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STEPHEN D. HASWELL TODD

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To my grandparents:

Bunny and Jack Todd
and

Ruth (Haswell) and (*in memoriam*) Alex Sidorowicz

*Je n'étais pas seul, j'étais un homme quelconque.
Cette formule, comment l'oublier?*

—Maurice Blanchot, *Le Très-Haut*

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Introduction

*Il y a le nom et la chose...*¹

—Montaigne

The chapters that follow present a history of the concept of autism and elucidate the ways in which this concept moved through psychopathological and other discourses in the early twentieth century. This is not the same as a history of the phenomenon now called autism. But the two are related. The fulcrum of this history of autism is the moment when the name “autism” and the thing now called by that name come together: a concept that already existed joins itself to a thing that, before then, had not existed in the way it does now. The thing in question, autism, is what we are all familiar with from hearing about it in the recent news: a mental abnormality or disability, enigmatic and yet recognizable, a clinical psychiatric diagnosis attached to a relatively small but ever-growing number of people. The name, on the other hand—“autism” in the full range of meanings it had before it became limited to its present object—is as strange to us as the thing we call autism is familiar.

And the thing we call autism is becoming very familiar indeed. An estimate recently quoted in the press is that the label “autistic” applies to one in sixty-eight American children,² though perhaps a more telling measure—and surely just as numerically impressive—would be a count of the newspaper and magazine articles that have been published about it in recent

1. As with so many ideas that have found their way into this work, I gratefully take this epigraph from Montaigne by way of another, my friend and teacher Thomas Pepper.

2. Sandhya Somashekhar, “How Autistic Adults Banded Together to Start a Movement,” *Washington Post*, July 20, 2015. https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/the-next-civil-rights-movement-accepting-adults-with-autism/2015/07/20/e7c6743e-f338-11e4-bcc4-e8141e5eb0c9_story.html. Accessed October 14, 2015.

decades.

With increasing prevalence and visibility, however, new controversy has arisen over the nature of autism. Not long ago it could be viewed simply as a disease or disability, and the only important questions were when and how it could be treated, cured, or prevented. But now, the same newspaper article that reports the latest incidence figures refers to people with autism as “a minority group” and as the subjects of “an emerging civil rights movement,”³ heirs “to the gay rights movement and to the protesters trying to improve police treatment of African Americans.”⁴ The ultimate goal of the “neurodiversity” movement is to remove the status of a pathology from autism and to assert an autistic *identity* not unlike those assumed on the bases of sexuality, race, gender, and so forth.

Neurodiversity makes ambitious political claims. To many it will seem far-fetched to raise autism—this peculiar and, despite the rising numbers, still somewhat unusual phenomenon—to the same stature as categories of race and sexuality on the political stage, let alone to claim specific rights for “neurological minorities.” Whether these claims are justified is not a question this text seeks to answer. But it is a question that, even to be properly posed, calls for a far better understanding of the *history* of autism than has been available. In fact, it calls for a different *kind* of history than autism has had up to now: in addition to the “natural history” of the phenomenon of modern autism, we need a discursive history of autism in order to understand the very reasons for and implications of assigning this name to a particular category of person.

How could a discursive history of autism help to clarify the stakes of the public debate over its political status? We can take the comparisons to race and sexuality made by the advocates of neurodiversity themselves as a starting point. Both race and sexuality have natural

3. John Elder Robison, quoted *ibid.*

4. *Ibid.*

histories, of course: in both cases, histories of biological givens and cultural norms interacting with each other in limitlessly complex ways, and ultimately receding, the further back we go in evolutionary time, into indifference from each other.

But race and sexuality have also been made subjects of discursive history, and so offer us valuable precedents. Taking the history of homosexuality as a case study, we can say that natural history posits it as an unvarying factor in human biology, and goes on to study its varying manifestations in different cultural contexts (so we should perhaps more accurately term this “natural-cultural history”). There have always been people whose orientation was toward the same sex, this history assumes; the changing *appearances* of homosexuality through history are functions of such people’s varying ability—or lack thereof, conditioned by social stigma and oppression—to express the essence of their homosexuality in their actual behavior. But in filling out the details of this history, we run into empirical obstacles: cultures (the classic example being ancient Greece) in which not just homosexuality as a distinct “orientation,” but the very idea of a stable, innate sexual identity appears not to have made sense to the collective spirit, at least not in the way it makes self-evident sense to us now.⁵ And this in turn has made it possible to look even much closer to home, from the Renaissance to the European nineteenth century, for example, and to ask seriously whether homosexuality itself was not a “construct” that emerged from a shifting matrix of bodily and spiritual practices and discursive factors ranging from the poetic to the medical—rather than a practice stemming from an unchanging essence and its variable expression. Which history is “correct”? That itself is not a question to be settled by way of an empirical *metahistory* capable of adjudicating between the alternatives. It is a choice with its own further epistemological and political stakes.

5. See Kenneth Dover, *Greek Homosexuality* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978).

In any case, few scholarly programs in recent times have been as influential as Michel Foucault's historicization of sexuality *as a discourse*, which opened up an entirely new register in which questions about sexuality could be asked.⁶ Previously, the political positions one could take regarding homosexuality were essentially limited to two: for or against. One could decry it as a pathology or an offense, or one could affirm it as an identity. Foucault's discursive historicism unseated the claims of pathology by proposing that it was pathologization itself, as a discursive formation, that had *created* "the homosexual" as a new category of person—not discovered the essence of homosexuality; but Foucault mounted an equally serious challenge to the politics of identity, revealing identitarian claims to be just another set of ahistorical and essentialist propositions about homosexuality, and just as dependent on the same pathological discourses that invented the homosexual. The discursive history of sexuality did not settle the culture wars, but it accomplished something more desirable, multiplying the dimensions in which sexuality could reside. One of the aims that a discursive history of autism could aspire to would be to do likewise for the politics of neurodiversity—not to take a side, but to add a dimension.

A discursive history of autism has its more scholarly rationale as well. In the broadest terms, the appeal of this investigation for scholars—of the history of science and medicine; of German literature, philosophy, and culture; of the theory and history of discursive regimes and social institutions—stems from its excavation of the archive of what I call *the discourse of autism*. This discourse flourished in the first half of the twentieth century and even beyond, before the modern clinical meaning of autism took exclusive hold. It was centered in Germanophone psychiatry, where autism featured in hundreds if not thousands of published

6. See Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume I: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Random House, 1978). For an updated view of Foucault's impact, see David M. Halperin, *How to Do the History of Homosexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

papers before those that mark the beginning of its current usage. But the discourse of autism also extended into practically all areas of the “human sciences”—philosophy, anthropology, aesthetics, etc.—in interwar Europe. Such broad use was a fulfillment of autism’s original determination: it was meant to become a generally valid concept across the disciplines.

We will see more of the discourse of autism in the course of this introduction, after an overview of the current state of knowledge and a consideration of how this discursive history will interact with the established natural and cultural histories of autism. After all, discursive history should not just provide an alternative intellectual point of view; it wants to be in conversation with the concrete, too.

A very brief overview of the established history of autism is as follows. The syndrome we know as autism was first described on two separate occasions, by Leo Kanner in Baltimore in 1943 and by Hans Asperger in Vienna in 1944 (going by the publication dates of their respective papers). That is, we take those two papers to be the first clearly recognizable descriptions, the “discovery,” of what we consider autism. The origins of the *word* “autism,” meanwhile, lie further back in time. The coiner of the term was the great Swiss psychiatrist Eugen Bleuler, who at the time oversaw the Burghölzli mental asylum outside Zurich. Bleuler used the term in public for the first time in a 1910 paper, but made it broadly known the following year with his monograph *Dementia praecox oder Gruppe der Schizophrenien* (which more famously introduced the term “schizophrenia” to the world). This work presented autism as a symptom of schizophrenia and defined it as the “loss of contact with reality” that caused the schizophrenic mind to withdraw into its own world. When Kanner and Asperger published their foundational papers on modern autism, each of them knowingly adapted Bleuler’s term to the new, more

specific purpose of designating this peculiar syndrome. The Kannerian and Aspergian moment at which modern autism emerges is thus the moment autism changes from a *symptom* of another underlying condition into a *syndrome* of its own.⁷

What, though, did Kanner and Asperger describe? This question can only begin to be answered over the whole course of this investigation. We can confirm, though, as a way of starting out, that neither of them saw himself as having seen and described the same syndrome as the other. The idea of an *autism spectrum*, with Kanner's type lying more at one end and Asperger's at the other, is an invention of the 1980s. Thanks to the spectrum model, we think of autism as ranging from low- to high-functioning individuals who also display quite varied degrees of intelligence as conventionally measured. The received view is that Kanner originally described patients mostly on the lower end of the autism spectrum, while Asperger's cases were on the higher end in terms of intelligence and functioning in everyday life. The salient features of Asperger's descriptions thus came to form the picture of "Asperger Syndrome," the region of the autism spectrum that we associate with precocious intelligence, specialized interests, and social awkwardness—as opposed to the Kanner type, which we think of as having little to no language use, sometimes extreme sensitivity to stimuli, and severe, comprehensive disability. How, in the decades following Asperger and Kanner's foundational papers, these two superficially disparate clinical pictures came to be seen as profoundly akin to each other, as just different expressions of one underlying condition, is a fascinating story in its own right, best told by Gil Eyal and his coauthors in *The Autism Matrix*.⁸

The agents behind the modern autism spectrum were a group of autism researchers and

7. The "symptom versus syndrome" formulation comes from Roy Richard Grinker, *Unstrange Minds: Remapping the World of Autism* (New York: Basic Books, 2007), 44.

8. Gil Eyal et al. *The Autism Matrix: The Social Origins of the Autism Epidemic* (Cambridge: Polity, 2010).

parental advocates in the United Kingdom, one of whom, Lorna Wing, wrote the 1981 paper “Asperger’s Syndrome: A Clinical Account,” which not only re-described the Asperger type using contemporary case material but also proposed the essential kinship of Asperger’s and Kanner’s autistic types and the idea of the spectrum. Another of these researchers, Uta Frith, published in 1991 a translation of Asperger’s foundational autism paper (Kanner’s, having originally been published in English, has thus always been the better known of the two). And another, Simon Baron-Cohen, is the name behind the dominant theory of autism of the last thirty years: the theory that the autistic subject “lacks a theory of mind.”

That autistic people constitutively lack a theory of mind has not been convincingly proven and is put in considerable doubt by some more recent research,⁹ but it remains the single most powerful explanatory idea in the recent history of autism. Having a theory of mind is defined as “being able to conceive of mental states: that is, knowing that other people know, want, feel, or believe things.”¹⁰ If one lacks this ability, the reasoning goes, one will consequently display the core symptoms of autism:

Lack of theory of mind can account for both the avoidance of social contact and for an inappropriate approach: both are consequences of not understanding other people in terms of what they think or feel or want. Communication failure is an inevitable consequence of this deficiency.¹¹

In more concrete terms, a person lacking a theory of mind will “treat people and objects alike” and “show a striking poverty of pretend play”¹²—refusing, say, to build a house out of blocks but instead arranging and rearranging the blocks according to an obscure serial principle.

9. See the work of Morton Ann Gernsbacher, in particular Morton Ann Gernsbacher and Jennifer L. Frymiare, “Does the Autistic Brain Lack Core Modules?” in *Journal of Development and Learning Disorders* 9 (2005): 3–16.

10. Simon Baron-Cohen, Alan M. Leslie, and Uta Frith, “Does the Autistic Child Have a Theory of Mind?” *Cognition* 21 (1985): 38.

11. Uta Frith, *Autism: Explaining the Enigma* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), 174

12. *Ibid.*

To lack a theory of mind is, in the words of Simon Baron-Cohen, to be “mindblind.”¹³ Popular interpretations of the mindblindness hypothesis state that autistic people “lack empathy” or have “a literal mind” that is unable to comprehend figurative language or non-verbal means of expression.¹⁴ What underlies the theory of mind in this view is the ability to recognize that people’s knowledge, beliefs, and intentions can differ both from other people’s and from actual states of affairs: “the child has to be aware that different people can have different beliefs about a situation.”¹⁵

In this widely accepted theory of autism, the autistic person’s lack of a theory of mind is equated with a supposed inability to *pretend*. Pretending is even seen as a more primitive function, as the basis for all “mentalizing” or theory of mind: in the development of a normal child, there comes a point around year two at which “the ability to pretend starts to develop, and then gradually the ability to mentalize.”¹⁶ This implies that all functions of the theory of mind—all the ways of understanding other people’s mental and emotional states—are outgrowths of the primitive ability to pretend. Autistic children, however, “show little if any pretend play” and “spend much of their time in reality-oriented play”¹⁷—taking blocks as just blocks, as in the example above, not as people or houses or vehicles. So we can, without putting words in anyone’s mouth, phrase the consensus theory of modern autism as the idea that the autistic mind takes things *just as they are* in an objective reality devoid of other minds, and is unable to fantasize about the contents of other people’s minds. When we view things in these easily graspable terms, a peculiar relationship comes into focus between Bleuler’s autism and the

13. See Simon Baron-Cohen, *Mindblindness: An Essay on Autism and Theory of Mind* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1995).

14. Frith, *Autism*, 154; 175.

15. Baron-Cohen, Leslie, and Frith, “Does the Autistic Child,” 39.

16. Alan Leslie, quoted in Frith, *Autism*, 170.

17. Frith, *Autism*, 170.

autism we know: they are not just different, they are polar opposites.

If the autism we know deals exclusively in reality, in objects and their physical relations, autism as originally conceived by Bleuler is just as strongly associated with *fantasy*. It is the state of a mind “turned away from reality” and unable to stick to objective states of affairs. “Realism” is Bleuler’s word for the opposite of autism. For Bleuler, in other words, *any kind of thinking that is independent of objective “reality,” that thinks things other than as they are*, is autistic. Bleuler never intended autism to denote merely a “symptom of schizophrenia,” as it is now taken to do, and did not consider autistic thinking intrinsically pathological. Bleuler’s autism is present in ordinary beliefs, opinions, fantasies, and dreams; and in myth, art, and poetry, to name just a few of its media other than madness. So a more precise formulation of Bleuler’s concept would state that schizophrenic withdrawal from the world is one among many and various instances in which “autistic thinking” manifests itself; autism considered in itself, however, is an aspect of thought or a domain of human experience larger than any of its concrete instances.

