

THOUGHT → EMOTION → BEHAVIOUR TRANSFORMING DESTRUCTIVE THOUGHTS AND ATTITUDES TO CREATE A POSITIVE MIND

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*The way in which we think determines us, as people,
and influences the evolution of man. (n.a.)*

ABSTRACT:

GLOBALLY, THERE ARE BEING REALIZED STUDIES AND CLASSIFICATIONS THAT EVALUATE THE DEGREE OF HAPPINESS OF EACH COUNTRY. THE CRITERIA FOR DETERMINING THE LEVEL OF HAPPINESS INCLUDE DIFFERENT FACTORS, SUCH AS: THE DEGREE OF HEALTH OF THE POPULATION, THE DEGREE OF SECURITY OF THE FAMILY AND OF THE WORKPLACE, BUT ALSO SOCIAL FACTORS, SUCH AS POLITICAL RIGHTS AND CIVIL LIBERTIES, AUTHORITIES' DEGREE OF CORRUPTION AND SO ON. STARTING FROM THE IDEA THAT THE MAN, REGARDED AS A PERSON AND TAKEN OUT OF THE CONTEXT OF THE SOCIETY, CANNOT INFLUENCE OR MODIFY ALONE THE FACTORS FORMERLY DESCRIBED, THE CURRENT ARTICLE AIMS TO FIND SOLUTIONS THAT COULD INDEPENDENTLY ENSURE A HIGH DEGREE OF HAPPINESS, AT THE INDIVIDUAL LEVEL.

KEY WORDS: (POSITIVE THINKING, NEUROPLASTICITY, COGNITIVE BEHAVIOURAL THERAPY, BEHAVIOUR, PSYCHOLOGY, RELIGION, BUDDHISM)

INTRODUCTION

The theories mentioned in this article – with major influences in the spheres of psychology and medicine – support the importance of positive thinking.

Starting from an analysis of the current society, referring to the group from the top of the Maslow pyramid, we will attempt to find an answer to the question: Why are people in a technologically advanced society not happy? We discover exoplanets potentially inhabitable, we have access to images from other planets, we produce robots, drones, we will soon possess the most powerful virtual world VR, we are connected to social networks, but, despite all this progress, very few of us live content, fulfilled and in harmony with themselves and with what surrounds them. What is determining us not to be happy? What causes sadness, grief, stress, discontent? There is a single answer: *cognition*, or more precisely, the way in which we think. The reality proves that there are no unsolvable situations, but rather the way in which we approach them is

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improper. Regardless of age, adaptive ways can be learned, which assume the understanding and management of the perceived situation, as problematic, due to the sorrow and stress it causes.

One of the events that are both difficult to accept and manage at the emotional level, but that is common for all of us, is death. Death itself is not something tragic, but it regarded as such by the persons who remain alive, because the association of “us” that formerly characterized the relationship is replaced by “me”. Without parents, children or loved ones, one is left feeling lonely and useless, overwhelmed by emotions which have no "target". Could these conditions that cause pain be changed? The practices that apply different current theories prove that it is possible, through changing the perspective on death and accepting it as a purely normal phenomenon, and particularly inevitable: we are born, we live, we die. The problem is not “death”, but how we relate to it.

The awareness and acceptance of death could have a positive impact on human development. The life-death concept could contribute to changing the human perspective on its own self and on society. As such, I am referring to the following phrase: if we accept that we can die wherever and whenever, our concern about the way we live our life shall increase. We could have control over our own life, but not over our own death, except for the case of euthanasia. How we may have the life we “desire”? By changing the way of thinking about events perceived as negative, through emphasizing the positive side of that context, by means of identifying and understanding negative elements and replacing/eliminating them with cognitions that fit the situation.

Briefly put, we should always choose the good or the positive side in the “good versus evil or positive/negative” fight – concept that becomes familiar to us since childhood – as we have been taught, both within our families and schools.

During childhood, problems are solved with the help of parents, who represent the refuge when children do not know how to manage situations perceived as being problematic. Later, when turning into adults, they seek refuge in addictions (drugs, alcohol, gambling etc.), in money, in goods owned and displayed, in competition and in success. It is true that, in the short term, these could end sorrow, but in the long run the issue remains the same and still unsolved. All this happens because we do not know and we have not been taught to think positively. Consequently, there emerges the tendency to perceive the negative side of the situations and events with which we are faced. Searching for the solution of problems in other places rather than in ourselves will not help us. We will repeat the same story without learning anything from previous mistakes. We must search for the solution of problems, for the “refuge” in ourselves, in order to avoid distress, pain and to become happy. It is imperative to learn to accept and to relate properly to what happens. We must pass from ambitions and competition to the way of thinking based on collaboration and cooperation. Both pain and happiness lie inside us, rather than outside, as we have been used to believe. The only thing left is to make the choice: I want to be happy or I want to be unhappy.

