

Delivering Justice Scientifically - A Point to Ponder

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Book Title : **Behavioural Neurology in Forensic Decision Making**
 Author : Ashoka Jahnavi Prasad
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Law and Science as we know are one of the few ideologies which continue to be closely intertwined with human existence right from the start of civilization. Being unique in their own sense, both the fields strive to ensure the well being of mankind but at times they come into conflict. This monograph *Behavioural Neurology in Forensic Decision Making* by Dr Ashoka Jahnavi Prasad briefly highlights this area of conflict in the world of Forensic Psychiatry.

The monograph starts with the content titled "Beha". Intrigued by the unfamiliar word I started to decode its meaning but the only connection that I could decipher was it was the first four letters of the word 'behaviour'. So, curiosity starts gripping the readers right from the first word as the monograph slowly unwinds the interplay between neuroscience and law. On the background of interesting lawsuits, the author has clearly pointed out the fundamental divide between law and neuroscience. In judicial proceedings, the field of Psychiatry explains the emotional trauma but often the law seeks for evidence of physical trauma to decide upon the verdict. Also, this gray area is not given due consideration many a time in formulating ways of punishment for criminal cases. The author has explained the above dilemmas with a number of examples from various law agencies and at the same time invokes a serious thought of how to narrow down this gap with the help of advances in behavioural neuroscience. The author also has penned down a very relevant interconnection between physical and mental injury in cases of solitary confinement, restrictive and other punitive punishment measures. The monograph has very well highlighted how mental agony and psychological

suffering could bring long-lasting structural and neurochemical changes in the brain of prisoners kept under prolonged isolation. When the court demands for evidence of physical trauma to decide upon violation of fundamental rights in such cases, behavioural neurological evidence could be the only way to prove the brain damage which is obviously physical in nature. This short write-up has ignited a larger debate of how neuroscience can play a very vital role on changing the current practices and at the same time help in formulating better policies in forensic decision making.

Concurring with the author's view, I personally opine that law and science cannot be completely binary whenever forensic psychiatry is concerned, but rather acknowledge the evidence available in making important judicial decisions. Although both the fields may seek for dominance with their own way of explanations, rational thinking on basis of neurological and behaviour science should win the argument.

I would suggest this monograph for all interested readers who have some basic idea in neurology, psychiatry and law as the content is written with many technical phrases and words. Most of the discussion emphasizes on solitary confinement and related brain damages which could have been limited to few examples. Adding other psychological aspects related to forensic and judicial proceedings would have helped to kindle more novel insights and interests in this emerging philosophy.

It is always a wonderful learning experience as the author continues to inspire many with his writings.

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