If “fiction” seems like an adequate substitute for this notion of autism in many instances, another equally good one is “pretending” or “make-believe.” Bleuler writes: “Autistic thinking turns the boy playing soldiers into a general, the girl playing with her doll into a happy mother.”¹⁸ Meanwhile the modern autistic person is said to be incapable of make-believe play! We believe the autistic person incapable of forming representations of other people’s states of mind; but when Bleuler’s schizophrenic patients express paranoid fantasies about what other people think or want of them, they are displaying *Bleuler’s* autism in one of its purest forms. We could now say that they are mentalizing *too much*, projecting mental states and beliefs where they do not belong.

18. Quoted in Uta Frith, ed., *Autism and Asperger Syndrome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 38n.

Seizing on the differences between Bleuler's use of the term autism and our own (which we claim to derive from Kanner and Asperger), commentators have delivered a unanimous verdict: the two senses of autism have nothing in common but the name. "It is clear," writes Frith immediately following her own quotation of Bleuler's passage about autism as the principle of make-believe play, "that autistic thinking in Bleuler's sense has nothing to do with autism as we know it."¹⁹ Since it appeared, along with Frith's translation of Asperger's foundational paper, in 1991, this dismissal of Bleuler's relevance to the problems of modern autism has gone unquestioned. The problem with this is that in Asperger's view, which Frith purports to transmit to us, the total independence of his autism from Bleuler's concept is anything but clear.

Frith's comments are attached to a passage in Asperger's paper in which Asperger presents a summary of Bleuler's autism followed by his own remarks, which stubbornly resist the interpretation Frith puts on them:

Autism is the paramount feature in both cases. It totally colours affect, intellect, will and action. Essential symptoms of schizophrenia and the symptoms of our children can thus be brought under a common denominator: the shutting-off of relations between self and the outside world.²⁰

If we read Asperger's paper in full and in the original, we find that the clear statement Asperger makes here of an essential continuity between Bleuler's autism and the one he is about to describe is of a piece with the entire movement of his thought, and that the concept of the weakening of "relations between self and the outside world" that sustains this continuity is both richly conceived and full of implications for his description of an autistic syndrome. But from its placement in Frith's translation and the changes she makes to the surrounding passages, most readers will fail to detect its importance. Frith's treatment of Asperger is often an exercise in

19. Ibid.

20. Hans Asperger, "'Autistic Psychopathy' in Childhood," trans. Uta Frith, in Frith (ed.), *Autism and Asperger Syndrome*: 37–92, at 38–39.

selective quotation and misleading exegesis. Frith substitutes modern clinical terms for Asperger's much more general concepts (speaking of "goal-directed" thinking when Asperger says "von der Realität bestimmt," for example); mixes clauses from distinct sentences of Asperger's into new sentences of her own, thereby changing the relations between subjects, verbs, and objects; and freely rearranges the order in which Asperger presents his thoughts—here with the effect of disguising the ways in which Asperger expresses his debt to Bleuler. All this in addition to her decision to omit the entire introductory section of the paper, in which Asperger reveals the deeper intellectual sources of his concept of autism (which we explore in Chapter Three).

Why the effort to distort the original sources, to suppress the continuity between authors in the name of a sharp break between a premodern and a modern autism? There were reasons, at the time, to underscore the specificity of the autistic syndrome—the medicalization of the condition was essential in order to obtain social services for those diagnosed with it.²¹ That notwithstanding, Frith's translation of Asperger and the accounts of autism's history put forth by Frith, Wing, and others at this time did unnecessary and regrettable damage not just to the historical record but surely to the potential richness and variety of autistic experience as mediated by historical understanding.

The fact that a word such as "autism" has one meaning at one point in time and then switches, not too long after, to an apparently opposite meaning does *not* show that the respective usages of the word have "nothing to do" with each other. On the contrary, the relationship of diametrical opposition—and the heavily laden terms of this opposition: notions such as reality and fantasy, logic and affect—should signal to us that they have everything to do with each

21. See Eyal et al., *The Autism Matrix*, esp. 194–211.

other. Like the “primitive words” in which Freud discerned a double and opposite meaning—“near-far,” “old-young,” “bind-cleave,” “outer-inner”²²—autism is a deceptively simple lexeme. Its root is just the Greek for “self”—*autos*—yet the contents ascribed to it by Bleuler, Asperger, Kanner, and others are widely differing visions of what makes up the human self in isolation from the world around. And the arc described by the movement of autism from Bleuler’s time to ours—a progression from madness to hyperrationality, from an excess of affect to its failure—is the arc of ideology in the twentieth century. This should become clearer in the chapters that follow. For now, let us lay out the terms of the inquiry—map, as it were, the interface of autism the thing and autism the name, whose paths we then hope to trace.

The consensus view of the natural-cultural history of autism can be summarized in five points, on each of which this *discursive* history will propose not a mutually exclusive contestation but an additional perspective. The consensus holds (1) that modern autism was *discovered* by Kanner and Asperger, each of whom saw, for the first time, more or less what we now consider the autistic syndrome. As to the existence of two contemporaneous first descriptions of this phenomenon, it holds (2) that the simultaneous discovery of modern autism by Kanner and Asperger was essentially a coincidence. Furthermore, the consensus implies (3) that the term “autism” chosen by both discoverers was at the time an obscure terminological relic, which they revived under a completely new meaning. A corollary of this last point is (4) that the phenomena previously designated as “autistic,” in the premodern sense, can be clearly distinguished from the phenomenon of the modern autistic syndrome, and that all uses of autism can thus be unambiguously divided into premodern and modern. Finally, this phenomenological distinction

22. Sigmund Freud, “Über den Gegensinn der Urworte,” in *Gesammelte Werke* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1999), vol. 8: 214–221, at 217.

between premodern and modern autism is underpinned by the notion (5) that it is *symptoms* that count in defining autism (as opposed to the ideational content of the concept of autism), so that an adequate differential diagnosis on the basis of symptoms is sufficient to demonstrate that modern autism is a distinct entity (assuming, then, that the stated symptoms of modern autism do in fact adequately perform that differentiation!). I will now expand somewhat on these points: discovery, coincidence, obscurity and revival, phenomenological dualism, and symptomatology; and sketch out how a discursive approach meets the consensus on each of them.

The first point, the question whether “discovery” is the most apt metaphor for the historical origins of modern autism, is really the sum of all the others, and cannot be fully addressed until the end. But what my approach does on this highest of levels is propose an alternate model of the *emergence* of modern autism from a gradual process, in which the discovery of facts is not ignored or suppressed, but in which the *interpretation* of what is seen or discovered plays at least an equal part.²³ The model of emergence, in other words, denotes a dialogue between practice and theory. This is what we will be working toward.

Point two—the theory of dual, independent discovery—gives us the occasion here to discuss the two most important published works on the history of autism. Both are histories of *modern* autism; but each begins from what it takes to be the beginning, the foundational papers of Kanner and Asperger. One argues effectively that there is no reason to be surprised that autism was discovered independently on two continents at almost exactly the same time, and thus no need to posit a hidden connection between the two sites. The other then shows incontrovertibly that in spite of all this, a vital connection—hidden for decades meanwhile—*did*

23. The metaphor of emergence comes from Arnold Davidson, whose work on the history of sexual perversion is moreover the most illuminating precedent for my project here that I have come across in the history of science literature. See Arnold Davidson, *The Emergence of Sexuality* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001).

exist; Kanner's and Asperger's "discoveries" were not, in fact, independent.

The Autism Matrix, by the sociologist Gil Eyal and a team of secondary authors, stands out among extant publications in addressing itself not to the families or caregivers of autistic children, in order to help them understand and cope with their charges, but rather to anyone seeking a fuller understanding of how the current autism crisis arose. Its overall argument is that the "epidemic" of autism that has gathered strength since the 1980s can be explained without reference to the actual rate of incidence of autism in the population, entirely on the basis of "diagnostic substitution": autism has come to be the preferred diagnosis for conditions that previously were lumped into other categories. The most important factor driving the shift in diagnoses was deinstitutionalization, or the emptying of American mental asylums in the 1960s. Large numbers of atypical children who would otherwise have been labeled as generically "feebleminded" and put into institutional care instead had to be dealt with in school and society. This opened up a new market for targeted therapies, and concomitantly a kind of "market" for diagnoses driven by the combined interests of therapists, researchers, teachers, and parents. This was a market on which autism performed exceptionally well. *The Autism Matrix* makes this argument in painstaking detail and rigorous sociological terms; and along the way it lends many insights into how the diagnosis of autism has changed since Kanner and Asperger.

Eyal and his team acknowledge what they call "the riddle of simultaneous discovery": the question of how Asperger in Vienna and Kanner in Baltimore, their respective countries at war with one another in the early 1940s, could have apparently had the same thought—that there was a group of children, more or less the same group of children, waiting for the label "autistic" to be applied to them. Because there had never been any known channel by which they could have heard of each other's work, this has always been thought to be a coincidence, an example of

genuine dual discovery like Newton and Leibniz’s independent arrival at the calculus. But for the sociologist Eyal, very little in this picture is truly coincidental. He sets out to “dissolve” the riddle by explaining why modern autism was ripe for discovery in both Europe and the United States at this time. To this end he points out the “similar intellectual and clinical milieus” in which Asperger and Kanner—a lifelong Viennese and an Austrian by birth who emigrated to the United States, respectively—were formed, and the similar “institutional location of the two men” at the time of their autism research, “their similarly interstitial position between disciplines” (the disciplines of child psychiatry and special education). The coincidence of these two factors—intellectual milieu and institutional location—made the two of them highly likely both to come across the same kind of case material and to interpret it in the same terms.²⁴

As successfully as Eyal’s dissolution of the riddle of simultaneous discovery is carried out, it is not strictly necessary, because the riddle also has a more conventional solution. A third doctor named Georg Frankl served as a conduit for the transmission of ideas about autism from Asperger’s clinic to Kanner’s as, in 1937, he emigrated from Vienna, where he had worked alongside Asperger, to the United States, and soon joined the clinic directed by Kanner. Only in 1938—manifestly influenced by Frankl—did Kanner even begin the work that led to his epochal publication on autism in 1943. Asperger remained ignorant of Kanner, but not the other way around.

Frankl’s story, which had been lost, was recently made public in the book *NeuroTribes: The Legacy of Autism and the Future of Neurodiversity*, by the journalist Steve Silberman.²⁵ In Silberman’s eyes, Frankl’s role turns Kanner into something of a fraud, eager to claim sole credit

24. Eyal et al., *The Autism Matrix*, 214.

25. Steve Silberman, *NeuroTribes: The Legacy of Autism and the Future of Neurodiversity* (New York: Avery, 2015). Acting independently of Silberman and before the publication of his book, I came across evidence of Frankl’s activity while researching Kanner and incorporated my own findings into the present Chapter Four.

for the discovery of autism and to deny both Frankl's and Asperger's influence on himself. I argue in Chapter Four that this view oversimplifies things and ignores certain other facts; for one thing, Silberman's telling of the story assumes that the observation of autistic children was experienced by those concerned—Kanner, Frankl, Asperger—as a momentous scientific “discovery” in the first place, a prize worth trying to claim sole credit for. But at the time, before it had caught the attention of the wider world, the autistic syndrome was not likely to have registered with these authors as quite so significant in and of itself. That we should instead understand the emergence of modern autism from its precedents as a gradual process of interpretation and reinterpretation, and in fact as a process that, far from having been achieved by Kanner and Asperger, is still ongoing—this is, as already stated, one of the main arguments of this dissertation. Silberman's diligent historical research, meanwhile, remains a valuable contribution.

So much for the question of dual discovery: it is *both* a perfectly explicable effect of sociological forces *and* a false appearance. But a highly problematic point remains: neither the sociological explanation nor the fact of Georg Frankl can explain the seemingly innocent question of why “autism,” and not some other term, was the name chosen for the new syndrome on both sides of the Atlantic.

One thing that Georg Frankl almost certainly did *not* suggest to Kanner is the application of the label “autistic” to any particular set of patients. Autism itself plays only a minor role in Frankl's own work—where it never serves to designate a definite syndromal type, but rather appears in the perfectly conventional Bleulerian sense—and was first used by Asperger only in 1938, after Frankl had left Vienna. Frankl certainly communicated to Kanner the substance of the Viennese research program that had already identified close approximations of the autistic type,

and he gave Kanner another concept, that of “affective contact,” that had a major impact on Kanner’s thinking and on his description of autism. But Frankl does not actually solve for us the riddle of why both Asperger and Kanner chose to call their particular groups of patients “autistic.” Neither does Eyal’s explanation suffice, for after mentioning the “similar intellectual milieus” in which Kanner and Asperger were trained in Berlin and Vienna, respectively, he goes on to elucidate these milieus in only the most general terms, and comes nowhere near the question of *the concept of autism* itself.

In fact, everything that *The Autism Matrix*—by some margin the most thorough and penetrating analysis we have of the history of *modern* autism—has to say about the use of the word “autism” before the modern era can be quoted here unabridged:

The Swiss psychiatrist Eugen Bleuler coined the term decades earlier to describe his schizophrenic patients. Bleuler’s patients went into states where they seemed totally detached from the outside world. Disconnecting from the world around oneself and basking in fantasy was something any person did to a certain extent, Bleuler thought. He dubbed this state of disconnection “autism” and spoke of “autistic thinking” as one modality of thought that all humans engaged in.²⁶

This brief summation of the Bleulerian concept of autism still surpasses others in that it devotes more than a single sentence to it. Grinker’s equivalent passage reads simply: “Coming from the Greek *autos*, meaning ‘self,’ the term was used as an adjective by Swiss physician Eugen Bleuler in 1912 [actually 1910—SHT] to describe the behavior of some people, then diagnosed with schizophrenia, who were disengaged from everything except their internal world.”²⁷ Chloe Silverman, whose writing centers on the history of autism therapy, autistic advocacy movements, and the contemporary sociology of autism, is content to note that “autism” was “a term [Kanner] borrowed from Swiss psychologist Eugen Bleuler, who had used it back in 1910 to describe

26. Eyal et al., *The Autism Matrix*, 213.

27. Grinker, *Unstrange Minds*, 44.

symptoms of schizophrenia.”²⁸ And here is Steve Silberman on the same subject: “The term *autism*, in the way that Eugen Bleuler originally used it, implied a gradual withdrawal into a private life of fantasy.”²⁹

We have just read the entirety of what the best, most scholarly contemporary writers on autism have to say about the use of the concept before Asperger and Kanner. Amidst their uncertainty as to Bleuler’s profession (psychiatrist? physician? psychologist?—he was in fact a psychiatrist), none of these accounts, which all stand in marked contrast to their authors’ intellectual curiosity about other matters autism-related, adds anything to what Uta Frith wrote about Bleuler in her 1989 *Autism: Explaining the Enigma*.

