

The right to mental integrity and the extended mind

Neurotechnologies allegedly form a unique threat to our minds. Some scholars have proposed a right to 'mental integrity' to protect against mental interferences by neurotechnologies. Considering the vague boundaries of what constitutes the 'mental,' an ensuing question is what would fall within the protective scope of such a right. Generally, the proposals for a right to mental integrity assume a brain-based conception of mental states, and accordingly, propose a right that protects what exists within the skull. However, an alternative conception of mental states as things that can extend beyond our skull may have very different implications for its protective scope. In this article, we will contrast a more traditional, brain-based view of the mind with an extended view of the mind and consider its implications for (the scope of) the right to mental integrity. We find that an extended view of the mind would imply a (perhaps implausibly) large protective scope of the right to mental integrity—not only protecting our internal mental states, but also external artifacts that may be constitutive of mental states, such as brain implants, or even phones or notebooks. Because such external artifacts would also be liable to mental integrity infringements, neurotechnologies would no longer constitute a unique threat to our mental integrity. Moreover, if our minds can extend beyond our internal states, this might suggest that neurotechnologies could become part of our minds, and therefore the subject of mental integrity infringements themselves. We conclude that a right to mental integrity would only sufficiently protect against neurotechnologies on a brain-based account of the mind. On an extended account, the right would either be too broad, counting neurotechnologies amongst the many interferences that could infringe mental integrity, or too narrow, by preventing neurotechnologies from infringing mental integrity altogether by becoming part of the mind themselves.