

# Disobedience

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**A** fascinating aspect of human progress is that it is critically dependent on both obedience and disobedience (violation of rules and even cheating). Earlier I wrote a column about the very high level of reliability of people. I illustrated this by stating that if you make an appointment with someone on the other side of the world, it is very likely that you will meet each other on time. Dozens of people must reliably have their share in your appointment (stick to traffic rules, transport you, provide food, etc. etc.). The fact that we often stick to so many written and unwritten rules makes us able to live in such a complex society. However, it also means that people can easily enrich themselves (and sometimes also society) by being the only ones who do not comply with the rules. And it is for good reason that our attention is always drawn directly by rule-breakers. What's up with that?

Just like learning in the brain, social progress (development) is based on accommodating and assimilating. We structure the information from the outside world on the basis of what we already know (assimilate them in our knowledge structures). If the information does not fit in already present knowledge structures - accommodations - these structures are accommodated. Progress is based on both applying, and adjusting rules.

The necessary adjustment of rules often starts with breaking them. Civil disobedience is an example of massive offence, that often starts with one person, as many large examples show. Recently the 16-year-old climate trustee Greta Thunberg indicates that she, as an Asperger, thinks black and white and that also with the climate and survival of the planet no intermediate position is conceivable. Violation of the rules can even mean not taking for granted what everyone else does: Jesus, Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Mandela. Negative examples are even much more numerous. The petty thief, white-collar criminal and psychopath often have the same starting point: if everyone allows themselves to be vaccinated, I do not have to do it. And so it is. Collective reliability offers a kind of moneybox for exploration space.

## Electroconvulsive therapy

Can you imagine how the neurologists Ugo Cerletti and Lucio Bini put electrodes on the temples of their patients and thus invented electroconvulsive therapy (ECT)? Certainly in those early days (the 1930s) the effects were very doubtful and it looked very violent; when the electric shocks were given, the patient began to shake violently (only a short 10 years later muscle relaxants were given). Still the operation of the now highly refined technique is not undisputed, but no longer "illegal"; ECT has become a regular medical practice in guidelines and protocols. Many of the things that we now take for granted have started as rules-breaking daredevil: flying, fission and fusion, parachuting, extreme and thrill seeking sports, etc.

In a "lean" world, a world in which our comings and goings are captured in rules and protocols, application (exploitation, assimilation) is easier than exploration. Exploration is soon beyond the rules. People who think differently are detected at an early age and are neatly monitored as soon as they have a diagnosis of ASD (or ADHD). In this context, it is very special that a brave 16-year-old Swedish student uses her Asperger diagnosis as an excuse for breaking the rules by skipping school for the climate (hoping that politicians and other policy makers start to take the climate crisis seriously). She is getting more and more followers in Europe. In my opinion she's absolutely right!

(PS. Just like electroshocks, the right to buy cheap petrol and to take an airplane is in my opinion a much less good reason for civil disobedience.)