Meanwhile, no available account provides even a clue to the question of why the name “autism” was chosen by both Asperger and Kanner. Every one of these authors, upon mentioning Bleuler, underlines how Bleuler’s old use of the term was *different* from the new use; none, however, has a word to say about how the two are related. This leads to a general shrug of the shoulders when it comes to the question: why, then, did Asperger and Kanner use the term at all? The authors’ helplessness on this point is a direct consequence of their belief that Bleuler’s autism and the autism we trace to those two later authors have “nothing to do” with each other: but if that is the case, there is, on those very same grounds, *no possible reason* for Asperger and Kanner’s uses of the term! Some accounts (including, notably, Eyal’s) state outright that “autism,” as borrowed from Bleuler, was *not* an appropriate description of Kanner’s or Asperger’s patients. So Eyal proceeds to suggest—and other accounts similarly imply—that both Asperger and Kanner adopted Bleuler’s term, despite feeling it inappropriate to their purposes,

28. Chloe Silverman, *Understanding Autism: Parents, Doctors, and the History of a Disorder* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 33.

29. Silberman, *NeuroTribes*, 171.

simply because they could not think of anything better. No careful reading of either Asperger's (original German) or Kanner's autism paper could support this conclusion. Both authors praise Bleuler's coinage and give reasons for using it—Asperger calls it “eine der großartigsten sprachlichen und begrifflichen Schöpfungen medizinischer Namensgebung”³⁰—but not a single one of these reasons makes it into modern accounts.

Even after taking full stock of Kanner and Asperger's reception of Bleuler, however, we still have another major factor to attend to in their selection of the term “autism”: the discourse of autism that spread out from Bleuler, surrounded Asperger and Kanner, and supplied them with any number of precedents for the handling of the concept. The recent works give the impression that Bleuler's curious invention was lying idly on the shelf when suddenly two young doctors, each for his own (quite mysterious) reasons, plucked it out of a dusty tome and applied it to a newly discovered phenomenon. This scenario, like the previous one, is as untrue as it is implausible. Kanner and Asperger would not both have chosen the same term if that term were obscure, in disuse. They chose “autism” precisely because it was easily recognized and understood; their uses of it lie in a tradition that, while stemming from Bleuler, encompasses a host of other authors and other uses of the term with which they—and their presumed readers—were so familiar that it would have been superfluous for them to go into it.

This, then, answers point three: the absence, in available histories of autism, of anything lying between Bleuler and the modern authors. “Autism” was not lying in the dustbin for Asperger and Kanner to retrieve; it was everywhere in their immediate field of child psychiatry (as well as elsewhere). They used it not on inscrutable whims, but *precisely because it would be easily understood* by their readers. And they used it, that means, not in a revolutionary new sense

30. Hans Asperger, “Die ‘Autistischen Psychopathen’ im Kindesalter,” *Archiv für Psychiatrie und Nervenkrankheiten* 117, no. 1 (1944): 84.

but only in a novel application. This is why both Asperger and Kanner used autism in its adjectival form in the initial designations of their syndromes: “autistic psychopathy in childhood” and “autistic disturbances of affective contact,” respectively.³¹ Only later did the name of the syndrome—Kanner’s syndrome, at least—change to “early infantile autism.” Initially the titles would have been read very much in the light of previous “autistic” phenomena, and even previous “autistic” personality types, in the psychiatric literature:³² an “autistic psychopathy,” for Asperger, is one of many types of psychopathy—a word that, in the German of the time, designated any kind of mild to moderate personality disturbance—this one just happening to be characterized as exhibiting autism, *in precisely the received sense of the word*.

Knowing that Kanner and Asperger functioned within the existing discourse of autism makes us ready to take on point four: the question of whether modern autism can be cleanly, phenomenologically differentiated from what Bleuler referred to as autism or “autistic thinking.” And here, even on the prosaic level of the clinic—that is, without going into philosophical uses of the autism concept—we can point to some complications that will arise from a fuller view of the discourse of autism between Bleuler and the early 1940s. We will take them here in order of increasing complexity.

The simplest way in which to complicate the notion of a clean break between premodern and modern autism is to note that authors were aware of the syndromes in question before Kanner and Asperger “discovered” them. This has already been done to an extent. There are compelling anticipations of Asperger and Kanner to be found in earlier authors, one of whom, Grunya Sukhareva, has received a certain amount of attention for her 1926 description of a group

31. Ibid.; Leo Kanner, “Autistic Disturbances of Affective Contact,” *The Nervous Child* 2, no. 3 (1943): 217–250.

32. See for example Eugen Kahn, “Psychopathien und psychogene Reaktionen,” *Archiv für Psychiatrie und Nervenkrankheiten* (1927): 4–38, at 11ff.

of children with qualities conspicuously like those found in Asperger's autistic patients.³³

Sukhareva's description of a proto-autistic syndrome, however, was no more of an anomaly within the larger discourse of autism than Asperger's or Kanner's. Like both of these, Sukhareva presented a type of childhood personality disorder as a special case of a larger phenomenon. For Kanner and Asperger, this larger phenomenon was Bleuler's autism plain and simple; Sukhareva instead names Ernst Kretschmer's concept of the schizoid type as the larger object of her observations. Hence Sukhareva's title "Die schizoiden Psychopathien im Kindesalter" with its uncanny (and perhaps not coincidental) foreshadowing of Asperger's "Die 'Autistischen Psychopathen' im Kindesalter": both announce their objects to be special, namely *childhood* cases of the general phenomena of the schizoid or of autism. Kretschmer's schizoid, moreover, happens to be an explicit equivalent of Bleuler's autism: of what he himself terms the schizoid, Kretschmer casually remarks: "Autismus nennt es *Bleuler*."³⁴ Sukhareva's paper was noticed and discussed in the literature of the time; it is highly probable that Kanner and Asperger read it.

Going back beyond Sukhareva, we can look to both Kretschmer and Bleuler themselves for highly probable, if not satisfactorily *provable* observations of the phenomena later discerned by Kanner and Asperger. Already in 1911, Bleuler speaks familiarly of a none-too-rare "character anomaly" found specifically in children: a "Neigung zu Zurückgezogenheit, verbunden mit einem höheren oder geringeren Grade von Reizbarkeit, so daß die Kinder schon sehr frühe auffielen, weil sie nicht mit den anderen spielten und dafür ihre besondere Wege

33. I regret that this dissertation has not made room for a proper consideration of Sukhareva. For some background information, see Sula Wolff, "The First Account of the Syndrome Asperger Described?" *European Child and Adolescent Psychiatry* 5 (1996): 119–132, which includes a translation of the original paper. The original is G. E. Ssucharewa, "Die schizoiden Psychopathien im Kindesalter," *Monatsschrift für Psychiatrie und Neurologie* 60 (1926): 235–261.

34. Ernst Kretschmer, *Körperbau und Charakter* (Berlin: Springer, 1921), 129.

gingen.” Bleuler’s name for these unusual behaviors?—“autistische[] Charakterabnormitäten.”³⁵
(Kretschmer’s equivalent is discussed in Chapter Two.)

But is there not still a clear moment—in Sukhareva or Asperger or Kanner—when the specific and peculiar symptom-groups of modern autism make their first appearance? Here too, the facts are more ambiguous than we imagine. The clinical presentation of Asperger’s or Kanner’s autism is notable for highly distinctive characteristic behaviors—rocking or spinning, a “distant” gaze, a “singsong” voice, restlessness, patterns of “naughty” or destructive acts with particular qualities—of suddenness, of sureness contrasting with a more habitual motoric ineptitude—and particular favored objects. These had to be meticulously observed, notated, collected, and finally *interpreted* as signs of a specifically autistic disturbance in order for the picture of modern autism to appear. And yet, as we will see in Chapter Four, very many of these characteristic behaviors were already described, even in phrasings that are more or less copied by Asperger and Kanner, in the context of syndromes that have little to do with autism as we know it: postencephalitic Parkinsonism, say, or tuberous sclerosis. These other syndromes were even interpreted as “disturbances of affective contact” in the same manner as modern autism. If we look closely, then, we can watch as individual “pieces of description” (as I call them) migrate from one symptomatic constellation into another, making the emergence of one or more autistic syndromes seem like a more gradual and more contingent process than ever.

A third and last factor blurring the border between premodern and modern autism is of a different kind. We can characterize the distinctiveness of modern autism in at least two ways. One is to recall that it is a syndrome, where before it had been a symptom (or, in the full light of Bleuler’s thought, not so much a symptom as an ontological or anthropological category—but

35. Eugen Bleuler, *Dementia praecox oder Gruppe der Schizophrenien* (Leipzig: Deuticke, 1911), 206. Reprint: Nijmegen, Arts & Boeve, 2001.

still not a syndrome in the modern sense). Another is to point to the qualitative distinctions between premodern and modern autism. Premodern autism is centered on *fantasy* while the modern kind is defined as *literal*; Bleuler believed autistic thinking to be driven by *affect*, while we take autism to consist in an affective deficit, an inability to understand emotion. In any case, the appearance in Asperger and Kanner of a new syndrome embodying the qualities now associated with autism was long preceded by a qualitative shift within the ongoing discourse of autism that prepared the ground for those appearances. In other words, even while autism was still being talked about in a thoroughly Bleulerian context, those commenting on it were gradually, almost subconsciously, but collectively shifting their accounts of it toward the modern view, even in the absence of the modern syndrome. Chapter Two describes how the association of autism with affect slowly tipped from a positive one (in Bleuler) to a negative one (as in Asperger and especially Kanner), passing through several intermediate stages on the way. Even the “symptom-to-syndrome” change was somewhat graduated. In this case the mediating instance is the idea of the *type* that took hold of Germanophone psychiatry (and many other branches of science as well) precisely in the years that separate Bleuler from Asperger and Kanner. Typology sought to displace the model of disease and symptom within which Bleuler had conceived of schizophrenia and autism, and to instead see the forms of the mad or merely atypical psyche as seamlessly integrated with both individual *Anlage* or constitution and various environmental factors such as family or race. The metaphysics of the type in this period go a long way to explain Asperger’s presentation of the autistic *as a human type*, which for him is something distinct from a “syndrome” in the current sense: the type is a formal-aesthetic unity that straddles or obviates the “symptom-syndrome” dichotomy. This latter is thus an anachronism when applied to the moment of modern autism’s emergence.

Our fifth and final point is about the role of symptomatology in differentiating modern autism from the phenomena collected under previous senses of that term. And here we will propose, as counterweight, a renewed attention to what is actually indicated by the concept of autism—its ideational content.

It is not a question of whether what we call autism and what Bleuler called schizophrenia are distinct conditions—obviously, they are—but of whether the element of “autism” in both constitutes a relatedness between them. But for this purpose we need to know *what autism is*. For us today, autism is nothing more than the syndrome that it names, the collection of symptoms it describes. If we cannot make an autism diagnosis on the basis of symptoms, we do not speak of autism. This is because we no longer believe that autism expresses a fundamental *idea*, or stands for an ontological condition, which might be larger than any particular syndrome, which might indeed be a very general condition of human existence that simply exhibits itself in unusual purity in the case of certain syndromes or personality types. This is evidently what Bleuler thought: for him, autism was no less than *the essence of the human condition*, the inescapable human propensity to “live within oneself,” to depart from reality, to try to escape or outwit the external world by constructing a world of one’s own, an autistic interior. In schizophrenia, Bleuler saw simply an instance of the autism common to us all, but in a concentrated and more pronounced form (because, to his mind, the function of logical reasoning that ordinarily keeps our autistic thinking in check had been weakened by the schizophrenic process). But not just Bleuler: in 1977, Asperger, reflecting back on his development of the modern autistic syndrome, still speaks of “autistic symptoms” first and foremost as “a complete turn away from reality” (“autistischen Symptomen, einer völligen Abwendung von der Realität”)³⁶—following, that is,

36. Hans Asperger, *Probleme des kindlichen Autismus* (Lüdenscheid: Gerda Crummenerl, 1977), 5.

Bleuler's formulation to the letter. He goes on to evoke the particular symptoms observed in his patients, those of the "Asperger type," as coming "from the interior, out of the child's self" ("aus dem Innern, dem Selbst des Kindes"),³⁷ as expressions of "their spontaneous interests" ("ihren spontanen Interessen").³⁸ (All of this is a reiteration of the thoughts set out in his original 1944 paper.) And finally he reminds us that such expressions of spontaneity, cultivated apart from the social world, are not just occasionally responsible for the greatest achievements in art and in science but that, on a much more prosaic level, "to act autistically is an entirely general human possibility" (es ist ganz allgemein eine Möglichkeit des Menschen, sich autistisch zu verhalten).³⁹ Asperger's theory of autism is just like Bleuler's in that it sees autism as a general aspect, if not as the core of the human, which happens to come to the fore in particular subjects or subjective states. And it is also like Bleuler's in that it posits a *weakening* of some countervailing force as the factor in these particular states that allows the underlying autism—an autism present in everyone—to appear in such striking isolation. In Bleuler, the countervailing force is logic, the loosening of which lets autistic thinking break free; in Asperger, it is *the social itself*, the socialization that is automatic to most of us and that prompts us to respond to social cues in predetermined, socially normative ways—that *suppresses*, that is, our spontaneous impulses and interests, or in other words, our autistic core. For Asperger, "autism" meant much more than just one particular collection of symptoms found in a certain clinical population—the skipping and singing, repetitive movements and stereotyped language, the violent outbursts of frustration, the carefully cultivated obsessions and precocious intellectual pursuits, the impossibility of conforming to the demands of school. Even these were for Asperger *expressions*

37. Ibid., 7.

38. Ibid., 8.

39. Ibid., 10.

of the autistic essence or of the *idea* of autism, the idea (*Idee*) that in his words “through-organizes” (*durchorganisiert*) the autistic personality. This is the idea contained in the very word “autism”: the idea of the self (*autos*).

In this light, questions of whether autism consists in an excess of fantasy or an inability to pretend; a lack of logical coherence and a flood of affects or the opposite, a dearth of affect and an overgrowth of logical structures; even whether it is present from the beginning of life (as in modern autism) or develops processually (as in schizophrenia)—these questions fall away in importance, and we begin to see that the particular qualities attributed to autism, whether in Bleuler’s era, that of Kanner and Asperger, or our own, are always those that stand opposed to the societal norm. For Bleuler, healthy thinking was logical, sober, scientific, masculine; autism, then, was a manifestation of the “other side” of thought: fantastical, emotional, artistic, feminine. When a “normal” subject of Bleuler’s era was unexpectedly confronted with his innermost, unconscious impulses, as in a dream or an episode of momentary panic, this is what he glimpsed there: his own autism. By Kanner and Asperger’s time, things had changed: “normal” subjects were understood to be emotionally attuned to others, “affective contact” was a standard of healthy development, and logical thinking had become a more specialized trait, peculiar to absentminded professors and the like, seen as potentially harmful in excess. Thus the autistic child was cast as the one whose thinking was not affective enough, was too logical, too sterile. But the sense of the autistic as the subject apart from the rest persists unchanged. And at each epochal moment we can point to at least one highly influential account—Bleuler’s, and later Asperger’s—that sees, in this isolated autistic subject, the kernel of the human, and accordingly presents autism in terms of a general theory of subjectivity or of thinking.

