We form as living beings from the very first moments, listening to the external world while resting in the womb. In the early years of life, every action is a way to understand what surrounds us, and we shape our behaviors by observing our parents. Science shows us that our brain is plastic and adapts to the demands of the environment, allowing us to face different contexts. However, what happens if this environment is negative? What occurs when, lacking the experience to handle life's difficulties, we witness parental models solving problems with violence, substances, escape, or avoidance? I believe that within us, there is always the possibility to choose. In the debate between determinism and free will, I think the truth lies somewhere in between: we can almost always decide, say yes or no, but our choices are heavily influenced by the environment. Indeed, decisions stem from inferences we make about what we believe is right for us, weighing costs and benefits. The problem arises when we lack the tools to interpret the world correctly.

I think the development of a dysfunctional personality is caused by multiple factors, like a puzzle made up of many pieces. It won't be a single negative event that deviates a person's psychological development. The psyche behaves like an organism in symbiosis with the environment, influenced by a two-way correspondence: the genetics of our brain guides how we integrate external stimuli.

A powerful example of how traumatic events and physical damage can influence behavior is represented by the case of Phineas Gage. After a severe brain injury, Gage underwent significant changes in personality and emotional regulation, demonstrating how specific alterations in the brain can affect

decision-making and social behavior. This example shows that the interaction between brain structure and psychological function is complex and vulnerable to external disturbances, especially in individuals with genetic predispositions. According to the diathesis-stress model, in fact, the combination of biological (or genetic) vulnerability and a traumatic event can amplify the likelihood of developing mental disorders or behavioral difficulties.

Moreover, the action of mirror neurons shows how interaction with the social environment is crucial for development. These neurons allow us to learn by observing others and develop empathy, facilitating the modeling of behaviors based on what we see in others. However, in a dysfunctional environment, this ability can lead a child to imitate or internalize maladaptive behaviors.

Finally, neural foundations show us that the brain constantly adapts to the environment. For example, a child with difficulty synthesizing serotonin and dopamine might struggle to find satisfaction in everyday activities or to have the vitality needed to pursue personal goals. Brain plasticity allows us to adapt and modify our neural circuits based on experiences, but this same ability can be harmful in negative environments, where the brain is shaped to adapt to harmful or stressful patterns.

The environment also shapes our psyche. If a child grows up in a context of high social prestige, they will gravitate toward certain ways of thinking and appreciate that type of life, as long as this development is compatible with their nature and supported.

Another example concerns the influence of collectivist cultures versus individualistic ones on personality traits. In more individualistic cultures, self-sufficiency and personal achievement are emphasized, potentially fostering competitive and aggressive behaviors in the context of success. Conversely, collectivist cultures, such as those with Buddhist religious values, emphasize group harmony, cooperation, and avoiding conflict, which may reduce the likelihood of violent tendencies but also promote passive-aggressive behaviors or other forms of internalized aggression.

Regarding the more psychodynamic component, attachment styles also play a fundamental role in psychological development and can significantly influence an individual's personality, particularly in relation to the management of emotions and interpersonal relationships. Attachment is the emotional bond that develops between a child and their primary caregivers during the early years of life. This bond can determine how a person approaches the external world and responds to emotional stimuli.

According to the attachment theory developed by John Bowlby, there are several types of attachment, including:

- Secure attachment: Children who develop secure attachment tend to feel protected and loved by their caregivers, which makes them more capable of exploring the world with confidence. As adults, these individuals tend to have stable interpersonal relationships and good emotional regulation.

- Insecure-avoidant attachment: This develops when the caregiver is distant or unresponsive. Children with avoidant attachment learn not to ask for help and not to express their feelings. This style can lead to difficulties in forming intimate relationships and managing emotions, with excessive independence or difficulty asking for support.

- Insecure-ambivalent attachment: This occurs when the caregiver is unpredictable, alternating between affection and rejection. These children become insecure and anxious about their relationships, developing difficulty in dealing with emotional conflicts and managing frustration. As adults, they may exhibit behaviors of dependency or fear of rejection in relationships.

- Disorganized attachment: This develops when the caregiver is frightening or traumatic (e.g., in cases of abuse or neglect). Children with this type of attachment may display contradictory behaviors, such as approaching the caregiver while simultaneously avoiding them. This attachment style has been linked to a higher vulnerability to psychological disorders, such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and a general difficulty in forming healthy emotional bonds.

Attachment styles can interact in complex ways with brain plasticity and the diathesis-stress model. For example, a child with insecure or disorganized attachment may have difficulty regulating their emotions and developing healthy resilience, amplifying the negative effects of a stressful or traumatic environment. Additionally, the development of inadequate or

dysfunctional neural circuits may be influenced by the interaction between a dysfunctional caregiver and the child's genetic predisposition.

Ultimately, the essence of being human seems to be a constant dialogue between nature and culture, between what is given and what is chosen, between conditioning and freedom. We are creatures in perpetual construction, shaped by a world we do not choose but that constantly invites us to respond and take a stand. Our mind is not a monolithic block but rather an organism in development, capable of adapting to the challenges it encounters along the way. However, this adaptation comes at a price: the flexibility of the human mind can become both a resource and a trap, depending on the influences it absorbs.

Perhaps true freedom lies in the awareness of this vulnerability, in the ability to recognize the invisible chains that bind us to family models, deep beliefs, and learned behaviors. Knowing the limits of our choices means opening ourselves to the possibility of new paths, new interpretations, and responses. And if, as Heraclitus said, "character is destiny," then we could say that our destiny, although intertwined with circumstances, can be constantly rewritten, through a conscious, critical gaze, capable of transforming even the shadows of our childhood into fertile ground for the future.

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