The uses of biology in public mental health discussions

While biological and neuroscientific arguments, idioms, and tropes have a significant presence in public discussions of mental health issues, there is no clear consensus on how to assess them. This presentation aims to avoid blanket *for* or *against* judgements, which fail to account for the richly varied uses of biology in these discussions. In depression debates, for example, tropes related to the "broken brain" have been important targets of critique as depoliticizing maneuvers, whereas in the context of autism the use of biodiversity and explicit references to the brain enabled positive and even politicizing developments. Through this contrast, I argue that such neurobiological framings are appealing and powerful in public discussions because they are persuasive "levers" for reality, but for the very same reason they tend to override and silence alternative views and voices, and that this might not only be morally harmful but also risk undermining the social objectivity of psychiatric scientific knowledge. Given this complexity, I suggest that assessing the public uses of biology cannot be limited to strictly intra-epistemic evaluations of *what* is mobilized but has to consider *how* and especially *to what end* this is done.