

OF A DELICATE INSIGHT | OaDI

On Being Conflicted in Neurodivergence

On Behaviour

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**“EACH GLIMMER, an OFFER of COMFORT
& Shelter in Gentleness, *fys*”**

OR SO

**„JEDER SCHIMMER, eine QUELLE
des WOHLBEFINDENS
& Geborgenheit in Sanftmut, *fds*“**

First of all, let me say that the following words describe my thoughts and ideas and thus are not universally or specifically representative. So, what you make of them is at your good liberty and your discretion! I speak here from my perspective and experience of being a German-born, British person with Asperger's (that was the term used when I received my diagnosis; you may or may not agree with it today. To me it still echoes), ADHD (cf., *ADHS*), dyscalculia and OCD.

Let me begin with a question, a rather difficult, perhaps controversial, question and yet one which I feel I need to ask: *Do I wish to function in a nonneurodivergent way even though I do not feel in opposition to, or indeed antagonistic towards my neurodivergence?*

It is a more complex, paradoxical thought to articulate and formulate which feels oxymoronic in part. And yet it feels to me like one of the more critical questions I have recently been asking myself. For a while now it has percolated, so it felt like time to write it. It is critical too, because in order to understand who and what I am, I need to explore this place, this more difficult and challenging thought within my feeling machinery.

Would it sound strange, I wonder, and paradoxical, if I said that this question is a fundamental aspect and act of neuroharmony? In partaking of philosophical, critical (self-)reflection, I ask this question through the endodialogue and neuroagency. This is a profound level of neurotranscendence, I think. It is liberating to formulate this question and write it out. It holds freedom and a measure of dignity. Philosophically and ontologically, I feel at ease with it. I am not questioning: I am asking myself a question. I am not doubting: I am offering to this theatre of my mind a thought to be explored and wandered. I am allowing it to be. In, within and throughout the movement of my time, this thought has been a feeling, an urge, an idea. It unfolds from a darker place and yet it carries with it alleviation. It is dignity because it allows me to approximate the very subtlety of my fabric and the value held in its vessel. If I did not ask this question it would burn and linger on in my mind; it would ever on linger and the wish to touch upon it would nag me and follow me.

I do not feel afraid and I am not afraid. Most of all it offers me a beautiful glimmer of happiness. Beyond all this thought though, it is simply a fascinating question to ask of myself. Sometimes a time unfolds, a moment, in which to ask oneself, or engage with, a darker set of questions and thoughts. Ultimately, I do not think this is so dark and it may not be as controversial as at first presumed. And so I continue with a thought which is related and which amends a question I have been asking myself otherwise: what does it mean to live? I have been at odds with myself, it would seem, for some time now. And yet, I have equally lived in consonance with myself. It is a clash and conflict between what I experience and what I wish to be able to do, or how I wish to be able to

live. This feeling, which is emotional and physical, has been at the heart of my experience, of wondering about the nature of how the ghost of life seems to wash through me. To learn about myself and my relationship with the world, and the people around me, it is not a bad thing to ask such a question. Least of all is it a bad thing if the exploration and contemplation of the thought allows me, reflectively, to move a bit in life. It is not about being neurodivergent or living neurodivergently in my mind. It is far more about relating to others and the world around me, or *how I relate* to that outer, other theatre. That has been at the heart of my exploration and a seed, which more so now grows strongly into a beautiful, hard teaching, mentorship. I enjoy playing with the thought of whether I wish to function in a nonneurodivergent way, even though I do not feel in opposition to, or indeed antagonistic towards my neurodivergence. Why not explore the full range of my ontology (of feeling)?

A part of this conflict is the expectation and perception of neurodivergence I hold in relation to myself and to others, be they family, friends, colleagues, or our wider society. I have observed an interesting relationship dynamic. A tacit dynamic, which is subtle in nature, subtle by nature. Beforehand though, let me acknowledge that a parent, family or a friend will have their own troubles and things to deal with. We cannot expect full awareness of all things, at all times, in all places. This, I say, is reciprocal. As beloved as it is to me, compassion and empathy can be effortful in times of raw roughness, tension or stress.

