



Our Genes / Our Choices

Genes on Trial



Professor Evan Balaban outlines what areas of genetic research on behavior might be most fruitful, and what areas might lead to serious repercussions for certain groups of people.

EVAN BALABAN:

Genetics is an incredibly powerful science when you apply it to things where you kind of know what we're studying. When we have a condition that's medically defined like heart disease we have a clearly defined population of things that we're trying to study and learn about.

When we move to something like alcoholism that may be a whole lot more nebulous, at least there is clinical agreement on patterns of behavior that constitute a problem. Now, we have moved into a brand new arena. We are using terms—"impulsiveness," "aggression" that are very difficult to define in the operational ways that scientists need to define things.

I believe that there's something inherent in what it is that you're actually studying that feeds into the question of the quality of the science. Of how good an answer you can hope to get. And there is a line somewhere that I think we have just crossed.