



Alternative Explanations: Worksheet

For the students:

Consider the following dilemma: Brain imaging technology is increasingly being used to predict the risk that a criminal will offend again. In one study involving 1,332 brain scans, researchers were able to combine information taken from the brain scans with psychological measures to accurately predict, on most occasions, whether a criminal would be rearrested. On the one hand, this enables some defendants to claim incompetency or insanity, but on the other, it marks some criminals out as irredeemable.

- (1) List two alternative explanations, besides brain biology, for why people commit crimes.
- (2) Which do you think is the best explanation? What makes it better than the other two?
- (3) Based on your assessment, do you think we should permit brain scans to be used in courtrooms?
- (4) How would you convince someone who disagreed with you because he or she thinks brain biology is the best explanation for why people commit crimes?

For the teacher:

Separate students into two groups: those who support permitting brain scans (Group 1) and those who do not (Group 2). Allow them to meet with their groups for ten minutes to discuss their reasons for their view and how they would respond to reasons against their view. Then, facilitate a debate between the two. One person from Group 1 offers one reason for their position. One person from Group 2 must explain why this person's defense doesn't work by referring specifically to the reason he or she gives. The response can include evidence or counterexamples against the defense, or a moral worry raised by the defense. It cannot introduce a new reason that is not currently in the debate. Then, give the floor to someone from Group 2 to offer a defense for their position and allow someone from Group 1 to respond. Continue until all the reasons have been addressed. Then ask the class as a whole what they learned from hearing the other side of the debate.

If the number of members in each group is very uneven, ask whether some students would be willing to play devil's advocate and join the other side. Depending on the class, you



could integrate a system of points or winning and losing into the debate. You may serve as the facilitator or assign the role to students who are neutral.