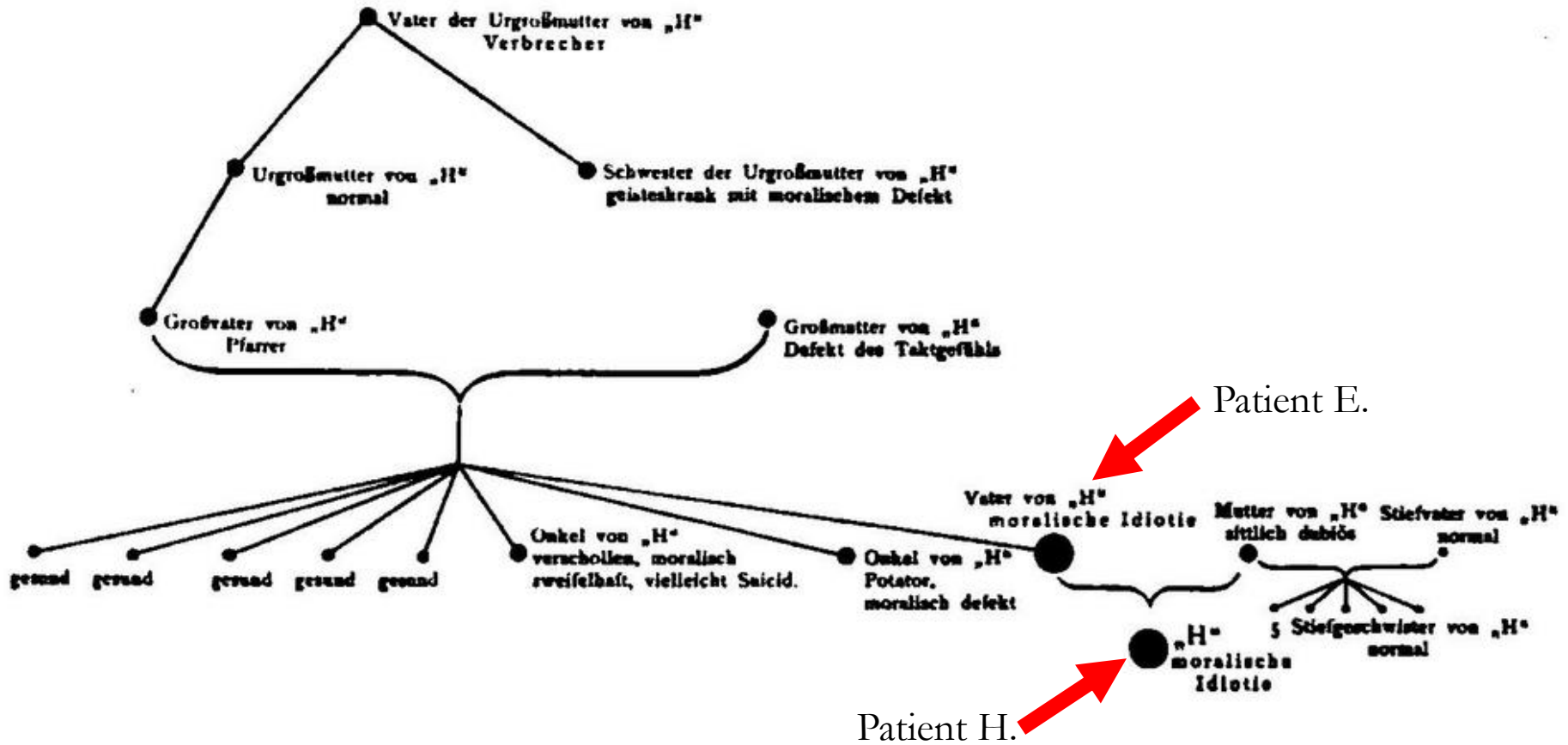
Von

Dr. **E. Bleuler**, Director in Rheinau.

- “moral defect caused by defective organisation of the brain” (Forel)
- “There are special functions of the cortex, which in their totality determine the character and the morality of an individual and these functions can be defective in isolation due to inborn or acquired inferiority” (Bleuler, 1896)

Patient H. – “inborn moral defect”

Fall I. „H.“



Iberger

oder religiöse Ich. Während die niedere Ich-Stufe der Triebe, Strebungen und Regungen nicht höher als vom Zwischenhirn aus gestört werden



Abb. 11. Orbitalhirn- und Augenverletzung (r. Glasaugel). (Gehirnpathologie, Abb. 395.)

kann, kommt dem Selbst-, Gemeinschafts- und Welt-Ich eine diencephale und eine corticale Stufe zu, die nach den Kriegsbeobachtungen im basalen Stirnhirn, dem *Orbitalhirn* liegt.