Therefore, the world we live in and everything that is defined and accepted as positive would define the main models that could guide the society. As human beings, we are in permanent change and adaptation, so that we are capable anytime to adopt a new way of thinking.

Certain texts from the bible, as well as articles of the constitution² make reference to positive behaviours, but they are too little assumed . The last six of the ten commandments in the Bible

² Article 22: The right to life, to physical and mental integrity: (1) The right to life, as well as the right to physical and mental integrity of person are guaranteed. (2) No one shall be subjected to torture or to any inhuman or degrading punishment or treatment. (3) The death penalty is abolished. Article 23: Individual liberty: (1) Individual liberty and security of person are inviolable. Article 25: Personal, family and private life: (1) The public authorities shall respect and protect personal, family and private life. (2) Any natural person has the right to freely dispose of himself unless

deal with the way the relations and behaviours between people should happen.³ The people that pray – monologue/dialogue of the man with God/spirit/divine force – can achieve a positive mindset. Analysing religion as a psychological phenomenon, it could be considered for the faithful as a panacea against all spiritual diseases.⁴ In the view of the American psychiatrist H. Maurer, “religion is deeply therapeutic, it represents our last hope for achieving health and equilibrium”.

The theories mentioned onwards, although having different approaches, they all lead, in the end, to one conclusion.

THE THEORY OF NON-SELF AND MEDITATION

The theory of non-self, supported by Buddhism and, more recently, by the scientists, has at its core the idea that there is no “me” and “you”.⁵ Buddhism has been working for thousands of years with this concept, entitled *anatta*, explained and researched by Mircea Eliade, Impermanence of things and the anatta doctrine. “Meditating about the first two noble truths – the pain and the origins of pain – the ascetic discovers impermanence, namely non-substantiality of things, and concurrently the non-substantiality of its own being. He sees himself not only lost between things (as the vedantic, the orphic or the gnostic), but also sharing their way of life. Because the cosmic totality and the psycho-mental activity represent the same Universe”.⁶

In Buddhist philosophy, there are three characteristics of existence: impermanence, non-self and dissatisfaction or pain. The human being is represented by and composed of the body, which signifies materiality, sensations, perceptions, mental activity and conscience. According to Buddha, all these are layers in a permanent transformation, ephemeral, under which the self cannot be found. Therefore, Buddhism does not accept the concepts of eternal and immutable entity or of perpetual and permanent “self”, but rather refers to “non-me”, “non-self” or “anatta”.

The five commands that may be found in Buddhism⁷ represent simple advice to live a happy, carefree life, in which meditation can take place in good conditions, and generally regard rules of conducts.⁸

The “mindless” type of meditation, as well as that focused on object are two of the techniques utilised in Buddhism to obtain a “clear” mind, undisturbed by thoughts that cause pain. In yoga, there will be adopted a specific position of the body, in an isolated space, while the practitioner will take care of controlling his breath and thoughts.

he thereby encroaches upon the rights and freedoms of others, on public order, or morals. Article Freedom of conscience: (1) Freedom of thought, opinion, and religious beliefs may not be restricted in any form whatsoever. No one may be compelled to embrace an opinion or religion contrary to his own convictions. (2) Freedom of conscience is guaranteed; it must be manifested in a spirit of tolerance and mutual respect.

³ (5). We shall treat our parents with respect; (6). We shall not murder other human being; (7). Live in monogamy; (8). We shall not take something that is not ours without the permission of the person that possesses it; (9). We shall not lie; (10). We shall not desire anything that does not pertain to us.