The deeper question or thought I am trying to grasp here is that sometimes I have the expectation of behaving normally, or let us say, more straightforwardly, or less preoccupied with the factors and frameworks, or borders, of my own conditions. This is where we need more and more accurate language which allows us to be better descriptive of the natures (cf., *die/das Wesen*) of these conditions, without limiting our comparisons to *normal* or (*non*)*neurodivergent*.

I am neurodivergent and thus exhibit a range of gradated, layered, behaviours and traits. However, am I necessarily limiting myself within or by these neurodivergence defining behaviours and traits? I am able to achieve, by far, more than often I recognise, feel or am willing, tacitly or otherwise, to let myself achieve. For instance, information processing. I know I have the capacity to take in a lot. I know I have the capacity to listen, respond and react to social cues (to some better than others, admittedly). And yet, sometimes, I feel so full of intersecting and complicated, interwoven stuff, I find it very difficult to get words out. One who knows me and in that moment expects me to answer in “my usual fashion” may then stumble across a rather non-responsive or effortfully responsive me. And so *my usual fashion* might well be to respond communicatively and forthcomingly (I know I am able to do so), yet in that moment my engine may be somewhat jammed. Mentioning my neurodivergence might then rather come across as an excuse (or, as one could more positively put it, a *reason*), because the other conversation party expects *my usual fashion*, without realising in that moment that my condition might be making that slightly more challenging. Then, however, it is also

within my nature to be neurodivergent. It is my reality. The orchestra keeps on playing, whether the conductor (me) wishes it to do so or not – after it has gained a steady, sturdy momentum, it does not wish to lose that momentum. I get that.

Often I need to move to think. It helps me to concentrate; it helps me to move through my thoughts and become mentally fluid, to rev up the engines. And yet, the old therapeutic line of *sit still* or *be still* contradicts that, causing tension and conflict – and still, here is the crux: that is an internal conflict which has less to do with, or less origin in, therapy, and more with my interpretation of it. As a youngster, who could not sit still for five minutes to eat a meal, and kept running away with other things in mind but the things which required my attention (hint, hint), causing uncountable problems for my parents, it was material to learn to *sit/be still*. It was a matter of early education in discipline and laid the foundations for what may be seen as *fitting* behaviour. Though I consciously want to contrast this with the often used *good/bad behaviour*. Being unrestful or jittery as a kid is *not* bad behaviour. As a kid with ADHD/S, in particular, you are not trying to be a bad, or obnoxious, or an annoying person. You are not trying to be a burden. Firstly, you are learning to live a life which will turn out to be more difficult and more complex than the young mind at that time could comprehend. You do not know any better as a kid either. You are still only learning. With ADHD/S in the fabric of my being, I have an overdrive afterburner installed and had little knowledge then as to how to use it well. That I had to learn. This information might not come as a surprise to the knowledgeable ADHD/S advocate. It is one of those things which justly needs exploring, I hold. Nowadays, I find myself at a crossing with this. Maybe the pandemic and several challenging years of HNC/HND, BA (Hons) and MA have somewhat kicked me out of that well established gear I once knew. Maybe the lack of therapy nowadays is contributing to a need for better understanding and comprehension; not to mention the lack of work I am experiencing on these conditions, with a regular guiding voice.

The conflict arises when I remember this concept of *sit/be still* today, and yet my feeling tells me that movement is beneficial to my condition and my processing ability. I still agree with that old guideline, or regulatory thought though. It has and holds its value, and always has done so. There is movement and there is unrest: the former is like a dance, a click track or metronome (for the musically minded), a syllable count or beat (for the poetry or else artistically minded), the latter is not. ADHD/S can cause the latter and sometimes needs the first. So does Asperger's, Dyscalculia and OCD. Which is which, unrest or movement? Often that is difficult to say. This is why there is conflict and tension because these are closely interacting, interplaying thoughts, ideas and factors. Movement is the engine of progression, smooth processing and thinking, the voltage which pushes the information through the threads of my mind. However, as much as there are situations, I think, in which quiet, rest and deliberation, are needed or appropriate (such as in conversation, when you want to let the other speak and listen, or when eating a meal), to move is just and valid as well, if fitting. Simply wandering off because I feel like it (impulsive) is a grey area of behaviour. However, it is easy here, to fall into the trap of treating someone with ADHD/S, even an adult, for instance, as a person who is really still in