Zur *Psychopathologie der Person* haben nun die Kriegsbeobachtungen ergeben, daß bei *Orbitalhirnverletzten* Mängel der *Gemeinschaftsgesinnungen*, Untreue und Lügenhaftigkeit, Betrug und Diebstahl, Unbotmäßigkeit und Hetzerei auftraten, während bei anderen, in gleicher Gegend Verletzten das *Selbst-Ich* im Sinne von Unreife, Jungenhaftigkeit, läppischen Kindereien, Witzel- und Faxensucht erniedrigt wurde, und auf dem *Willensgebiete* Haltlosigkeit und Süchtigkeit sich ein-

stellten. Die Verletzungen drangen häufig durch die *Augen* oder die

Iberger

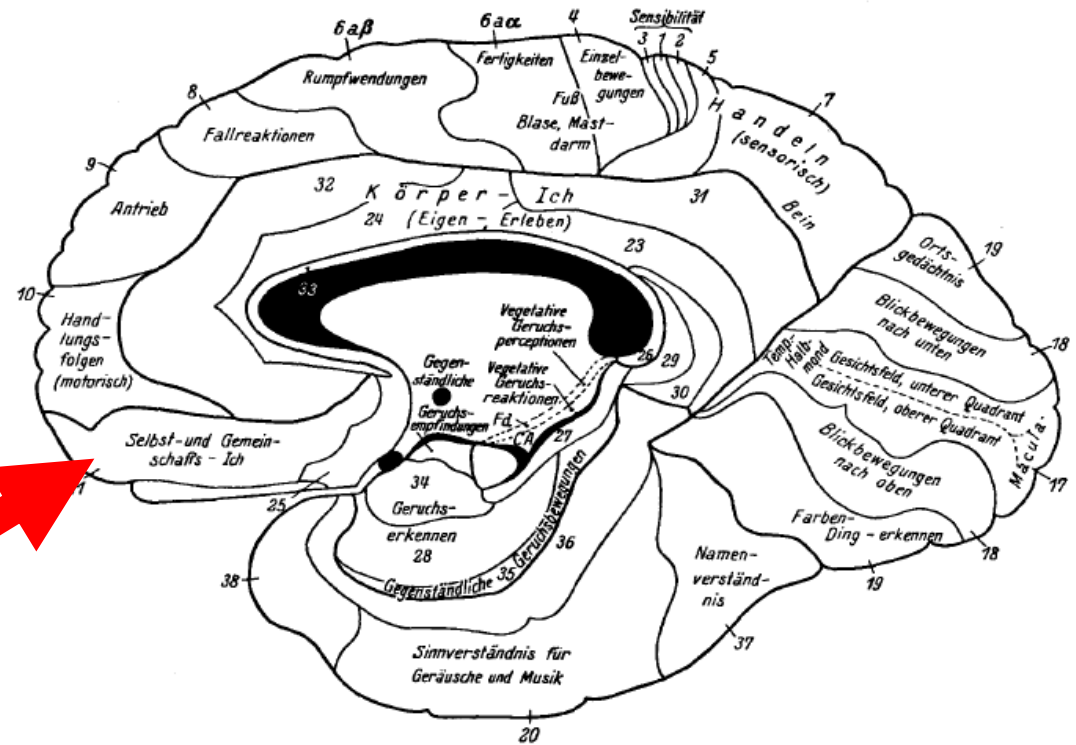


Abb. 4. Lokalisation der Funktionen an der Großhirnrinde, auf architektonischer Grundlage. Innenseite.



Abb. 11. Orbitalhirn- und Augenverletzung (r. Glasauge!). (Gehirnpathologie, Abb. 395.)