⁴I.N.Bukina, M. A. Popova, cap. Evoluția psihologiei burgheze a religiei

⁵ http://www.seeker.com/buddhism-and-science-agree-that-there-is-no-695494911.html?xrs=RebelMouse_fb

⁶MirceaEliade, *Tratat de istorie a religiilor*, Editura: HUMANITAS, 2013, Bucuresti

⁷ (1). To abstain from taking someone's life (non-violence towards all forms of life). (2). To abstain from taking something you do not deserve. (3). To abstain from sensual disrespectful behavior. (Abstinence from lasciviousness). (4). To abstain from lie. (5). To abstain from consuming any substance that leads to the loss of lucidity of mind. (Abstaining from drugs or alcohol)

⁸ <http://religiilelumii.weebly.com/budismul.html>, <https://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/Budism>

The Buddhist theory is supported by Evan Thompson⁹, professor at the University of British Columbia, who confirmed the idea of non-self, published by Big Think.¹⁰ He interprets *anatta* not necessarily as the absence of “me or you”, but by arguing that “me” and “you” are permanently subject to the change of form and content and that they continuously evolve. He believes that, accepting this idea could help us to overcome the things which we fight to obtain, both physically and mentally. “The ones that think that they remain eternally unchanged are limited in thinking, but if we admit that there is no consistent self, that would mean that we must not take all that happens personally. That is, our internal thoughts are only thoughts and do not define us. External events are only external events and are not happening thus personally”. By adhering to these ideas, Evan Thompson says, we could easily become the men that we want to be. “There is tremendous liberation in not identifying ourselves with thoughts, or a set idea of who we are. It is then that we can grow and change, with the help of neuroplasticity. There is then hope that we can overcome our vices or bad habits (of mind and body), because if we are not stuck with the self-limiting beliefs inherent with a consistent self, we may orient ourselves towards becoming more of who we want to be”.

COGNITIVE-BEHAVIOURAL THEORY

This theory confirms the cognitive-behavioural theory, approached in cognitive psychology. The simplest definition of cognition (<fr. cognition, lat. cognitio) explains the term as being the “faculty of knowing”. From the perspective of cognitive psychology, there are many definitions, as follows:

Jacques Cosnier¹¹, defines cognition as being “the totality of mental activities which ensure the acquisition of information”.

Cognitive psychology studies the assessments to which information is confronted between sensorial input and motor or behavioural output.¹²

Cognitive psychology represents a comprehensive analysis of the human cognitive system (memory, thinking, language, perception etc.) and of the manner in which it processes the information.¹³

The cognitive-behavioural theory defines cognitions as being the “automatic thoughts, cognitive schemes and evaluative faiths. The central schemes or faiths are deep cognitive structures which allow the person to interpret its own life experiences”. Human mind is compared

⁹Evan Thompson, Professor of Philosophy, University of British Columbia: “My research interests are philosophy of mind and cognitive science, especially embodied cognition and the neuroscience of consciousness; Phenomenology, Continental philosophy of science, and contemporary European philosophy; and cross-cultural philosophy, especially Indian philosophical traditions and contemporary Buddhist philosophy in dialogue with Western philosophy of mind and cognitive science.”

¹⁰ <http://bigthink.com/ideafeed/good-news-science-buddha-agree-theres-no-you>

¹¹ Jacques Cosnier, doctor în medicină și doctor în științe, profesor emerit de psihologie, des communications à l’Université Lumière (Lyon II) a pratiqué l’ethologie animale et humaine ainsi que la psychiatrie et la psychanalyse. Ancien Président de la Société Française d’Ethologie (SFECA), et ancien Président de l’association Applications des Recherches sur la Communication et les Interactions (ARCI), il est actuellement chercheur à l’unité de recherche associée au C.N.R.S. n° 1347 (G.R.I.C.). Il est l’auteur ou co-auteur d’une dizaine de livres et d’une centaine d’articles dont: Les névroses expérimentales (Seuil), Clefs pour la psychologie (Seghers), Psychologie des sentiments et des émotions (Retz), Le retour de Psyché (Desclée de Brower).

¹² Department of Psychology, Babes-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca and Bucharest Expert Center, Evaluarea și conceptualizarea cognitiv-comportamentală în consilierea psihologică

¹³ Mircea Miclea, Psihologie cognitivă: Modele teoretico-experimentale, Ed. A 2-a, rev. Editura Polirom, 1999

to a computer, which processes the stimuli/information according to some schemes/algorithms, entailing a behaviour/output.

By analysing the aforementioned aspects, it could be argued that *a thought will produce a certain emotion which will determine a proper behaviour.*

Starting from here, we shall take into consideration some criteria/dimensions related to thought:

- length, which is related to the period of storage, affecting the dimensions of memories (of long or short term);
- the type of thought, depending on the perception of the person, investigating therefore the dichotomic typology: positive/negative;
- the way the type of thought influences the person or its emotions;
- the behaviour determined by the emotion created by the thought.

