

CONFERENCE PRESENTATION

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Title:

**Rethinking Mental Integrity with Kant: Dignity or Autonomy?
Human Rights Ethics Technology Disability**

Abstract:

In this presentation, I want to engage with the idea of mental integrity, as developed within the broader framework of Neurorights. Mental integrity is one of the core rights proposed by proponents of Neurorights. Mental integrity, as a specific right within Neurorights, protects against nefarious accessing, manipulation, or alteration of brain states.

The central argument advanced by those advocating new general rights covering 'mental' or neurological life is that the current development of Brain-Computer Interfaces (e.g., devices that alert users to impending episodes of epilepsy, decode speech for those with locked-in syndrome, or devices that may modulate emotional responses) requires novel protections for our 'inner life' against undue attempts to access, manipulate, or alter.

In much of the current state of the art, mental integrity is linked to the idea of autonomy. However, many of the current and foreseeable uses of Brain-Computer Interfaces may bypass autonomous control systems (i.e., rational decision-making by conscious agents). There are, e.g., devices that help people with mobility impairments move or those with locked-in syndrome communicate. Nevertheless, commonplace accounts of autonomy may argue that such devices may diminish autonomy or even render actions subordinate to the device's control. Thus making the person non-autonomous.

By interjecting a Kantian flavour into this debate, I hope to show that the human dignity implied by Kant's proposal -- that we ought to "act in such a way that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never merely as a means, but always at the same time as an end" - - can help us reframe the debate of Brain-Computer Interfaces and mental integrity in relation to dignity rather than autonomy. A reframing that I want to show may be better suited to analysing cases in which these devices can enable or restore functions or capabilities (e.g., mobility, speech, vision, cognition, etc.).

By reconceptualising mental integrity through Kantian dignity rather than autonomy, I aim to show that Kant offers the current debate on mental integrity a much-needed perspective, enabling us to move beyond a focus on individuals (autonomy) and instead to care more broadly for people with reduced or non-existent autonomy. Therefore, with Kantian dignity, Neurorights might have a much stronger foundation than if we rely solely on autonomy.