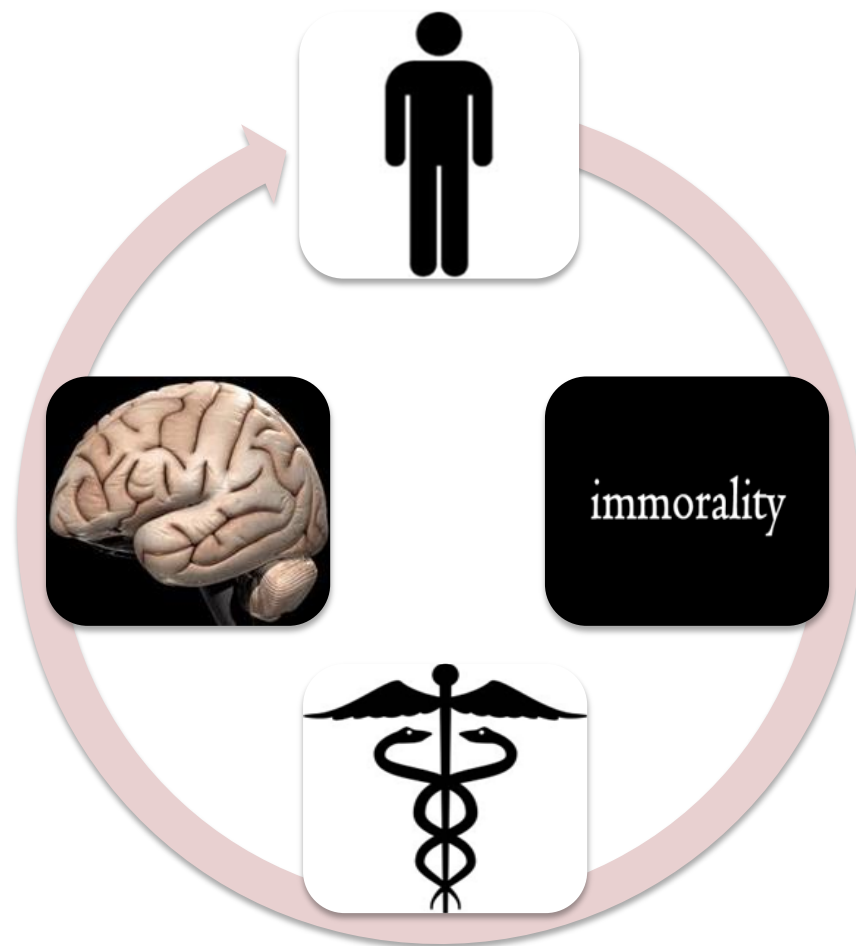
Kleist, 1934 – Gehirnpathologie

Millard Wright



“His counsel [...] requested that his client be permitted to enter a hospital to have a prefrontal lobotomy performed in an attempt to cure the prisoner of his criminal tendencies.” (Mayer 1948)

How have we come to think of immoral persons in terms of disordered brains?

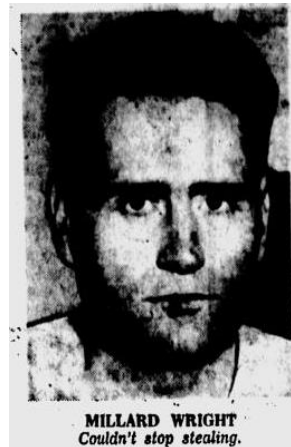


Similar underlying rationale

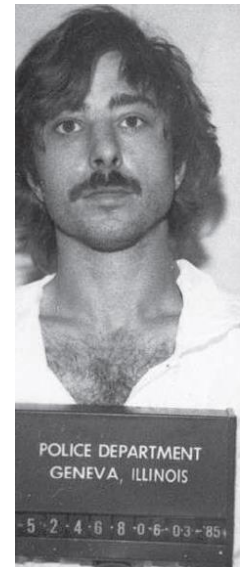
- Naturalization/‘scientification’/‘psychiatrization’
- Brain disorder → immorality
- Bad VS sick (person/culprit VS organism/patient)
- Person exonerated/relieved of responsibility
- Brain blamed/furnished with accountability



Abb. 11. Orbitalhirn- und Augenverletzung
(r. Glasauge!). (Gehirnpathologie,
Abb. 395.)



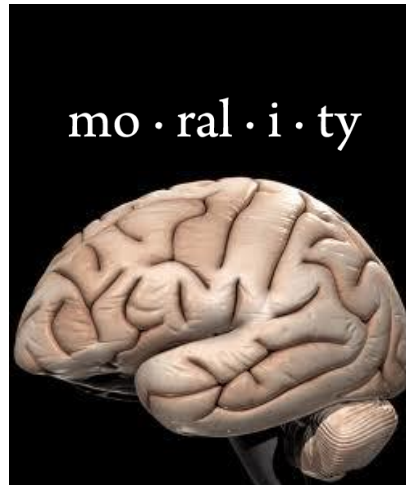
MILLARD WRIGHT
Couldn't stop stealing.



POLICE DEPARTMENT
GENEVA, ILLINOIS

5-2-4-6-8-0-6-0-3-85+

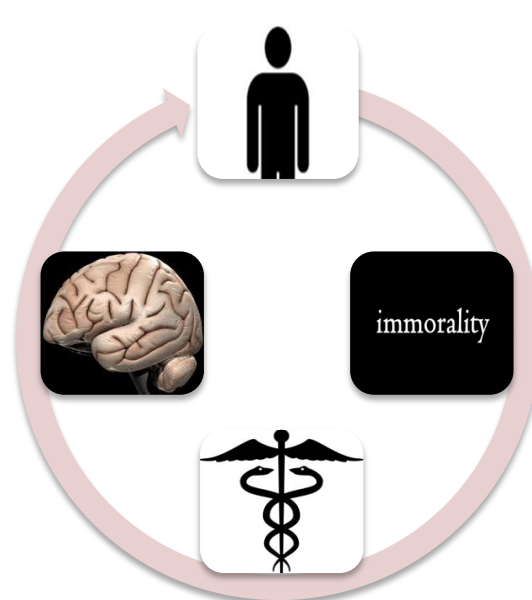
modes of interpretation determine courses of action



- Double-edged sword of bad biology/brains
- prison VS asylum / penal VS health system
- brain as target for intervention and control:
moral bioenhancement

Conclusion

- Brain-based descriptions of immoral persons
 - are of long-standing
 - Change with changing methods & technologies
 - Contested – then and now – yet can have consequences



Key Literature

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- Schirmann, F. (2013). Invoking the brain in studying morality: A theoretical and historical perspective on the neuroscience of morality. *Theory & Psychology*, 23(3), 289-304. doi:10.1177/0959354313478479
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