Intervention techniques at the cognitive level regard the change of automatic thoughts, of the cognitive schemes and cognitive distortions. For the person with non-adaptive thoughts, it is very important to realize that these thoughts are dysfunctional, irrational and useless, sometimes defying reality.

PLASTICITY/NEUROPLASTICITY

Plasticity/neuroplasticity represents the “main activity of the brain which changes itself” (*Society of the Mind, author Marvin L. Minsky, 1986*)¹⁴

The capacity of the brain to change through learning is plasticity. According to Durbach (2000), there are at least two types of changes that occur within the brain while learning: the first deals with changing the internal structure of the neurons, particularly in the synapses, and the second targets the increase of the number of synapses between the neurons. Initially, recently learned information is “stored” in the short-term memory, and after some time it is moved into the long-term memory, which is the result of anatomical and bio-chemical changes happening within the brain. (Tortora and Grabowski, 1996).

Neuroplasticity is also defined as the perpetual metamorphosis of the brain.¹⁵ “The ability of the brain to reorganize its neurons in order to form new neuronal connections as a result of leaning and life experience is an extraordinary priority which is entitled neuroplasticity”. This process is a continuous one, due to which we are able to learn new things throughout our life. Moreover, apart from helping us to adapt and to develop culturally and spiritually, neuroplasticity represents our chance to recover after neurological diseases which could affect our sensory, motor or cognitive functions. As a result, there are being created new neuronal ties, which aim to resuscitate a lost, but necessary function. “Neuroplasticity represents the capacity of the brain to change its structure and to reorganize its functions, according to the experience of its interaction with the environment. Neuroplasticity is highlighted through: changing the strength of the synapses – increasing/decreasing the number of synapses and the modification of neuronal excitability – neurogenesis” (Neuroplasticitate: adaptarea creierului la experiența Drd. Liviu Crișan Laboratorul de Neuroștiințe ale Emoției și Cogniției).

The research that has been undergone at the end of the twentieth and beginning of the twenty-first century proved that new neurons are born, also in the case of older people, and that many aspects of the brain can suffer changes until late, in the period of maturity. “Neuroplasticity

¹⁴ Marvin Minsky was an American expert in cognitive science from the field of artificial intelligence, co-founder of the Laboratory of Artificial Intelligence of MIT, laureate of the Turing Prize in 1969

¹⁵ Neuroplasticity, The continuous metamorphosis of the brain, Dr. Ionuț Băcanu, Director medical SECOM

transcends the boundaries of cellular changes which stand at the core of the formation of memory and learning, the brain being in a perpetual change from this point of view: specific cerebral areas modify their functionality as a result of neuroplasticity.”¹⁶ To sum up, *the brain transforms itself throughout our entire life*, and the grey matter meant for the accomplishment of a certain purpose turns out to execute another function as a response to external environmental stimuli and experience.”¹⁷

HYPNOSIS, AUTOSUGGESTION AND SUGGESTION

The hypnosis is a curative method for treating mental disorders or enhancing performances, though verbal influence – suggestions – upon a person in order to produce a specific reaction.

Through hypnosis, the person enters the meditative state and afterwards begins the process by which one thought or idea is being modified/replaced in order to produce a change of behaviour. In the hypnotic state the degree of suggestion, as well as that of openness towards learning increases, surpassing one’s own barriers and limits.

Autosuggestion has at its core one’s own thoughts, which voluntarily and consciously become suggestions, with the aim of obtaining desired effects. Autosuggestion uses imagination. Through autosuggestion, one could improve his/her health, develop attitudes and abilities to change behaviours, as intended.

CONCLUSIONS

Taking into account the whole article, it appears that science and religion intersect, having in common desirable behaviours, which lead to interior equilibrium and change, so that people can reach harmony with themselves and with everything that surrounds them. Change cannot be imposed, cannot come from the exterior, but can only take place when a person so wishes.

Therefore, neuroplasticity, cognitive-behavioural therapy, hypnosis, meditation and prayer produce permanent neuronal changes, through reshaping the way in which we process information, while simultaneously modifying our thinking patterns.

Generally, the removal of negative thoughts and the modification of cognition, can be achieved through any of the methods described in the previous theories. Regardless of the chosen method, the resulting effect is going to be the same: a healthy and balanced mind, undisturbed by non-adaptive thoughts.

¹⁶ Lucian Chipuc, *Mintea din spatele creierului*; <http://www.chipuc.ro/mintea/>

¹⁷ Sharon Begley, *Antrenează-ți mintea, modelează-ți creierul*, Editura Curtea Veche, București, 2010.

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