need to learn *to sit/be still*. As much as discipline is valuable, and it is, I wonder whether I have been driven solely and too profoundly by it, rather than a dynamic balance (cf., *Ausgewogenheit*, lovely word) of when which behaviour would be more suitable. Obvious and clear? I do not think this is so clearly cut or lit (for the filmmakers), or in crisp focus for me. I find this ironic because often I have been told to be more flexible, and yet I observe people (who are nonneurodivergent) who are often quite set in their ways and routines in life. The heart and soul of this question, is to weigh out the symptomatology and nature (cf., *das Wesen*) of ADHD/S, for instance, against the need to find a fitting place in my framework of life; to fit it in. Though I find observing my condition (cf., *Neurowesen*, or *Wesen*) from a cool reference to symptomatology and nature alone rather trickier, than from a more insightful and erudite perspective.

Here is the thing:

- (01) Am I being impulsive or have I changed my mind or thinking about something in need of urgent attention, if I suddenly leave the table? Perhaps I had an epiphany, a creative idea which might be gone if I don't write it out immediately. Perhaps I now have to or should re-evaluate my lessons from therapy? *Not being with it* can be construed in so many ways, it is easy to interpret it as *you are not concentrating on what you should be doing* – the task at hand.
- (02) Am I being jittery or fidgety because I am hyperactive? Or am I moving as a means of navigating or sailing the ship which is the theatre of my mind?
- (03) Am I being impolite or even rude or badly behaved by not answering someone in the then expected and perceivably appropriate fashion? Or is my Asperger's brain overwhelmed and working at 30% (figure according to my whim) and so not quite as able to respond in a timely way? What is the perceivably appropriate fashion?

These things and thoughts almost end up in a philosophical stratosphere when I begin to ponder over them. I shall restrict them here. Each of these items for themselves and unto their own is paradoxically equally legitimate in nature, and yet, depending on the perspective, while oddly contradictory, true unto themselves and each opposing scenario. That is, because of each issue, it could be said that it is, on its own, an utterance of a valid nature. It depends on how I approach it. Thus each could be considered as good and/or bad, and/or fitting behaviour. If we presuppose, for instance, that being neurodivergent affords me valid grounds upon which, at times, I find it effortful to respond to, or answer a call (a prompt), then in point three I am behaving befitting of my condition and (therefore, arguably) not doing anything badly, unless of course I think so of it myself, because I expect myself to be able to respond properly despite my state of mind described here. If, though, one presupposes that neurodivergence does not exclude or render null, my capacity to discipline myself to perform a proper response, despite my feeling like the opposite, then in point three, equally, I may be said to be behaving (socially) badly, by not properly responding even though I probably could. Whether or not I could is often subtle and difficult to determine in the moment, but that is

stratospheric. Even in the more intermediate spheres this becomes an entirely greyish area where fitting, good and bad become murky and more interwoven. Then again, in the same instance, it also depends on the recipient of my answer and in which way they observe or comprehend the circumstances. My point is that these situations could, philosophically and practically, be turned either way. The conflict then, of course, arises from how we or I react to, and reflect upon the factors presented to me or us. How do I relate my thinking to the other person and their expectations? It is complex and as complex as these conditions are, so my relationship with them, my feelings about them can be, too. I see it as my job to reflect on these darker, more difficult thoughts, to explore the profundities and depths and analyse the fabrics which are more troubling, taking time (cf., *Zeit*) to do so. More profoundly, time is a theme which I love to explore and its relationship to processing and perception. Although I love the thought of time, I have struggled profoundly with the organisation and keeping of time also due to my neurodivergence and mental health. It is a curiosity that we all follow this line of ephemeral essence, which behaves like a fleeting fragrance only so briefly felt and sensed. That is what makes time valuable and fascinating. It is equally a source of conflict, as the time I need to process information diverges from the time others feel they need. Should I respond or answer by taking the time I feel I need, do I adapt to them, or do I fuse both threads together and work out a middle ground? Should I go with my neurodivergent need for more time, or should I try to do the courteous thing, and try to adapt to those around me? Is it a neurodivergent need of mine, this need for more time, or is it my own perception of my need which is then guiding me? That is slippery indeed – all of which is why I often use text messages after the fact to offer my appreciation.

