

The review of the Italian association of psycho-neuro-endocrine-immunology
edited by Francesco Bottaccioli

PNEINEWS

The new knowledge of health

FLEXIBLE BRAIN

The dogma of the adult brain incapable of regeneration due to a biological law is now yielding to a new vision where flexibility, plasticity, neurogenesis are the key words.

**Living will
Who decides of my life?**

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Pag.4.Cajal's theory reform.

It held for 100 years the dogma according to which no new neuron could be generated in the central nervous system of adult mammals. Now the dogma has collapsed.

Patrizia Ambrogini

Dossier

Flexible brain

Pag. 7. Memory as a multisystem

How does memory work? Does it make sense referring to memory as if it was a single unit? These are some of the questions raised by Larry Squire, the worldfamous American psychiatrist and neurologist who devoted his life to decode the mechanisms of memory together with Eric Kandel, the recipient of the Nobel Prize in Medicine for this kind of researches.

~ **Paola Emilia Cicerone**

Dossier

Flexible brain

Pag.10. Meditation improves cognition skills and changes the brain.

There are growing evidences that meditation improves attentional capacities, work memory and cognitive flexibility. On the same time meditation practices seem to be able to modify positively the structure of the cerebral areas involved in cognition and the control of emotions.

Francesco Bottaccioli

Human network- Stress and work

Pag.14. Evaluating the risk of work related stress according to the law.

The inside story of two main figures in the debate which took place at the Committee charged to handle the new legislation about work related stress. The law has become operative since this January.

Paola Geralico- Laura Barnaba

Bioethics – Living will

Pag.17. Self determination.

The proposed law supported by the centre-right coalition contrasts openly with the Constitution and with the international regulations. It also ignores the will of the large majority of the citizens.

Ignazio R. Marino- Claudia Cirillo

Pag.21. It is better no law than a bad law

In the city of L'Aquila, last October the Ordine Provinciale dei Medici held a conference about the living will and the end of life with a rich group of authoritative participants. A third possibility arose.

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Editorial

Mass psychology and psychology of power

Francesco Bottaccioli – Sipnei honorary president.

Our mirror neurons made us suffer in these last weeks. The few but eloquent images coming from the Libyan slaughter hurt us and provoked deep emotions and pain, these feelings were followed by anger at hearing comments of some of our fellow countrymen fearing an invasion of desperate people...to be welcome with guns! In front of children, women and young people being slaughtered in the streets and even in their own houses, such a display of evil makes one wonder: where are the mirror neurons of those Italians? Do they have them too? Or those people's brains are different? Obviously they have mirror neurons too but the mirror got obscured because of the soot coming up from their stomach. In these cases it is the second brain that talks: the belly with its elementary emotions oriented to the friend-enemy logic. It is this second brain that takes control over the mind.

And Gadhafi? The scientists investigating the psyche have often analyzed the figures of dictators. Famous are the analyses made by Jung on Hitler and Mussolini¹ or Freud's works on mass psychology and the cult of the leader². These studies explain the character of the leader and highlight the strong tie binding the leader with the masses. It would be although an oversimplification to see only Gadhafi's tribal traits, As I am writing the dictator is not only using his entire military apparatus in the attempt to suppress in blood the current rebellion of the people, he is also using a very modern communication strategy. Gadhafi and his son are denying everything. They say that in Libya everything is normal, the riot is just some drug addict young people armed by the Western countries and Al Qaeda. The dictator does not have any personal interest and the Gadhafis, as the son declares, are a modest family who do not own any richness hoarded abroad.

What is the logic behind these enormous lies?

Almost sixty years ago, Solomon Asch, an American psychologist of Polish origin, published the results of his experiments about the formation of judgements and how they change according to social circumstances³. Asch wanted to investigate why and under which conditions the individuals yield to the group and make affirmations which are contrary to what they think. The groups set by Asch were composed by one or more experimental subjects and by a group of so-called "confederates" namely people who knew the real aim of the experiment. The experiment consisted in a simple discriminative task: tracing the standard length of a line in a group of other close lines. It was a very easy task which was hardly questionable. The first times the whole group answered correctly then, at a certain point, the "confederates" started to give clearly wrong

answers. Conclusion: after a certain number of similar situations, only a very small minority (20%) had maintained their own opinion. 80% of the participants had conformed to a clearly wrong judgement at least once. There was a 33% who had regularly aligned with the wrong answers. There were the ones who kept the point saying that it was exactly what they were thinking. The majority declared that they adapted to the clearly wrong answers because it was easier to adjust or because they wanted to be like the others. Hence opportunism and conformity are feelings and behaviours that are well rooted in the human psyche. All the powerful persons know it and when they find themselves in difficulties, they try to appeal to them.

In a democratic political and social context which is therefore not comparable to the Libyan situation, also Berlusconi is using the strategy of denying the evidence.

Ruby is an underage prostitute whose disclosures can hurt the premier? Not at all. She is Mubarak's niece! Wagons of accommodating pleasing young women? Those are the premier's fans! Bunga bunga? A joke! Rivers of bank transfers and hush money in big banknotes to the above mentioned women? Charity! Wild parties? Just healthy relaxing after dinner events!

An experiment of social psychology in great style. It is this a very exciting situation providing a richness of material for the psyche scientists. A little bit less exciting for our country.

1) Jung C.G. Jung Speaking: Interviews and Encounters, edited by William Mc Guire and R.F.C. Hull, London Thames and Hudson, 1978

2) Freud S., Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego
Massenpsychologie und Ich-analyse Leipzig, Vienna und Zurich Internationales Psychoanalytischer Verlag. 1921.

3) Asch S.A., Studies of independence and conformity, Psychological Monograph 1956, 416