So perhaps the biggest reason for a discursive history of autism is to remind us of this

idea itself—the idea of the interior of the self, the thinking that happens when we are alone, alone among others, alone in the world—and how powerful an idea this has been and might still be. A list of authors well known outside of psychiatry (even if some were also psychiatrists) who made notable use of autism in their writing would at a minimum include Karl Jaspers (in his pathography of Hölderlin); Hans Prinzhorn (a doctor, but just as much an art theorist, the father of our notion of “outsider art”); Jean Piaget, whose account of the normal autism of childhood is later picked up by Claude Lévi-Strauss and forms part of the basis for the latter’s “savage mind”; the literary critic and historian Herbert Cysarz (also in reference to Hölderlin); the philosopher Emil Utitz; and Hans Sedlmayr, one of the greatest art historians of the age and Asperger’s colleague at the University of Vienna, who developed ideas of an autistic style in Renaissance art that run in often uncanny parallel to Asperger’s thoughts on the autistic as a style of person. Even after Kanner and Asperger had deployed the term in their own senses, autism continued to be used in more general contexts and with philosophical resonance: by the political theorist Carl Schmitt, for example (in *Politische Theologie II*, 1970), and by the literary theorist Jacques Derrida (in “The Ends of Man,” included in *Margins of Philosophy*, 1982).

In lieu of a systematic summary of the discourse of autism, which would take up considerable space, we will let one of its representatives speak to its extent and intensity:

Autismus—zuerst eine Art Schimpf—ward daher zu einem seltsam verführerischen Wort. Die Abkapselung in eine autistische Welt büßte zwar nicht ihre Schrecken ein, aber sie umwitterte eine Ambivalenz, in der das Grauenhafte mit dem Faszinierenden sich rätselhaft mengte. Bis zu heiligen Schauern—ich erinnere an *Ottos* berühmte Schrift über das Heilige⁴⁰—konnte diese Zerspaltenheit sich verdichten. Es ist fast selbstverständlich, daß die geistige Erkrankung—in der Autismus seine höchste Steigerung gewinnt—eben die Schizophrenie geradezu modern wurde Das betont Antinaturalistische des Schizophrenen, die Opferung der erfahrungsmäßigen Wirklichkeit zugunsten der Selbstherrlichkeit und Willkür des Ich, schafft bisweilen seinen Gestaltungen eine fast

40. The work alluded to, Rudolf Otto’s *Das Heilige—Über das Irrationale in der Idee des Göttlichen und sein Verhältnis zum Rationalen*, was first published in 1917 and is still in print.

unheimliche Verwandtschaft mit der Kunst des Expressionismus. Wie realistische Dichtung den differenzierten Schleichwegen und schillernd abgetönten Nuancen psychopathischer Persönlichkeiten nachspürte, so wird jetzt die gefährliche Beziehung zur Schizophrenie aufgerollt. Wie in einer furchtbar drohenden Grimasse erblickt unsere Zeit ihr Zerrbild im Schizophrenen. Eine sehr intelligente Kranke ... klagt immer wieder, daß sie sich heraussehne aus der unwirklichen Traumwelt in die frühere Wirklichkeit; in die Welt des Gemüts und der dampfenden Kaffeetassen, wie sie einmal sich ausdrückt. Trotzdem wertet sie ihre Phantasiewelt höher ein: "das geistige Leben ist stärker als das erlebte Leben, das Reich der Idee stärker als das wirkliche Leben."⁴¹

The year was 1927 and the author of these lines was Emil Utitz, a professor of philosophy equally noted for his contributions to psychology, characterology, and aesthetics. Having studied with the philosopher Christian von Ehrenfels, Utitz went on to edit the *Jahrbuch der Charakterologie* and hold chairs at the universities of Rostock and Halle and the German university in Prague. Later he was director of the official library of the Theresienstadt ghetto (and lived to see its liberation). Though writing from a perspective critical of "expressionism"—which he casts as synonymous with autism—Utitz testifies to the fact that autism, at this time, was reflexively understood to stand for arguably the highest problem of the age: the relation of the private self (or the "spiritual life") to the public world ("real life"), a problem posed with equal urgency from the standpoints of aesthetics, spirituality, science, and politics.

The following chapters do not attempt a full-scale archaeology of the discourse of autism. They put forth instead something like a genealogy of the concept as used by Asperger and by Kanner, showing how autism traveled from its roots in Bleuler to this critical turn in its history, the dawn of its modernity. The plan of the dissertation is accordingly as follows.

Chapter One considers the origins of autism in the work of Bleuler. Bleuler originally devised "autism" as an equivalent substitute for Freud's term "autoerotism," which Bleuler

41. Emil Utitz, *Die Überwindung des Expressionismus* (Stuttgart: Enke, 1927), 11–12.

understood in his own fashion as a form of thinking “turned away from the world” and “turned in on itself.” Surveying Bleuler’s work from his earliest writings on, this chapter reveals autism to have an originary *philosophical-anthropological* determination: it designates what for Bleuler was the inmost tendency of the human, namely the tendency to think above and beyond the confines of reality, with consequences both creative and destructive, in his eyes.

Chapter Two examines the discourse of autism between Bleuler and the era of Asperger and Kanner. The trajectory of the term here describes an arc of shifting cultural and scientific ideology. Bleuler had characterized autism as deficient in logical reasoning and driven by the affects. Over time, Bleuler’s followers (including Ernst Kretschmer, Ludwig Binswanger, and Eugène Minkowski) effected a “switch in polarity” to a concept of autism defined as excessively logical and deficient in affect—the polar opposite of Bleuler’s parameters. The chapter explains this shift against a countervailing movement in the ideology of science and culture, from a normative concept of community as grounded in logical agreement to one sustained by “irrational” affective harmonies. In each case, autism appears as the opposite of the norm, the subject apart.

Chapters Three and Four are devoted to readings of the foundational autism papers of Hans Asperger and Leo Kanner, respectively. Chapter Three presents Asperger as responding to and complicating the discourse of affect and empathy that had arisen in the preceding decades. Even as he lays out one of the earliest clinical pictures of what we recognize as autism, Asperger questions whether this condition can be adequately explained as a mere deficit in empathy. His more skeptical stance on this point sets Asperger apart from his colleagues and superiors, who held to a view of autism as affectively impaired and therefore “socially useless” that was endorsed by the ruling National Socialists. Asperger instead held autism to be in essence a

distinctive relation to language and expression. The expressive phenomena of autism have, in his view, a unity among themselves and a particular *shape* that deviates from the norm but in so doing reflects all the more immediately the activity of *thinking* that constitutes the autistic core. The chapter shows Asperger's theory of autism to be a highly original reworking of the philosophy of Ludwig Klages, and concludes by showing that Asperger also offers a general theory of the relation between thinking and the social.

Chapter Four takes on the work of Leo Kanner, the other founder of modern autism, who was born (like Asperger) in the Austrian empire and trained in Berlin, but who then emigrated to the United States, where his research on autism was conducted. But the chapter is also devoted to illuminating the hidden role of Georg Frankl, the emigre from Vienna to Baltimore, from Asperger's clinic to Kanner's, in the transmission of autism from Europe to America. Working from archival sources, I show how the ideas Frankl brought from Vienna—chiefly his own original concept of “affective contact”—were critical in starting and guiding the research that led to Kanner's epochal 1943 autism paper. Delving into Frankl's own previous work moreover affords a view—not available anywhere else—of how the specific type that both Asperger and Kanner would dub “autistic” emerged in a gradual manner from earlier clinical types—foremost among them, surprisingly, the historically unique psychoses following upon the European epidemic of encephalitis lethargica in the 1920s.

It is my hope that this work will help us see the emergence of modern autism less as a sudden discovery than as a stage in a long—and still ongoing—process of interpretation. This in turn will have unpredictable but far-reaching effects on our thinking about autism now and in the future.

Chapter One

Eugen Bleuler: Autism as the Sickness of the Human

At present, the term “autism” serves to distinguish one group of people, those who “have” it, from others, who do not. For those who “have autism” or “are autistic,” this condition encompasses their entire way of being in the world and determines them in any number of aspects; their actions are interpreted through the lens of their autism and taken as signs of it. Autism is, in contemporary parlance, an identity. Using a somewhat older vocabulary, we could say autism designates a *type* of person. It is a type identified not primarily by physical appearance or, say, sexual proclivities, but by *characterological* traits: habits of thinking and acting, ways of appearing in the context of society. We trace this sense of autism to the foundational descriptions of an autistic character type published by Leo Kanner in 1943 and Hans Asperger in 1944.

When the concept of autism was created around 1907, and first used in public in 1910, it had a sense that differs from the current one not just in its particulars, but in terms of its overall function. It did not serve (at least, not usually; complications will arise and be dealt with in time) to delimit one particular set of individuals in contrast to others. Instead of describing people, the adjective “autistic” applied to particular thoughts—a very wide range of thoughts indeed, and a kind of thought entertained regularly by all kinds of people, not just the mentally disturbed. An autistic thought was understood to be one that contradicted the reality of external facts. Hence “fictional” would have been an entirely appropriate substitute for “autistic,” and autism, rather than a condition alien to most people, was understood as an intrinsic dimension of the human condition, namely the tendency to think “autistically”—that is, to think beyond the bounds of

factual reality, for better or for worse. This is the sense in which autism was intended by its first author, the Swiss psychiatrist Eugen Bleuler.

The evident contrast between Bleuler's aims in creating the concept of autism and the narrower sense in which we now use the concept has led a consensus to form around the idea that autism as we know it owes nothing to its Bleulerian forerunner but the name, a kind of empty shell lifted and transferred from one meaning to another. A leading representative of this view, and one of the writers who has contributed most to popularizing the current picture of autism, puts it as follows:

The Swiss psychiatrist Eugen Bleuler, who wrote an influential textbook of psychiatry, coined not only the term autism but also the term schizophrenia. . . . For Bleuler autistic thinking meant thought associations driven by affects. He applied this concept not only to schizophrenic patients but also to normal people. "Autistic thinking turns the boy playing soldiers into a general, the girl playing with her doll into a happy mother . . . it enables the dreamer to express his wishes and fears." In 1919 Bleuler published *The autistic-undisciplined thinking in medicine and how to overcome it*, where he castigated then current medical practice. He gave examples of beliefs in medicine that are wishful rather than truthful, analogical rather than logical, fantasy rather than reality. It is clear from this bitter treatise that autistic thinking in Bleuler's sense has nothing to do with autism as we know it.¹

The writer is Uta Frith, commenting on a passage in Asperger's 1944 paper on autism, one of the twin sources from which we derive our current conception of the autistic character type. The fact that Asperger there cites Bleuler at length and credits him with "eine der großartigsten sprachlichen und begrifflichen Schöpfungen auf dem Gebiet medizinischer Namensgebung"² does not seem to disturb Frith's conviction that the phenomenological differences between the two senses of autism rule out any substantive relation between them.

One of the more general aims of the present work is to counter the consensus view just described by showing that in fact, meaningful legacies of Bleuler's autism persist at every level

1. Frith, ed., *Autism and Asperger Syndrome*, 38n. (see Introduction, n. 18).
2. Asperger, "Die 'autistischen Psychopathen,'" 84 (see Introduction, n. 30).

of our understanding of the concept, and can moreover be traced in the literature that mediates between Bleuler on the one hand, Kanner and Asperger on the other. Chapter Two describes the specific paths leading from Bleuler to Asperger, Chapter Three those leading to Kanner. For the time being, we turn our attention to Bleuler's concept of autism and attempt to grasp it in its origins and in its own right.

If Frith's depiction of Bleuler's autism comes across as slightly incoherent, that is in part an accurate reflection of Bleuler's concept, which is every bit as centrifugal in its force and sprawling in its manifestations as she presents it. In fact, the main limitation of most attempts to deal with Bleuler's concept of autism within the history of psychiatry (see Dalzell, Küchenhoff, Sprecher) is their eagerness to make sense of it by capturing it in the sort of definition usually proper to psychiatric categories. In striving to clarify the relation of autism to Bleuler's concept of schizophrenia—the context in which it first arises—they fail to keep in mind the extent to which the driving force behind Bleuler's elaboration of autism comes from *outside* the domain of psychopathology proper, as we will show. As we glean from Frith's collection of examples, Bleuler's autism was not a condition unique to schizophrenics, nor was it its own category of mental disorder. It was, strictly speaking, not an inherently pathological concept at all. It was an aspect of all mental life, one that merely happened to manifest itself in a particularly concentrated form in the patients Bleuler observed.

What, then, do a schizophrenic patient, a child playing make-believe, a dreamer, and a medical practitioner circa 1919—to recall Frith's examples of Bleuler's autistic thinkers—have in common? As indicated above, Bleuler understands each of these figures to be engaged in a kind of thinking that fictionalizes, that distorts reality. As Frith correctly states, the broadest parameter of Bleuler's autism is that it forms thought-associations on the basis of affects,

resulting in thoughts that are “wishful rather than truthful.” So simple and general a definition, however, can hardly justify the existence of a special concept, let alone begin to explain how it was used in practice. There is little in that description that could distinguish the concept of autism from that of “fantasy” or “wishful thinking,” or simply from “affect” in general understood as something pseudo-cognitive. And Bleuler is indeed guilty of inviting “misunderstandings” of his concept, of which he later complained, by failing to make explicit many of the assumptions behind it: what is an affect, what exactly marks out the “real” as real rather than fantasized, etc.

A thorough unfolding of Bleuler’s autism in its full scope and in the context of Bleuler’s broader thinking has never been supplied, even by historians of psychiatry who specialize in Bleuler. To perform that unfolding, we must not flinch before the concept’s apparent contradictions, but must turn these to advantage. It is only by way of its concretions—the alternately dazzling and baffling array of instances in which Bleuler sees it at work—that something like a true “shape” of autism emerges. Only on the basis of this whole, irregular, concrete shape can we begin to articulate a “concept” of autism. The process starts with a recognition of the tension between the vast generality of Bleuler’s official “definitions” of autism—as literally *any* thought that departs from factual reality in *any* respect—and the immediately striking particularity, even the frequent oddity, of the limited set of concrete instances of autism that he provides. If we can read these instances together, welcoming those that appear to stick out rather than bracketing them or explaining them away, we would then have the shape of autism. Recalling that autism stands opposed to “reality,” we might then establish just what constitutes, for Bleuler, the borderline between the two.

