

Wrongly wired ?!

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After I had spent a whole day working on our roof with a small company to instal solar panels, there was considerable discussion about the most optimal route for the cables in order to make it look nice. I could only think that it doesn't matter as long as it works! To my amazement, drinking a cup of coffee, I read in the paper about a psychiatrist who explains that some people are wrongly wired and therefore get stuck later in life. A nice example of predisposition thinking.

I have previously stated that psychology can have a more relevant position among the sciences if it ceases to be primarily a predisposition science. Precisely because I am surrounded by psychologists and psychiatrists at my work, it generated a lot of discussion. I got one question several times: "Don't you agree that our biology delivers the conditions in which psychology takes place?"

The microbiologist Elizabeth Blackburn and her team (Carol Greider and Jack Szostak) received the Nobel Prize in 2009 for their work on telomeres (and telomerase). Telomeres are the DNA end pieces of the chromosomes, protecting the chromosome during cell division. However, with each cell division they become a bit shorter. Blackburn compares it with the sheathed end of a shoelace that has disappeared at a sudden moment, so that the lace can no longer be pierced through the holes. The cell can then no longer divide, causing the organism to die. Age can be estimated on the basis of the length of the telomeres.

In a single-celled freshwater organism (Tetrahymena), Blackburn discovered an enzyme (telomerase), which after each cell division supplements the lost piece of telomere. Quite recently, Blackburn came up with convincing evidence that the shortening of the telomeres - a hard determinant (predisposition) of our lifespan - depends on our psychological position! Mothers of "deviant" children (intellectually and/or mentally limited, but also autistic, or ADHD) were found to have a faster decrease in the length of telomeres on average. More stress, faster shortening! After helping the mothers to cope with the (perceived) stress, the decrease stopped again and even recovery appears possible. Position! For the sake of clarity, aging is dependent on two things: the aforementioned reduction in the length of telomeres and the senescence (after division new cells contain more "noise" on average and are thus qualitatively slightly worse, due to copying errors). If the senescence can also be controlled (by reducing the "rust" after each division), we could last for hundreds of years!

What matters is that we now understand that even here position is decisive. The population of the Japanese island of Okinawa has been studied for years because people are healthy ageing and getting very old. Now it appears that this is also due to psychological factors! Every morning people tell each other their dreams, and every day they set individual goals for the day. At the end of the day they celebrate what they have achieved, instead of stressing what has not been achieved. The familiar phrase "do not be afraid to go slow, but be afraid to stand still" comes from them!

There's a gross contrast with our predisposition psychology/psychiatry. I quote from an article in the NRC (17-11-2017) about autism. Professor Staal: "The brain of autistic people works like a computer that is not wired properly, the processing of information is difficult, and the patient, when asked too much, crashes like a computer." And further: "The real autistic person can not fulfill his development tasks". Now, that is pre-disposition thinking. Thinking in defects, without considering that theory may be other "development tasks" for autistic minds, or that those minds are just another type of computer. Not worse and not better, just different!

A world without autistic people would look completely different; many inventions would not have been done! A position-based psychology helps people to be considered in their own value, to get the best out of every possible development, without mentioning people deficient, wrongly wired or inferior. In contrast, a disposition-based argument can easily be reversed: the loser who calls himself psychiatrist and yet doesn't know that half the world around him has been devised by autistic geniuses. Moreover, the computer metaphor goes to show that the man even doesn't understand computers. This may sounds rude, but you can put it aside, because I may be wrongly wired!