In recent years, neuroscientific studies have uncovered many of the physical processes and mechanisms involved in drug addiction and addiction-related behaviours. This evidence has prompted some theorists to claim that drug addicts cannot satisfy the conditions for criminal responsibility. If so, how does drug addiction impact on criminal responsibility? Are addicted criminal offenders fully responsible for what they do, or does their addiction somehow diminish their responsibility for the drug related crimes that they commit?

Stephen Morse has defended the criminal law's commitment to holding people responsible for what they do from similar challenges posed by behavioural genetics and cognitive neuroscience. He has argued that once the conditions of criminal responsibility are properly understood, neuroscientific findings will not support the claim that drug addiction diminishes responsibility. On Morse’s account, drug addiction has minimal impact on criminal responsibility because it does not involve compulsion, coercion, or irrationality, and because addicted people are responsible for becoming addicted and for failing to take measures to manage their addiction once developed.

In this presentation we argue that, contra Morse, a sub-group of addicted people do meet plausible criteria for compulsion, coercion or irrationality; few addicted people are fully responsible for becoming addicted; and some addicted people can be at least partly excused for failing to manage their addiction.