Further stretching our patience, it is only by way of yet another concept, a difficult one in

its own right, that Bleuler's autism can be approached. It is well known, beyond doubt, that Bleuler intended autism to serve as a like-for-like replacement for the existing concept of "autoerotism" as found in the work of Freud. Autoerotism is a subtle, yet crucial piece in Freud's developmental theory of infantile sexuality. At first glance, given what was said above about Bleuler's definition of autism, it is difficult to imagine the latter concept slipping neatly into the space already occupied by Freud's autoerotism, itself a very specifically determined word finely tailored to its own set of assumptions. The sense Bleuler gives to "autism" seems incompatible with the equivalence he asserts between it and autoerotism. However, rather than chalk this up to inexplicable confusion and hastily declare that Freud's autoerotism evidently "has nothing to do with autism" as Bleuler knew it (let alone "as we know it"!), we must again turn weakness to strength and ask on what basis Bleuler was able to read what he understood as autoerotism in the Freudian sense into his own very peculiar notion of autism. Tracking closely Bleuler's efforts to assimilate and refashion Freud's concept yields two rewards: a more fine-grained picture of Bleuler's autism, and a revealing view of his intellectual relationship with Freud.

Bleuler was an academic psychiatrist of considerable repute with a strong interest in psychoanalytic ideas. He was not a psychoanalyst or a member of the "psychoanalytic movement" that formed around Freud. In certain respects, though, the Freud-Bleuler relationship deserves to be accorded an attention equal to that which has already been devoted to Freud's relations with Carl Jung. The standard line is that Jung broke from Freud because he could no longer accept the role accorded to sexuality in Freud's thinking. Bleuler, too, appears to have made his differences with Freud clear over the same question: autoerotism with its heavy baggage of Eros, or autism? Yet despite this surface parallel, the stakes were not the same. And while Jung's break from Freud was fateful for the history of psychoanalysis, the deterioration in

relations between Freud and Bleuler (more a gradual breakdown than a breakup) was, it can be argued, of immense consequence for the history of psychiatry—and thus for the concept of autism that we now have. Of Freud’s, Jung’s, and Bleuler’s respective understandings of psychoanalysis and its implications, it is Bleuler’s that has had the most success—filtering into the mainstream, thriving in the form of “schizophrenia” and “autism,” his dual contributions to science.

Autoerotism and the first Freudian theory of psychosis

The setting for most of this chapter is the Burghölzli—a huge, modern asylum on the outskirts of Zurich.³ As of 1898, Bleuler was its director; Carl Jung arrived in 1900 as his deputy and head of the staff of doctors, which would include many who later made names for themselves. Bleuler had followed Freud’s work since the 1890s—his writings on aphasia and on neurological subjects, his translations of Charcot’s Paris lectures, and the 1895 *Studien über Hysterie* with Breuer, of which Bleuler wrote a positive review.⁴ By 1907—a critical year for psychoanalysis in which Jung, Karl Abraham, and Ludwig Binswanger, all working under Bleuler, each established official ties with Freud—Zurich had become the second center of psychoanalytic research, after Vienna. In the next several years, it would arguably exceed Vienna in importance for the history of psychoanalysis. Bleuler placed a premium, too, on maintaining respectability in the academy, making himself and his associates the rare conduits through which certain Freudian ideas could be made presentable, if phrased in sufficiently diplomatic terms, to the psychiatric establishment.

3. Cf. Bernhard Küchenhoff, “Autismus—Autoerotismus. Das Verhältnis von Psychiatrie und Psychoanalyse am Burghölzli,” in *Das Unbewusste in Zürich. Literatur und Tiefenpsychologie um 1900*, ed. Thomas Sprecher, 217–232 (Zurich: Neue Zürcher Zeitung Verlag, 2000), at 219ff.

4. Eugen Bleuler, “J. Breuer, S. Freud: Studien über Hysterie,” *Münchener medizinische Wochenschrift* 43 (1896): 524–525. Cf. Küchenhoff, “Autismus—Autoerotismus,” 220–221.

The Burghölzli was important not only for the doctors who worked there, but also for the patients who came there for treatment. Its specialty was the condition then known as dementia praecox, later as schizophrenia. In eight years, Bleuler reported in 1908, he had been able to observe 647 cases of dementia praecox under his personal care.⁵ To study this many patients with dementia praecox together in a controlled environment was a notable opportunity for the scholar-doctors of the time. Considering the influx of Freudian ideas into the Burghölzli and the existing population of patients there, it comes as no surprise that the development of a theory of dementia praecox along Freudian lines was a major preoccupation for Bleuler, Jung, and Abraham. The preeminent result of this project was the publication, in 1911, of Bleuler's magnum opus, *Dementia praecox oder Gruppe der Schizophrenien*. As indicated by its title, this is the work in which Bleuler renamed dementia praecox "schizophrenia," while simultaneously offering a new theory of the nature of the illness in question.⁶

"Dementia praecox," a term introduced by Emil Kraepelin, still smacked of the nineteenth century's predilection for naming mental illnesses in quasi-Linnean fashion, as if classifying plants by genus and species. The "dementia" in its name indicates that its symptoms are severe disturbances of basic mental functioning—it might translate loosely as "madness" or "psychosis." "Praecox" indicates that the illness had an "early" onset, understood as falling typically in the years of adolescence or early adulthood. Bleuler's replacement as a name for the condition, "schizophrenia," took an entirely different tack. Rather than designate the outward parameters of the diagnosis, as Kraepelin had, Bleuler attempted to put his finger on the root of the matter—the essential nature of the problem affecting the psyche "on the inside," as it were.

5. Eugen Bleuler, "Die Prognose der Dementia praecox (Schizophreniegruppe)," *Allgemeine Zeitschrift für Psychiatrie und psychisch-gerichtliche Medizin* 65 (1908): 436–464, at 437.

6. Here the terms dementia praecox and schizophrenia will be used interchangeably, though with preference for the former, which remained more prevalent in use for some time after Bleuler's book (including by Bleuler himself).

This, accordingly, was posited as a “splitting” (Greek *schizein*) of the psyche, which in Bleuler’s developed theory takes on two main senses. There is, he holds, a “primary dissociation” or breaking of the connections between ideas, which, in the “associationist” tradition to which Bleuler adheres, constitute the fabric of the mind.⁷ The breaking of normal paths of association is the condition of the emergence of the other symptoms of illness. These latter then enact a second-order “splitting” of the mind: the particular delusions, paranoia, nonsensical speech etc. that appear in the patient have their origin, Bleuler maintains, in specific “complexes” of ideas that have been *split off* from the main part of the psyche owing to their especially strong affective charge, positive or negative. Things the patient has intensely desired, or greatly feared, come to the surface in a scrambled form, and this is what the clinician observes in a case of schizophrenia.

Bleuler’s interpretation of schizophrenic symptoms in terms of ideational “complexes” is explicitly indebted to his reading of Freud, particularly *The Interpretation of Dreams*. (The idea of the complex—a set of interrelated ideas—in fact originates in Zurich with Bleuler and Jung, and only later migrates into psychoanalysis.) It was revolutionary in psychiatry to suggest that the utterances of severely disturbed asylum patients were only *apparently* nonsensical, and furthermore that they had a “secret” meaning that could be deciphered using clues found in the patient’s personal circumstances—upbringing, past love affairs, professional tribulations, etc. What Bleuler took from Freud was this idea of the intrapsychic determination of symptoms—that the delusional ideas appeared in their peculiar forms for a reason, a reason to be sought *within* the patient’s thoughts.

Bleuler famously declared in the foreword to *Dementia praecox* that “a weighty portion”

7. Bleuler, *Dementia praecox oder Gruppe der Schizophrenien*, 10 (see Introduction, n. 35).

(ein wichtiger Teil) of his work was “nichts als die Anwendung der Ideen Freuds auf die Dementia praecox.”⁸ A weighty portion of that process, in turn, was the turning of autoerotism into autism.

The cornerstones of the first major phase of Freud’s psychoanalysis, the theories of hysteria and the transference neuroses and *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), had been the results of endless hours of talk—mostly of Freud listening to the unprompted musings of his patients. Psychoanalytic “theory,” Freud would always emphasize, was nothing but tentative generalization from the experiences rendered through psychoanalytic *technique*. Most of these early patients were neurotic, suffering from mild to moderate forms of hysteria, obsessive-compulsive disorders, neurasthenia and the like, which did not lead to hospitalization. Freud used the observations gleaned from them to construct models not just of their specific conditions, but of the “normal” psyche as well, insofar as, for instance, the dreams of healthy individuals yielded to the same interpretive techniques as the bodily tics of a hysteric, revealing common ground between the normal and the pathological in the form of the unconscious. What Freud did not yet have in 1907, however, was a theory of more severe disturbances of the mind—what we would call the psychoses, chief among them dementia praecox. He did not frequently encounter these conditions in his patients. The Burghölzli had this type of case in abundance. From his earliest correspondence with Bleuler and Jung, Freud makes known his jealous desire to partake in the riches of clinical material at their disposal.⁹

Freud speculatively proposes the first outline of a libidinal theory of psychosis in a letter

8. Ibid., vii, original emphasis removed.

9. Sigmund Freud and C. G. Jung, *Briefwechsel*, ed. William McGuire and Wolfgang Sauerländer (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1974), 46.

to Jung composed around the third week of April 1907, and headed “Einige theoretische Gesichtspunkte zur Paranoia.”¹⁰ As in hysteria, the kernel of paranoia is a wish that is unable to become conscious. Rather than repress said wish internally into the unconscious, from whence it might then reemerge in the form of a hysterical conversion, the paranoid mechanism instead projects the content of the wish onto the external environment, from whence it appears to attack the subject in a hostile manner. It has been displaced from a wish on the part of the subject to something wished upon the subject by others, which the subject now attempts to fight off. In order for this to happen, reasons Freud, the content of the wish must have somehow lost the attributes that marked it as an inner experience and gained those attributes otherwise held by outward experiences or sense-perceptions. Normally, inner experience is marked by a quantity of affect, while outward experience is marked by the qualities of perception. In paranoia, a certain idea has shed its quantity of affect; in other words, its libidinal cathexis has been detached. Severed from the libido, the idea now appears as something foreign to the subject, and the affect attached to it is able to switch signs, from positive to negative. What began as a wish has become a persecutory delusion. Finally, and crucially, the quantity of libido that had previously been bound to the wish-object “[ist] ins Ich zurückgekehrt ... d. h. autoerotisch geworden.”¹¹ Overcatheted at the expense of object-libido, the autoerotic ego-libido produces the delusions of grandeur which, in the symptomatology of paranoia, complement the delusions of persecution.

In his next letter (April 21, 1907), Freud already speaks of the “Rückbildung” or “Rückkehr zum Autoerotismus” as shorthand for the entire sketch of a libidinal theory of the

10. Ibid., 41–44. It is thus not the case, or at least not as unambiguously as is claimed by Küchenhoff (“Autismus—Autoerotismus,” 224), that Bleuler came before Freud in the particular application of psychoanalysis to the psychoses.

11. Ibid., 43.

psychoses.¹² The effect is to put at the center of that theory the idea of the detachment of the libido from the things of the world and its return into the self. This leads Freud to an even bolder formulation—as he puts it to Jung: “was Sie ... über das Reaktionsverhalten einer Patientin mit Dementia praecox, die Widerstandslosigkeit der Analyse, die Flüchtigkeit der Übertragung mitteilen, das fordert doch die *Diagnose des Autoerotismus* geradezu heraus?”¹³ From the outlines of a theory of paranoia we have proceeded to the reinscription of dementia praecox as a “diagnosis of autoerotism.”

The criteria Freud gives for the diagnosis of autoerotism—the lack of resistance to the analyst’s probing, the instability of the transference—point to a deficit in the affective rapport between the patient and other people. The theory of hysteria, by contrast, had been built entirely on the basis of the transference between patient and analyst, an emotional relation into which the dynamics of the patient’s history and outside relationships would “transfer” themselves, thus becoming available for analysis. A patient who did not form an affective bond with a doctor or analyst, and thus open up the space of the transference, would present a serious problem for the techniques of interpretation upon which psychoanalysis rested. In a clever twist, though, the strange lack of affective rapport that made itself felt when dealing with psychotic persons would itself serve psychoanalysis as a clue to the nature of their illness. The key was to interpret their very lack of rapport as a specific organization of the libido—one in which sexual energy, rather than find objects in the world toward which to channel itself, circulates entirely within and upon the subject’s own body. In its erotic self-sufficiency, such a subject resembles the early infant in Freud’s theory of developmental stages. When Freud diagnoses “autoerotism,” this is what he

12. Ibid., 44–45.

13. Ibid., 46, emphasis added.

refers to: a regression of the patient's libido into a childlike, self-contained state.¹⁴

The key to Freud's understanding of normal, infantile autoerotism is his interpretation of the behavior of thumb-sucking. What does this action accomplish for the baby—why does it provide such obvious pleasure and satisfaction? Clearly, as a substitute for the even more primitive behavior of *suckling* at the mother's breast. But the satisfaction provided is not of the same kind: thumb-sucking yields no milk and stills no hunger. Rather, in seeking to satisfy its need for food by its own means, the small creature has instead discovered a new type of gratification, one that is pleasurable for its own sake and not dependent on other people. And this Freud points to as the first form of pleasure that deserves the label "sexual" to distinguish it from the satisfaction of mere material needs. Does not sexual activity later in life furthermore mimic the total absorption, the rhythmic intensity, and the insatiable quality of the infant's sucking?

A telling example of Freud's autoerotism as it manifests itself in adult life is the following confession of a "grown-up girl" (*eines erwachsenen Mädchens*), "welches diese kindliche Sexualbetätigung nicht aufgegeben hat und die Befriedigung durch das Lutschen als völlig analog einer sexuellen Befriedigung ... schildert."¹⁵ In her own words:

Nicht alle Küsse gleichen einem Lutscherli: nein, nein, lange nicht alle! Man kann nicht schreiben, wie wohligh es einem durch den ganzen Körper beim Lutschen geht; man ist einfach weg von dieser Welt, man ist ganz zufrieden und wunschlos glücklich. Es ist ein wunderbares Gefühl; man verlangt nichts als Ruhe, Ruhe, die gar nicht unterbrochen werden soll. Es ist einfach unsagbar schön: man spürt keinen Schmerz, kein Weh und ach, man ist entrückt in eine andere Welt.¹⁶

Although it was added to the text of Freud's *Three Essays* in the 1920 edition, and would thus not have been read by Bleuler while his concept of autism was incubating, this passage isolates

14. For a masterly account of Freud's autoerotism in the general context of psychoanalytic developmental theory, see Jean Laplanche, *Life and Death in Psychoanalysis*, trans. Jeffrey Mehlman (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), 8–24.

