

At the Threshold of Autistic Age

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I have spent my life working on neurosurgery. As time passed, brain diseases seemed to be more sophisticated than I've expected. I found it harder to deal with when my patients suffered more. Now, I politely accept that the human brain will go on maintaining its enigmatic presence. It is fashionable to classify each alternative process of mind as a disorder. However, it is obvious that brain does not only have a single working principle but a complex interdependency between different areas. Humanity includes many so-called 'disorders' as natural parts and autism plays a key role by staying at the intersection point of altered states.

There is every reason to suggest that interdependency between mind and life, builds culture as well as brain. Not too long ago, in the 17th century René Descartes had used to believe that thinking is the very essence of Living. With his Cartesian Method in philosophy "cogito ergo sum", scientific uncertainty has tried to make its way out by telling the world that "we think, therefore we are". He was strongly affected by the mystery of the brain so far as to do surgical studies on it. Metaphysics of Descartes has led us to think of the brain as a regulatory agency that is independent from other branches or arms of the body. The Cartesian theory, which by the way, all of us have been explicitly or implicitly trained in, has dominated Western culture for over three hundred years. In this regard, sociology has always been a part of neurological sciences. This view of knowledge has built an obsession, imposing that all data of the contemporary life was given in a neural hard disc. Accordingly, the trouble is, post-Cartesian medical tradition keeps us off a much better epistemology related to a broader sense of biology.

António Damásio has tried to destroy the traditional dichotomy between reasons and feeling, noting its artificial and damaging effects successfully in his well-known book *Descartes' Error*. "Somatic marker

hypothesis" proposed that behavior and decision-making in a rational and logical manner require emotional input. Actually, some other philosophers like Spinoza, have stated that Descartes had went wrong. But work of Damásio was quite remarkable since it revealed the same fact in a neurological way. From now on, we would have to design our ideology on brain, body, thoughts and feelings in a completely different way. Only the "revoluted" state of science may renew our enthusiasm. Damásio's invention was spectacular not only for its remodeling of brain conception, but also for the revolutionary movement that it may spread out among the autism studies.

Temple Grandin says that "the world needs all kinds of minds". As an autistic individual, she describes her own situation as follows: "I'm a visual thinker, really bad at algebra. There are others that are a pattern thinker. These are the music and math minds. They think in patterns instead of pictures. Then there's another type that's not a visual thinker at all, and they're the ones that memorize all of the sports statistics, all of the weather statistics". She didn't argue that ASD is not a mental disease, but I'm quite sure that she would if she had got up the courage to do. Ironically, the world has turned into an autistic imaginary place with TV's, PC's, cell phones etc. which are full of visual documentary in every way. Bearing out her assertion, it is not unreasonable to suggest that our century has become the age of visual thought. Maybe it is time to get assistance from philosophy considering Grandin's statement about thoughts and images. Descartes was not the terminus and philosophy's job with neurological sciences isn't finished yet. I think that Deleuze's conception of image and thought may have a chance to fix up the way of thinking autism. As he said, "thought does not naturally relate to truth at all, but is rather a creative act". At the threshold of our autistic age, we have to keep in mind that brain is not only an organ of perception, but also a machine programmed for creation.

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