Am I worthy of my own neurodivergence? It is a strange thought. It is a kind of tacit, subtle, inner struggle, perhaps a feeling of yet not being in harmony with my condition or still searching for ways to feel connected to it. You may get from my formulation that this is very hard to put into words. What I can say is that, reckoning with this has been a process, and a conflicting one which reaches far back into my past. It has also moved through several stages and layerings of perception, comprehension, understanding and attitude shifts. The conflict has remained throughout a presence to me, even if a subtle one, which, even through everyday life, studies, writing and other philosophising, has remained relatively hidden or veiled. It may also be that with growing age I feel more acutely the complexity of my condition. I am 30 at present, so make of that what you will, and feel that I have gone through much perceived change since I moved to Scotland in 2015. A part of that is also the understanding that it is not simply, or just about whether I am neurodivergent or able to transcend it. It is also not easy to say straightforwardly whether something is what it seems to be, whether I am complicating or simplifying it. So often I have thought, I am overthinking this; I am making it too complex; surely this must be more straightforward than what I feel it to be? And yet, it turns out, after some time, I uncover a whole other perspective or layering of thought associated with that thing. Am I being impatient? Am I expecting things discordantly with what I am observing. Am I using the wrong

lens or perspective? Am I asking the right questions? Am I being (in)tolerant towards the circumstances or condition under which I find myself asking those things? This is particularly so in ADHD/S and Asperger's I feel, especially when I get hung up on one thing instead of looking at a more broadly natured picture. If I question why I am neurodivergent or say I did not choose this, in the darker moments, do I so also question the projects of prose, poetry and linguistics which I love and which fulfil me? Is this arrogant or self-important of me to ask? This is a searing thing and thought. If I do not write it out, it will linger and I will regret not writing it out. Because I would rather elaborate it, describe it, observe and study it, than leave it to gnaw at me and consume me. You see, positivity has its place; however, if you feel, in the darker moments and times, like your life is moving nowhere, I advise, grasp those thoughts and work with them. It is then difficult and effortful to think, all the time, that, in fact I am blessed or fortunate to be neurodivergent. I am conflicted about saying that because it is a mightily double-edged blade and one of its edges is pointed at me. You may think this is negative, and the advocate driven and filled with positive thoughts may think I am being detrimental to myself and the cause of neurodivergence awareness. This, however, is a glimmer of comfort for me, and a source of strength because it is reflective insight, knowledge and the processing of difficult, challenging feelings. I think, regarding the struggles and challenges which come with the condition of neurodivergence and mental health, there is little use in being overly negative nor, though, should one be overly positive without a degree of caution. There is always the danger of getting lost in the darkness. There is always the danger of sounding ungrateful and it sometimes feels and has felt like I can see nothing but my conditions as a wall of glass towering up in front of me. There is always the danger of drifting into personal lament, which is not very transcendent or helpful as foundations upon which to live.

And while I should be able to grow beyond myself (cf., *über sich hinauswachsen*), I invoke the good, old words – neurodivergence is a reality. Despite this, talking about it, weaving it into conversation has often felt, to me, like it could be deemed or seen as an excuse rather than a reason for the way I function. So one cannot deny or simply ignore the fact, yes fact, that neurodivergence is reality, just as the absence of it is reality to those who are not neurodivergent.

And so there is a conflict and meeting of realities and of worlds. There is a conflict between what I know I can do and achieve, and the hurdles and sabotage which I inflict upon myself. If I do not render these thoughts, which are legitimate, when and where else will they be known and where else would they be allowed to exist and be explored? Thus, this conflict and tension calls.

All in good time and in its good place we might find good judgement and attain movement.

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