Blog Topic: The Mind of A Psychopath

(... Are psychopaths suffering from a ‘disease’? What is the direction of causality with respect to research findings involving the brain? Should they be held responsible for their actions? Should they be punished? Should considerations regarding the origins of psychopathy be introduced during trials of crimes like the Connecticut murders discussed above?

I believe that one of the most difficult facts regarding psychopathy is the nature of its prognosis. It is now clearly understood that antisocial behavior is commonly the result of under-activity of the limbic system and malfunction of the amygdala. There is no avoiding the predisposition. The resulting behavior of these malfunctions is something the individual has no control over. Even if there were an effective treatment, the individual suffering antisocial behavior probably would not even care about seeking help because of the nature of the disease. He or she would not feel bad for his or her actions, so in his or her mind, what would be motive behind seeking treatment?

Even though the brain is not fully developed until later in age, I wonder if there is a way to test for a specific gene that would suggest later psychopathic behavior. If so, I wonder if it would be possible to start treatment very early in life to avoid antisocial behavior. Since the mind has so much plasticity during early development (and throughout life), would treating an individual who may give signs of exhibiting antisocial behavior early on cause the limbic system to be more active and prevent the malfunctions of the amygdala?

Even though this behavior is a result of malfunction of the brain, one must still be responsible for his or her own actions. This is especially true if the person’s actions threaten the lives of other individuals, such as the victimized family mentioned in the case in Connecticut.