15. Sigmund Freud, *Gesammelte Werke*, 20 vols. (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1999), vol. 5, 81.

16. *Ibid.*

precisely those features of Freud's autoerotism that Bleuler found worth incorporating. First among them is the idea that this woman's preoccupation with herself comes at the expense of her ability to apprehend and act upon the outer world: her enclosure within herself constitutes the boundary between two worlds, one real, one illusory. Though this woman is not diagnosed as mentally ill, she is separated from the "real" world in the same sense that Bleuler ascribes to the schizophrenic: by an excess of *affective* energy, of feelings and pleasures, and a corresponding deficit in her ability intellectually to get a grip on things. This will become the heart of Bleuler's concept of autism. But Freud's autoerotism had first to be brought nearer to Bleuler by another.

Karl Abraham: autoerotism and dementia praecox

It was neither Jung nor Bleuler, but another Burghölzli doctor at the time who would be first to publish a theory of dementia praecox constructed around the Freudian concept of autoerotism. Karl Abraham was separately in correspondence with Freud, in addition to being frequently in the presence of Bleuler and Jung. He was about to leave the Burghölzli to establish a private psychoanalytic practice in Berlin (and later to found the Berlin Psychoanalytic Association).

Abraham's correspondence with Freud begins in June 1907, *in medias res*: in his second letter, Freud already refers to "our hypothesis" (*unserer Supposition*), namely, that dementia praecox represents a return to autoerotism.¹⁷ He and Abraham carry out an extended, parallel discussion of the issues raised in Freud's "Einige Gesichtspunkte" letter to Jung. The next year, immediately following Abraham's move to Berlin, appears his short paper "Die psychosexuellen Differenzen der Hysterie und der Dementia praecox."¹⁸ It takes up very precisely the core idea of

17. Sigmund Freud and Karl Abraham, *Briefe 1907–1926*, ed. Hilda C. Abraham and Ernst L. Freud (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1980), 18.

18. Karl Abraham, "Die psychosexuellen Differenzen der Hysterie und der Dementia praecox," *Zentralblatt für*

Freud's "Gesichtspunkte" and, as the title suggests, presents a libidinal theory of dementia praecox in parallel to the established Freudian theory of hysteria.

Abraham's account of the "normal" trajectory of libidinal development from infantile autoerotism to mature, heterosexual object-love emphasizes its coincidence with the process of socialization: the excess of infantile libido which does not find its way to the proper objects must be dealt with somehow, and this is by *sublimating* it into productive social feelings such as shame and pity (the overcoming of infantile exhibitionism and sadism, respectively), as well as into artistic and intellectual pursuits (which might be imagined to feed off the remnants of autoerotism). In relation to this normal picture, Abraham's hysteric (or neurotic in general) is characterized by both an unusually strong desire—an excess of libidinal energy directed at objects—and an unusually strong repression of this desire. In technical terms, we observe a "gesteigerte Übertragung: die Objekte werden in abnormem Grade mit Libido besetzt. Auch zur Sublimierung besteht eine über das gewöhnliche Maß hinausgehende Neigung."¹⁹ The hysteric unconsciously feels excessive sexual desires, in other words, but reacts with a correspondingly fierce effort to conform to social expectations. When the neurosis breaks out, its symptoms represent substitutes for the desired, but repressed forms of sexual gratification. The process of psychoanalyzing a neurosis amounts to uncovering the desire in its original form, which is typically a "perverse" one. Psychoanalysis speaks of the libido having become "fixed" at one of the perverse or "partial" stages in normal development: the stage of orality, anality, exhibitionism, etc.

If the hysteric displays both excessive object-love and excessive repression or sublimation, the one suffering from dementia praecox displays just the opposite. His symptoms

Nervenheilkunde und Psychiatrie 19 (1908): 521–533.

19. *Ibid.*, 524.

divide themselves into two groups: “die einen zeigen, daß die Libido von belebten und unbelebten Objekten abgekehrt wird, die andern zeigen den Verlust der durch Sublimierung entstandenen Gefühle.”²⁰ In other words, he seems less able to love or to attach strong feelings to persons or objects, and at the same time simply uninterested in following social conventions. “Es ist, als existierte die Umgebung für ihn überhaupt nicht.”²¹

As hysterical symptoms can be interpreted as replacements for perverse desires, so we should be able to identify in the symptoms of dementia praecox some analogous underlying organization of the libido, a similar stage at which it has become fixed and to which it regresses in the symptoms. The difficulty for this conjecture is of course the fact that dementia praecox appears to destroy the ability to love *tout court*, to cancel all libidinal cathexis of the world. But Abraham’s reading of the symptomatology of dementia praecox as a *turning-inward* of the libido allows him to account for the missing object-love and to identify the libido-position underlying this state as the autoerotic one:

*Die Dementia praecox führt also zur Aufhebung der Objektliebe und der Sublimierung. Einen solchen Zustand der Sexualität kennen wir sonst nur in der frühen Kindheit. Wir benannten ihn hier mit Freud “Autoerotismus.” Auch in dieser Zeit fehlen Objektbesetzung und Sublimierung. Die psychosexuelle Eigenart der Dementia praecox besteht somit in der Rückkehr des kranken Individuums zum Autoerotismus. Die Symptome der Krankheit sind eine Form autoerotischer Sexualbetätigung.*²²

With this, Abraham gives public expression to the idea at the core of Freud’s “Gesichtspunkte zur Paranoia.” Abraham’s paper is not a theoretical advance on Freud’s sketch, which is considerably denser, but that is not Abraham’s intent. He speaks not to a coterie of psychoanalysts, but to professional psychiatry as well. In doing so he produces precisely the theory we would be led to expect from the Bleulerian school, combining a theoretical

20. Ibid., 528–529.

21. Ibid., 524.

22. Ibid., 529.

Freudianism with clinical material centered on dementia praecox.

Abraham's paper also contributes something highly specific, which is not in Freud's prior speculations and which plays a significant role in Bleuler's presentation of autism. This is the rhetorical motif of the psyche *turning away* from the world and in upon itself. Whereas Freud, in his various letters to Jung and Abraham on the matter, speaks exclusively of libido being *withdrawn* from objects and *returning* to the ego (*Rückkehr, Rückzug*), Abraham speaks repeatedly of a "turning away"—an "Abkehr der Libido"—either "von der Außenwelt"²³ or "von den Objekten."²⁴ He also introduces the motifs of patients who "versinken gern in sich"²⁵ and who, "völlig in sich gekehrt" and "für die Außenwelt nicht interessiert," live in an "autoerotische Absperrung gegen die Außenwelt."²⁶ The effect of the language of turning inward, turning one's back on the world, is to recall precedents from Christian monasticism and Classical philosophy. It is to open the door to a certain reading of the autoerotic—or what for Bleuler will be the autistic—position as a pseudo-"ethical" one, a "form of life." This is the distinctive contribution of Abraham to the initial formulations of Bleuler's autism.

Bleuler's autism, phase one: pseudo-ethical, autoerotic

When Bleuler publishes his *Dementia praecox* three years after Abraham's paper, in 1911, the concept of autism—Bleuler's replacement for autoerotism—does indeed play a large role in it. Bleuler introduces the concept first in a shorter preparatory study for the schizophrenia book, a 1910 paper entitled "Zur Theorie des schizophreneren Negativismus." There, Bleuler remarks of the cases he has presented:

23. Ibid., 529n.

24. Ibid., 529.

25. Ibid., 527.

26. Ibid., 530.

Alle diese Kranken sind hochgradig autistisch, d. h. der Wirklichkeit abgewandt; sie haben sich in ein Traumleben zurückgezogen, oder der wesentliche Teil ihres zerspaltenen Ich wenigstens lebt in einer Welt subjektiver Vorstellungen und Wünsche, so daß die Wirklichkeit ihnen nur Störungen bringen kann.²⁷

The corresponding passage in the long-awaited *Dementia praecox* of 1911 is quite similar:

Die schwersten Schizophrenen, die gar keinen Verkehr mehr pflegen, leben in einer Welt für sich; sie haben sich mit ihren Wünschen, die sie als erfüllt betrachten, oder mit den Leiden ihrer Verfolgung in sich selbst verpuppt und beschränken den Kontakt mit der Außenwelt so weit als möglich.

Diese Loslösung von der Wirklichkeit zusammen mit dem relativen und absoluten Überwiegen des Binnenlebens nennen wir Autismus.²⁸

In both passages we note the recurrence of several of the motifs cited above from Abraham.

Central to each is the relation of autism to “reality,” cast in terms of a spiritual attitude—a “turn away” in the first, “detachment” in the second. In its opposition to reality, autism is then variously identified with dreams, wishes, and the “subjective” or “inner life” in general. The ethical component is strong in both passages, conveyed through the language of *active* retreat into a “dream-life,” a “cocoon” of the self where desires and suffering dwell, and actively shutting out the outer world with its bother, trouble, or vehemently resented disturbances (“Störungen”).

These are practically more conjurations of autism than “definitions” in the sense we would expect from a psychiatric treatise, their lightly sketched aestheticism at odds with Bleuler’s otherwise dry, scientific style. Working on these sketches alone, one could easily picture the character of des Esseintes, from Huysmans’ *A Rebours*, as the paradigmatic autist, or at least the literary exponent of an autistic form of life. A classic “degenerate aristocrat,” des Esseintes voluntarily turns his back on society and the modern world and retreats to a laboriously

27. Eugen Bleuler, “Zur Theorie des schizophrenen Negativismus,” *Psychiatrisch-neurologische Wochenschrift* 12 (1910): 185n.

28. Bleuler, *Dementia praecox*, 52.

decorated house whose every feature is planned with one goal in mind: to insulate him from the outside and allow him to dwell pleasurably—or at least undisturbed—in the world of his idiosyncratic contemplations. There is little in Bleuler’s words to differentiate a specifically *schizophrenic* form of autism from such an aesthetic sensibility—to separate autism from “aesthetism.”

The first concrete examples Bleuler gives of autistic phenomena, meanwhile, also betray an apparent debt to Abraham. Taken from schizophrenic patients, they make of autistic behavior primarily a disturbance in the form of social life, corresponding to the failures of “sublimation”—i.e., social adaptation—identified by Abraham as a key to the autoerotism of dementia praecox. One is a woman “otherwise entirely fit for the salon” (*sonst ganz salonfähige*) who “singt in einem Konzert, kann aber nicht mehr aufhören. Das Publikum fängt an zu pfeifen und Lärm aller Art zu machen; sie kümmert sich nicht darum, singt weiter und fühlt sich, als *sie* fertig ist, sehr befriedigt.”²⁹ Another, “[e]in gebildetes Fräulein, dem man von der Krankheit kaum mehr etwas anmerkt, setzt plötzlich vor Zeugen ihre Fäzes mitten in den Salon und begreift die Entrüstung der Umgebung gar nicht.”³⁰ One fit for the salon, one evidently not—these patients’ lack of shame and of concern for the judgments of others, together with their marked “satisfaction” in their respective performances, are in substantial accord with the sense Abraham gives to autoerotism as the motor of schizophrenic symptoms.

Furthermore, it is on the occasion of the two “definitions” of autism cited above that Bleuler makes explicit its purported equivalence with autoerotism in the Freudian sense. The footnote to the passage of 1910 reads:

Unter “Autismus” verstehe ich ungefähr das nämliche wie *Freud* (nicht aber Havelock

29. Ibid.

30. Ibid.

Ellis) unter “Autoerotismus.” Ich halte aber für gut, den letzteren Ausdruck zu vermeiden, da er von jedem, der *Freuds* Schriften nicht genau kennt, mißverstanden wird.³¹

And in 1911:

Autismus ist ungefähr das gleiche, was *Freud Autoerotismus* nennt. Da aber für diesen Autor Libido und Erotismus viel weitere Begriffe sind als für andere Schulen, so kann das Wort hier nicht wohl benutzt werden, ohne zu vielen Mißverständnissen Anlaß zu geben.³²

The two footnotes state, in sum: (1) that autism is synonymous with autoerotism, within the bounds of a certain approximation (“ungefähr”); (2) that the autoerotism in question is distinctly Freud’s use of the term, not Ellis’s relatively restrictive sense; (3) that the reason for using autism instead of autoerotism is pragmatic, not theoretical: it will increase clarity and prevent misunderstandings. In other words, the substitution of “autism” for “autoerotism” is not meant to be a critique of the Freudian notion of autoerotism, merely a better name for the same thing. Moreover, in stating that Freud’s concept of the erotic is “much broader” than the usual, Bleuler evinces a correct, if not necessarily a complete, understanding of Freud’s notion. From this beginning, though, Bleuler’s autism was about to diverge from its parent concept.

Interlude: Bleuler and Freud on infantile sexuality

Less than a month after Freud had sent his “Gesichtspunkte” to Zurich (on May 13, 1907), Jung reports back to Freud: “Ich habe Ihre ‘Gesichtspunkte zur Paranoia’ mehrfach, auch zusammen mit Bleuler, überlegt.”³³ Later in the same letter comes the first trace of “autism” in written form:

Bleuler vermißt noch eine klare Definition des Autoerotismus und seiner spezifischen psychologischen Wirkungen. Er hat aber den Begriff akzeptiert für seine *Dementia praecox*-Darstellung im Aschaffenburgschen “Handbuch.” [This refers to *Dementia*

31. Bleuler, “Zur Theorie des schizophrener Negativismus,” 185n.

32. Bleuler, *Dementia praecox*, 52n.

33. Freud and Jung, *Briefwechsel*, 48.

praecox—SHT.] Er will aber nicht Autoerotismus sagen (aus bekannten Gründen), sondern “Autismus” oder “Ipsismus.” Ich habe mich an “Autoerotismus” bereits gewöhnt.³⁴

Coming in the immediate wake of Freud’s transmission of his “points of view on paranoia” to Zurich, centered as they were on the autoerotic core of dementia praecox, this suggests a highly plausible line leading from Freud via Jung to Bleuler’s adoption of autoerotism for his own theory of schizophrenia. But this adoption is simultaneous with the truncation of autoerotism into “autism.”³⁵ Jung merely hints at Bleuler’s lack of “a clear definition of autoerotism” and, more ominously, at the “well-known reasons” for the name change.

