Neuro Linguistic Programming - Eye Pattern Origins

History

In Neuro-Linguistic Programming, eye movements are claimed to represent specific internal representations that correlate to Visual, Auditory, Kinesthetic, and Internal Dialogue processes. It is one of the controversial topics that was used at certain points to discredit parts of NLP, and at the same time paved the way for the creation of Eye movement processes such as EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing), as claimed by NLP Co-Creator John G. Grinder. Other processes that came as a bi-product of that discovery were EMI (Eye Movement Integration) developed by Steve and Connirae Andreas, and IEMT (Integral Eye Movement Therapy) developed by Andrew T. Austin.

One of the first people to suggest that eye movements were related to internal representations was the American Psychologist, who is touted by many to be the father of modern psychology, William James in his book Principles of Psychology (1890, pp. 193-195). After observing the micro-eye-movements that were happening as the person was thinking a certain thought, James wrote:

“In attending to either an idea or a sensation belonging to a particular sense-sphere, the movement is the adjustment of the sense-organ, felt as it occurs. I cannot think in visual terms, or example, without feeling a fluctuating play of pressures, convergences, divergences, and accommodations in my eyeballs...When I try to remember or reflect, the movements in question. . .feel like a sort of withdrawal from the outer world. As far as I can detect, these feelings are due to an actual rolling outwards and upwards of the eyeballs.”

In the selected paragraph, what James is referring to is what is correlated as the visual eye-accessing cue [eyes moving up and to the left or right for visualization]. This discovery was then disregarded until the 1970s when psychologists such as Kinsbourne (1972), Kocel et al (1972), and Galin & Ornstein (1974) when they connected specific eye movements to be connected to specific processes related to different brain hemispheres. They saw that right-handed people tended to move their heads and eyes to the right during “left-hemispheric” (logic and language-oriented) tasks, and to move their heads and eyes to the left during “right-hemispheric” (imagistic and space-oriented) tasks. Moreover, people tended to look in the other direction of the part of the brain they were using to complete a mental task.