

Practicing the plastic brain

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PROPOSITIONS
belonging to the dissertation

*Practicing the Plastic Brain:
popular neuroscience and the good life*

by Ties van de Werff

1. Brain claims do not speak for themselves; it takes context-sensitive, practical, and deliberate efforts to make them valuable for specific audiences and for specific ends.
2. Both proponents and critics of the plastic brain overstate the novelty and potential of the neurosciences for changing practices and ideals of self-fashioning.
3. The concept of brain plasticity allows for different distributions of agency and determinism over the individual subject, its brain, and its environment – whichever is needed to cater to established action programmes and ideals of the good.
4. A good life based on a plastic brain is foremost about coping with and cultivating societal change.
5. When probing for moral changes, scholars in Science and Technology Studies could better focus on explicating how we creatively use science and technology to keep our moral order stable instead of explaining why controversies emerge.
6. The notion of value work turns ethics from a transcendental prime-mover to a practical activity.
7. Self-help literature not only provides ethicists and philosophers with a rich resource for studying contemporary concerns, fears, hopes, and dreams but also reminds them of an important task they once had.
8. To improve valorisation and broaden its scope beyond mere economic utility, scientists and science journalists should train their moral sensitivity to societal concerns and prevailing ideas of the good.
9. ‘Excellence’ in an academic context should be about desirable academic virtues – such as persistence, cooperation, humour, and anger – instead of counting journal publications and successful grant proposals.