Jung’s insinuation is that Bleuler was uncomfortable with the specifically “erotic” nature that Freud ascribes to the autoerotism of infants and, by extension, of schizophrenics. It was after all a standard contention among psychiatrists of the day (as of today) that Freud’s psychoanalysis rested upon the assumption of a “sexual meaning” behind everything. In the case of those who at first engaged eagerly with Freud, then later “broke” with him, we are inclined to think that it was their discomfort with the extent of Freud’s sexual theory—particularly its extension into the realm of childhood—that motivated the break. This story is well rehearsed, nowhere more so than in the case of Jung himself. In this light, Jung’s understanding of Bleuler’s resistance to the concept of autoerotism in 1907 may be the first signs—“projected” onto his superior at the Burghölzli—of the sentiments that in a few years would lead Jung himself to reject Freud’s theory of a sexual libido.

If anything, we would expect the standard suspicion regarding infantile sexuality to be even stronger in the case of Bleuler. Bleuler was fully formed as a psychiatrist before coming

34. *Ibid.*, 49.

35. As Jung tells it, “ipsism” was mooted as another alternative, which would have had the advantage, from Bleuler’s classicist perspective, of not mixing a Greek root (*autos*) with the Latinate *-ismus*. It would of course also have put much more distance between Bleuler’s term and Freud’s. It is noteworthy that, given the option, Bleuler chose to stay closer to “autoerotism.”

across Freud's work. His standing in the world of mainstream psychiatry remained relatively high *in spite of* his perceived role as Freud's apologist. His "misunderstandings" with Freud began, furthermore, with his inability to accept Freud's *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, and his period of close collaboration with Freud ended in 1912—around the same time as Freud's break with Jung. His cautious substitution of "autism" for "autoerotism" would then appear to be the emblem of his reservations regarding Freud's "expanded" concept of the erotic—real intellectual reservations, not merely rhetorical or pragmatic concerns. But in fact, to assimilate Bleuler's discomfort with Freud's libido theory to the standard skittishness around the idea of an infantile sexuality would be quite misleading. Bleuler's discomfort is not with the notion of a sexualized child *per se*. Neither is it a denial of sexuality as a specific, and especially powerful, driving force in the human psyche. True, he has his reasons for preferring the de-sexualized "autism"; but these are subtler than might be supposed, and have to do with a much more crucial point in Freud's sexual theory than the mere question of whether there is a sexuality in childhood—a question Bleuler answered with an emphatic affirmative.

Bleuler's struggle to read the *Three Essays* is amply documented in his personal correspondence with Freud. He read it, fresh from the press, alongside Freud's other major work of 1905, *Der Witz und seine Beziehung zum Unbewußten*. In his words of June 9, 1905: "Dank einem Rheumatismus kam ich dieser Tage dazu, Ihre Sexualtheorie & Ihren Witz zu lesen. Die erstere hätte ich gern ausführlicher gesehen. Ich glaube sonst alle Ihre Schriften würdigen zu können. Hier aber kann ich noch nicht ganz folgen."³⁶

During this time, Bleuler, having taken in *The Interpretation of Dreams* and Freud's early work on hysteria with enthusiasm, is passionately embracing Freud's hermeneutic methods. His

36. Eugen Bleuler and Sigmund Freud, "Ich bin zuversichtlich, wir erobern bald die Psychiatrie." *Briefwechsel 1904–1937*, ed. Michael Schröter (Basel: Schwabe, 2012), 73.

primary vehicle of exploration is a kind of psychoanalysis by correspondence of his own dreams, with amusingly earnest results (“Revolver: Fredi [i.e., Bleuler’s son Manfred] meine frühe Sexualität geerbt? ... Komme nicht weiter. Revolver. Kinderfrau. Engländerin. ... Habe ich das meiner Frau gesagt? bald meine ich ja, bald nein. Revolver. Ich weiß nicht wie weit ich komme. Ist das mein Revolver?”).³⁷ We note that this self-analysis already contains an “example” of early sexual activity: Bleuler’s own, which he wonders whether his son has inherited. This he confirms in another letter to Freud: “mein Geschlechtstrieb war mir ... sehr früh klar & ich glaube mit meiner Frau deutlich wahrzunehmen, dass mein 2 3/4 jähriger Knabe einen Unterschied zwischen den Geschlechtern macht,”³⁸ as well as in a publication of 1910, in which he writes: “Ich habe absolut sichere Erinnerungen sexueller Gefühle vom vierten Jahre an.”³⁹ Here he also made public statements of the existence of the Oedipus complex and his discovery of it in himself and his son, in strongly worded form, as a rebuke to those psychiatrists who would deny it simply out of disgust. He denies, on these grounds, that his inability to comprehend Freud’s notion of infantile sexuality and its importance for the theory of the neuroses is a manifestation of “emotional resistance” (*Gefühlswiderstand*), maintaining instead that “[e]inige Beispiele werden hoffentlich helfen;”⁴⁰ “[w]as mir fehlt, ist das Material, aus dem Ihre Schlüsse gezogen sind”.⁴¹ But in addition to the personal examples he provided, Bleuler published his own paper on “Sexuelle Abnormitäten der Kinder” in 1908, rife with further

37. Ibid., 79.

38. Ibid., 77–78.

39. Eugen Bleuler, “Die Psychoanalyse Freuds. Verteidigung und kritische Bemerkungen,” *Jahrbuch für psychoanalytische und psychopathologische Forschungen* 2 (1910): 646–647. Cited in Bleuler and Freud, *Briefwechsel*, 77n.

40. Bleuler and Freud, *Briefwechsel*, 77.

41. Ibid., 80.

instances.⁴² It cannot have been the mere existence of sexual impulses in children to which Bleuler objected.

More revealing is a second resistance to Freud's *Three Essays* that Bleuler manifests from 1905 on, one evidently grounded in the maxim, introduced into biology by Ernst Haeckel, that "ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny": "Dann fehlt mir noch," he writes,

die Verbindung der neuen Entdeckung [i.e., Freud's 1905 theory of sexuality—SHT] mit der phylogenetischen Teleologie. Um eine solche Sache ganz zu verstehen, muss man ihre Verbindung mit dem "Zweck" der Einrichtung einiger maassen sich vorstellen können.⁴³

In other words, something in Freud's sexual theory struck Bleuler as a purported feature of individual development that would not be transferable onto the biological history of the human species, and this was grounds for suspicion.

This objection, first uttered in 1905, carries through to Bleuler's fraught exchange with Freud in 1912, which was over Bleuler's follow-up to *Dementia praecox*, a paper devoted entirely to "Das autistische Denken." Only at this point does it emerge precisely what in Freud Bleuler finds incompatible with his knowledge of phylogeny. In "Das autistische Denken," Bleuler had delivered what for all intents and purposes was a rejection of autoerotism in the following terms:

Nach *Freud* ist die Sexualität beim Menschen zuerst eine ganz autoerotische, und es bedarf einer besonderen Entwicklung, daß die Libido sich nach außen, auf Objekte, wirft. Ich muß dies nicht nur deshalb ablehnen, weil eine derartige Entwicklung in der *Phylognese* unmöglich wäre, sondern namentlich deshalb, weil mir die Beobachtung der kleinen Kinder das Gegenteil zu zeigen scheint.⁴⁴

It was autoerotism, then, whose ontogenetic function appeared to Bleuler as untenable at the

42. Eugen Bleuler, "Sexuelle Abnormitäten der Kinder," *Jahrbuch der schweizerischen Gesellschaft für Schulgesundheitspflege* 9 (1908): 623–646.

43. Bleuler and Freud, *Briefwechsel*, 73.

44. Eugen Bleuler, "Das autistische Denken," *Jahrbuch für psychoanalytische und psychopathologische Forschungen* 4 (1912): 18n.

phylogenetic level. How could an entire species pass through a phase of autoerotism—of non-copulative sexuality—and survive beyond a single generation to evolve later into a sexually reproductive organism? Freud’s epistolary response was perhaps gently mocking:

Ihre Einwendungen gegen den Autoerotismus der Kindheit sind die natürliche Konsequenz der Stellung, die Sie dem autist[ischen] Denken anweisen. Doch scheint mir der Hinweis auf die Phylogenese weder verbindlich noch zutreffend Die ersten Sexualakte, von denen wir bei den Organismen wissen, sind nicht Kopulationen, sondern Erneuerungen und Theilungen, also autoerotischer Natur. Beobachtungen, die dem Autoerot[ismus] der Kinder widersprechen, wären natürlich sehr wertvoll.⁴⁵

Freud’s halfhearted defense of the “autoerotic nature” of the reproductive processes of amoebas is poor cover for his evident feeling that the problem Bleuler poses is less than compelling. The autoerotism of infant sexuality should rather stand or fall on its own terms. As for Bleuler’s claim that observation disproves infantile autoerotism, it probably pits Bleuler’s conception of child sexuality—which is of the nature of an adult sexuality in miniature, meaning that children distinguish between the sexes, prefer the opposite sex as playmates, etc.—against Freud’s idea of child sexuality as autoerotic or *without* such external objects. Freud’s request for counterexamples is a highly rhetorical tack: unable to prove the negative, Bleuler will not bother sending back any.

The tension was left unresolved between Freud and Bleuler. There is, however, a most revealing exchange over their respective understandings of the dream; from these, the entire conflict can be clarified. Rather than a question of ontogeny and phylogeny constituting their differences, Freud suggests,

habe ich den Eindruck, als hielten Sie sich vorwiegend an die Denkvorgänge bei der Dem[entia] pr[ae]cox und verarbeiteten die dort empfangenen Eindrücke, während ich von der Anregung durch die Traumvorgänge ausgehe, die mir reiner u[nd] deutlicher scheinen. Diese Differenz unserer Erregungsquellen wird wol [*sic*] die Schwierigkeit des Verständnißes zwischen uns bedingen. Ich weiß, daß Sie sich mit meiner Auffassung der

45. Bleuler and Freud, *Briefwechsel*, 165.

Traumpsychologie eigentlich nicht befreundet haben, und doch ruht auf dieser alles Andere.⁴⁶

This drew a direct response from Bleuler, the effect of which is to deny the difference Freud posits in the respective sources of their intellectual “arousal.” At the same time, it evinces precisely these differences. Bleuler writes:

Wenn Sie sagen, ich habe mich mit Ihrer Traumpsychologie nicht befreundet, so ist das nur in einer Beziehung richtig, die von meinem Standpunkt aus als ganz nebensächlich erscheint. Es fehlen mir die Beweise, dass der Traum einen Zweck und eine Absicht habe. Ich kann mir ebensogut denken, dass die Freudschen Mechanismen in Aktion treten bei *Gelegenheit* des Traumes, der in seiner Existenz durch ganz andere (vielleicht bloß physiologische) Ursachen bedingt ist. Wäre die letztere Auffassung richtig, so müsste auch der Censurbegriff derselben fallen und ersetzt werden durch den allgemeinen Mechanismus, dass man das vermeidet, resp. unterdrückt, was man nicht gern hat. Mit dieser Auffassung ginge auch die Annahme einer primären Traumdissoziation zusammen. Auf die ganze Traumdeutung hat dieser Unterschied in der Auffassung keinen Einfluss.⁴⁷

Bleuler’s concluding point—that any differences in the psychology of the dream he has just outlined from Freud’s version are without consequence for interpretation—is itself the strongest possible evidence of his distance from Freud. When he insists that his revisions to Freud’s dream book are “inessential,” he ignores that in the question of whether these differences make a difference, the real difference emerges. To make the essentials clear, we need only “interpret” Bleuler’s dream theory—considerably easier than interpreting a dream—in terms of what it stands in for: his theory of autism.

Bleuler’s dream theory has two main planks. The first has to do with the “mechanism” determining the dream thoughts, namely, that unpleasant associations are repressed (and, by implication, pleasant ones promoted). This is a repetition of Bleuler’s general theory of affect, which consists in the idea “daß der Strebung entsprechende Assoziationen gebahnt,

46. Ibid., 164.

47. Ibid., 167.

entgegenstehende gehemmt werden, *also durch den uns von der Wirkung der Affekte her geläufigen Mechanismus.*”⁴⁸ The second point of Bleuler’s dream psychology is that the dissociation, which permits dream thoughts to be formulated in such unusual forms, is primary—in other words, is not itself psychologically conditioned, but is purely physiological. This in turn repeats his general theory of schizophrenia. Together, the idea is that the primary dissociation opens up a space, into which the mechanism of the affective selection of associations enters, thus determining the dream thoughts. This is precisely the same process that Bleuler sees in schizophrenia, supporting his contention that there is “keinen Unterschied zwischen dem Denken des Traumes und der Dem[entia] praec[ox].”⁴⁹ The differences between them are leveled precisely insofar as everything but the “general mechanism” is bracketed out of the picture—here, in the first instance, the Freudian notion that the dream in its entirety is a striving entity, that it has “a wish and an intent.” For Freud, the dream is libidinally motivated; likewise, the censoring instance is an agent of a repression with specifically libidinal character. That the properly “Freudian mechanisms” of the dream represent a conflict of forces, of libidinal drives, carries no weight against the merely cognitive model with which Bleuler proposes to replace repression.

In terms of the theory of autoerotism, what we can now see is that although Bleuler fully accepted both the existence of sexual motives in the infant on the one hand, and (at least what he himself understood to be) Freud’s hermeneutics on the other, he was unable to digest the coincidence of the two in Freud’s genuine concept of autoerotism as a developmental stage. The developmental aspect of autoerotism is crucial for Freud’s hermeneutics, because the tracks laid down by the libido in its individual progress out of autoerotism and into object love are those

48. Bleuler, “Das autistische Denken,” 4, emphasis in original.

49. Bleuler and Freud, *Briefwechsel*, 167.

which the psychoanalytic cure later traverses in the opposite direction. This directionality of the libido is what Freud indicates with his notion of the “drive.” This notion combines the progress of the libido over the course of an individual’s life history with the *development*, within that individual, of the “symbolic” mechanisms that will later drive a psychoanalytic interpretation of her particular case. It is this understanding at which Bleuler never arrives. Freud insists on the interweaving of biological ontogeny and psychical reality as interpretable using his hermeneutics. Bleuler is just as recalcitrant in keeping the hermeneutics of the psyche strictly separate from his biological picture of development.

