Mental Health
Respecting patient autonomy is today a cornerstone of medical care.

But with mental illness, this autonomy is problematic.

The very thing needing treatment is the thing that is supposed to be autonomous.

We might treat a sick person against her will, with the hope that, once well, she will welcome the intervention. (Treating the sick-version of a person on behalf of her well-version.)
Disease or Illness?

These terms are often contrasted to mark out different aspects of ill health.

‘Disease’ refers to the biological pathology found in a patient that underlies the ill health.

‘Illness’ refers to a patient’s subjective response to, or social experience of, that ill health.

Disease: the same between individuals and across cultures.
Illness: varies greatly across individuals and cultures.

A disease can exist without any accompanying illness (the patient may not notice any ill health)
An illness can occur without any underlying disease (psychosomatic disorders).
Abnormal Behavior

Humans behave in various ways. Some ways we don’t like. Those we call abnormal.

(1) evaluation: a behavior might be harmful (e.g., biting others, self-cutting, compulsive shoplifting) or unusual (e.g., uncontrollable swearing), but what we don’t like we call abnormal.

(2) diagnosis: (find the cause) a behavior’s root cause might be neurological (e.g., a tumor), psychological (e.g., some pathological compulsion — a “mental illness,” perhaps brought on my an environmental stress), or autonomous (e.g., the agent wanted to do it and did it).

(3) treatment: the cause determines the treatment (surgery, psychiatric therapy, reasoning and admonishment).
Models for Framing Abnormal Behavior

Mental illness is generally viewed as a deviation from the norm (=abnormal). How shall we understand it and its cause?

**Cultural**: MI as value-neutral (cause irrelevant). Behaviors considered abnormal in one culture are normal in another culture. Mental illness/health is a “social construction”.

**Religious**: MI as demon possession (self as culpable).

**Moral**: MI as the result of a “bad choice” (self as culpable).

**Medical/Biological**: MI as result of an organic disorder; no culpability.
What is “Mental Health”?  

Jahoda (1958) defined six criteria by which mental health could be measured:

(1) Positive view of the self  
(2) Capability for growth and development  
(3) Autonomy and independence  
(4) Accurate perception of reality  
(5) Positive friendships and relationships  
(6) Environmental mastery (able to meet the varying demands of day-to-day situations).

The more criteria satisfied, the healthier the individual.