Meanwhile, Bleuler is able to equate Freud’s autoerotism and his own autism because he sees both in terms reduced to the “general mechanism” of affective selectivity, a cognitive mechanism. Several commentators have already pointed out that the replacement is not like for like.⁵⁰ They emphasize the fact that Bleuler’s autism is neither developmental nor aetiological, but first and foremost a *descriptive* notion. Just as important is the fact that Bleuler’s autism is developed in purely cognitive terms: as a form of *thinking*, not as an attitude of the whole person as it was in Abraham’s account and even appeared to be in Bleuler’s first descriptions of it.

Bleuler’s autism, phase two: cognitive, epistemological

Dementia praecox was by far the most effective vehicle for the reception of the concept of autism. As we saw above, autism, when first introduced in *Dementia praecox*, appears to describe a certain attitude over-against the world. This attitude has a shape: it turns away from its surroundings, eventually turning in on itself to form a closed entity. The shape of this autistic

50. Thomas G. Dalzell, *Freud’s Schreber between Psychiatry and Psychoanalysis* (London: Karnac, 2011), 211; Bernhard Küchenhoff, “Zur Psychologie der Psychosen im Briefwechsel zwischen Eugen Bleuler und Sigmund Freud,” in Bleuler and Freud, *Briefwechsel: 227–243*, at 227ff.

attitude appears firstly against the background of the social environment. We will see (in more detail in Chapter Two) that this determination of autism as a social attitude with a closed, turned-in shape (and with pseudo-ethical as well as literary-aesthetic overtones) was indeed the most widely received understanding of the concept in the literature following from Bleuler.

Another aspect of autism is simultaneously announced in *Dementia praecox*, however. This second aspect appears against an epistemological rather than a social background. It describes autism not as a form of life, but as a form of thought in the strictest sense. Its only criterion is the way in which it cognitively represents reality. Its only definition is negative: it represents reality as it is *not*.

It is almost never that Bleuler speaks of an autistic *person*, always of “autistic *thinking*.” “Wir haben also ein realistisches und ein autistisches Denken zu unterscheiden, und zwar beim gleichen Patienten nebeneinander”⁵¹—proof that the presence of autistic thinking is independent of the overall status of the person. A given thought is an autistic thought, regardless of where, in what mind, in the context of what form of life it appears.

The first point in the definition of autism as a form of thought is its opposition to the other form of thought, dubbed “realism” or “realistic thinking.” This latter is much easier to describe: it consists solely in the accurate perception and logical elaboration of the factual world. This is expressed in Bleuler’s conviction “[dass] die Formen unserer Logik nur durch die Erfahrung gegebene Assoziationen wiederholen oder Analogien dazu bilden,” thus constituting a “Reproduktion der Wirklichkeit und ihrer Zusammenhänge”⁵² on the level of thought. “Realism,” then, is Bleuler’s term for mimetically truthful thinking in the simplest possible sense.

51. Bleuler, *Dementia praecox*, 55, original emphasis removed.

52. *Ibid.*, 292n.

In opposition to Bleuler's forcefully conceived notion of the real as a set of hard, unambiguous facts, autism stands for every kind of thought which alters, omits, or fabricates any particular of this "real," outside world. At another point, Bleuler speaks of it as "ohne ein Substrat denken"⁵³—thinking without a substrate. It is as if the previous image of the autistic "cocoon" has yielded to one of butterfly-like detachment from earthly matter, a kind of thinking that is kaleidoscopic, whimsical, directionless—and capable of giving rise to chaos, albeit a chaos that obeys its own laws, the laws of affect. Autistic thinking yields "die Wirklichkeit nur verzerrt wiedergebende[s] Vorstellungsmaterial,"⁵⁴ which reflects reality not as it is, but as one (consciously or unconsciously) *wishes* it were.

The importance of affect in autistic thinking is that it determines the specific contents of autistic thoughts. "Den Inhalt des autistischen Denkens bilden Wünsche und Befürchtungen."⁵⁵ On the level of the "mechanism," as we saw above, autistic thinking functions by promoting those associations which support the affective striving while inhibiting those which contradict it. Autistic thinking is in this respect simply the cognitive manifestation of the psychological workings of affect in general: "Zur Erklärung des autistischen Gedankenganges bedarf es keines neuen Prinzipes."⁵⁶

Schematically, Bleuler divides the entire realm of thoughts into two hemispheres, the realistic and the autistic. Each thought must belong to one hemisphere or the other. The starkness of this "mapping" approach can be appreciated in the fact that in a given individual at a given point in time, realistic and autistic thoughts may coexist in any numerical proportion to each other, the balance determining the individual's degree of autism at that moment:

53. *Ibid.*, 305.

54. Bleuler, "Das autistische Denken," 12.

55. Bleuler, *Dementia praecox*, 55, original emphasis removed.

56. Bleuler, "Das autistische Denken," 4.

Je mehr der Wirklichkeit nicht entsprechende Voraussetzungen und Zusammenhänge in einen Gedankengang aufgenommen sind, um so autistischer ist dieser. Es gibt also Grade des autistischen Denkens und Übergänge zum realistischen, aber nur in dem Sinne, daß in einem Gedankengange autistische und realistische Begriffe und Assoziationen in numerisch verschiedenen Verhältnissen vorkommen können.⁵⁷

The numerical proportion of autistic to realistic thoughts in a given momentary state of mind will depend on how much territory has been ceded to the control of the affects through the workings of Bleuler's "primary dissociation." The cognitive theory of autism is thereby summed up. The autistic "form of life" as articulated by Abraham, and with it the meaningful application of Freud's genuine autoerotism as a developmental and aetiological concept, is subordinated, in Bleuler's conception, to this static play of realistic and autistic forces on a map of the mind.

Compared with the "social" aspect of autism by which Bleuler originally introduced the concept, this cognitive or epistemological aspect of autism allows many more of the examples Bleuler gives to find their place within a unifying framework. The fact is that Bleuler's examples of autism come from a huge variety of different social forms—the socially withdrawn schizophrenic being by no means the most important of them. "Die autistischen Gedanken können flüchtige Episoden von wenigen Sekunden Dauer sein, sie können aber auch das ganze Leben ausfüllen Dazwischen gibt es alle Übergänge."⁵⁸ It is an instance of autism when a child plays make-believe,⁵⁹ just as much as when "[a] schizophrenic inmate of an asylum enters a room in a country inn, goes to bed, and can only be removed by force, for he expects the Queen of Holland, who wishes to marry him, to arrive at any moment."⁶⁰ Both have in common that they entertain thoughts contrary to reality, and hence the similarities between their

57. Ibid., 15, original emphasis removed.

58. Ibid., 13.

59. Ibid., 35.

60. Eugen Bleuler, "Autistic Thinking," *American Journal of Insanity* (1913): 873.

respective situations outweigh the differences.

Loosely in keeping with the proportionate variability of realistic and autistic associations, there exists for Bleuler something like a “spectrum,” or perhaps a bestiary of those forms of life in which autistic thoughts predominate, to varying degrees, in differing guises, and with divergent effects. All of these remain under the single general criterion of a form of thought that departs from the mimetic reproduction of reality.

There is the child, whose autism results largely from simple lack of knowledge and experience, but is also exacerbated by a natural tendency to fantasy⁶¹—who “spielt mit einem Stück Holz, das ihm das eine Mal ein Bébé, das andere Mal ein Haus bedeutet.”⁶² Often paired with the child in Bleuler’s lexicon is another figure who, in the eyes of Europeans, lacks the kind of accurate knowledge of the natural world required to combat autistic tendencies: the “savage” with his “Tabuvorschriften oder peinlichste Bestrebungen, vom Essen nichts übrig zu lassen, was einem Feinde Gelegenheit zu einem schädlichen Zauber geben könnte.”⁶³ On the basis of Bleuler’s cognitive model of autism, these become practices grounded in false beliefs about causality in nature—much as they often appear in Frazer’s *The Golden Bough*.⁶⁴

An example of the beneficial effects of a certain intermediate degree of autistic thinking is the creativity that produces works of art. “Auch alle echte Kunst wurzelt im Autismus”⁶⁵ is Bleuler’s succinct statement. “Das Denken muß sich von sklavischer Wiederholung früherer

61. Bleuler, “Das autistische Denken,” 17; Eugen Bleuler, *Naturgeschichte der Seele und ihres Bewusstwerdens. Eine Elementarpsychologie* (Berlin: Springer, 1921), 194.

62. Bleuler, *Dementia praecox*, 305.

63. Eugen Bleuler, *Lehrbuch der Psychiatrie*, 3rd ed. (Berlin: Springer, 1920), 35.

64. “If my analysis of the magician’s logic is correct,” writes Frazer, “its two great principles turn out to be merely two different misapplications of the association of ideas.” James George Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion*. Abridged ed. (New York: Touchstone, 1996), 13. Bleuler’s autism is, then, the general theory of pathology in the association of ideas of which this is a “special” case.

65. Bleuler, “Das autistische Denken,” 25.

Erlebnisse losmachen und muß Analogien wiederholen, nicht Gleichheiten, wenn es ... zu Neukombinationen führen soll,”⁶⁶ as in the case of the artist or the inventor. This is an autism that elastically pulls apart the hardened connections between familiar things, stretches their meanings, brings them into disparate new proximity with unexpected other things—but does not yet fracture the wholeness of things as we know them.

A bit further removed from reality than art and poetry, we find mythology. Here, in contrast to familiar Western art, things are subjected to all manner of fission and fusion, fragmentation and condensation. “In diesen Formen geht der Autismus bis zur Auflösung der gewöhnlichsten Begriffe,” with the result that “Apollo wird in mehrere Persönlichkeiten gespalten, in eine sengende und tötende, eine befruchtende, eine künstlerische, ja, obgleich er für gewöhnlich ein Mann ist, kann er auch eine Frau sein.”⁶⁷ Or, in an example of condensation rather than fragmentation: “Die Mythologie läßt den Osterhasen Eier legen, weil Hasen und Eier zufällig das Gemeinsame haben, daß sie als Symbole der Fruchbarkeit der Ostara heilig sind.”⁶⁸

The difference between art and myth lies along a kind of continental divide in the topology of Bleuler’s autism. Depending on which slope we are on,

finden wir es in bezug auf den Grad der Abweichung von der Realität in zwei verschiedenen Ausprägungen, die nicht scharf voneinander geschieden sind, aber in ihrer typischen Gestaltung doch recht große Unterschiede zeigen; *die wesentliche Differenz liegt darin, daß in einem Fall auch sonst feststehende Begriffe dissoziiert und in willkürlicher Weise neu gebildet werden können*, im andern nicht.⁶⁹

On the far side of this border lie the domains in which autism metastasizes into forms more grotesque. These extend from mythology to the dream and the delusions of schizophrenia:

Der Autismus des wachenden Normalen knüpft an die Wirklichkeit an und operiert fast

66. Bleuler, *Naturgeschichte*, 155.

67. Bleuler, *Lehrbuch*, 34.

68. Ibid.

69. Bleuler, “Das autistische Denken,” 11, emphasis in original.

nur mit normal gebildeten und feststehenden Begriffen. Nur die Mythologie, in deren Wesen es liegt, sich aus Raum und Zeit hinaus zu begeben, behandelt auch die Begriffe in äußerst freier Weise. Der Schlaftraum und der ausgesprochene Autismus der Schizophrenie sind vollständig unabhängig von der Wirklichkeit und benutzen und schaffen Begriffe, die aus beliebigen Eigenschaften zusammengesetzt sein und von Augenblick zu Augenblick sich beliebig ändern können. Diesem Umstand ist es zu verdanken, daß Schlaf und Schizophrenie einen sonst ganz undenkbaren Unsinn komponieren können, während die übrigen autistischen Produkte jedem Normalen sofort verständlich sind, so daß er sich ohne Schwierigkeit hineindenken kann.⁷⁰

These, then, are the principal domains—the broadly diverse “forms of life”—from which Bleuler takes observations of the autistic form of thought, somewhat after the fashion of an ethnologist.

The approach is ethnological not least in that the point of view of the observer of all these variously autistic forms of life would appear to be a male, European scientist. But while that scientist, at least in his sober, waking life, may be relatively less autistic, in his own view, than the objects he studies, the aim of Bleuler’s presentation is neither to use autism to classify people, nor to deny the workings of autistic thoughts in “normal” mental life, even that of the most conscious, and conscientious, man of science. “Sogar in der Wissenschaft ist das, was man gern glaubt, bald bewiesen, und Gegen Gründe dazu werden leicht ignoriert.”⁷¹ The scientist, too, resides on Bleuler’s autism spectrum; no really existing person is zero percent autistic.

On the epistemological plane of autism, as we have seen, there is a line dividing the milder from the more severe forms of derealization. This fracture, and the regions on either side of it, serves to construct the “spectrum” of life-forms in whom autism manifests itself.

There is yet another dividing line on the plane of autism, intersecting it on a different bias. The border thus drawn divides the objects of our thinking into a lower space in which realistic thinking, by means of a diligent application of logic, is endowed with full powers and

70. Ibid.

71. Ibid., 5.

capable of stable governance, and a space of “higher questions” in which, by virtue of the inadequacy of logic, we are forced into autism by necessity. “In Themen, die unseren Kenntnissen und unserer Logik überhaupt nicht oder nicht genügend zugänglich sind, oder wo der Affektivität an sich die Entscheidung zufällt, muß die Logik naturgemäß zurücktreten,”⁷² as Bleuler puts it. An entryway to these themes might, for instance, pass through the realm of politics, one “sehr wenig durch Überlegung, aber sehr viel von Instinkten, von suggestiven und autistischen Psychismen bestimmt.”⁷³ “In den Fragen ‘der letzten Dinge,’ der Weltanschauung, der Religion, der Liebe,”⁷⁴ we are firmly beyond the reach of realism and thus of necessity thinking autistically. The conception of this autistic realm is large enough to permit Bleuler the unqualified attestation that “[d]ie Religion ist eine autistische Bildung.”⁷⁵ Even among the healthy, this autistic commitment to unknowables “richtet ... natürlich viel Schaden an,” Bleuler continues. For example: “Die Kreuzzüge und der Dreißigjährige Krieg waren ein recht böser Aderlaß für einen großen Teil der damaligen Kulturvölker.”⁷⁶ To give “the Crusades,” in their entirety, as the first example of how autism functions in the normal psyche, and then to “explain” the Crusades solely as a result of autistic thinking—and to consider them thereby rendered definitively senseless in the view of history—may be startling gestures, but they capture in microcosm the contours of Bleuler’s mind.

In these “questions of ‘the last things,’” Bleuler’s thinking takes on a form reminiscent of the Kantian critique of pure reason: it draws a border between a kind of knowledge of which reason is in sure possession and a kind for which we intrinsically strive, but in pursuit of which reason, by its nature, fails us. The difference is that Bleuler’s episteme lacks the transcendental

72. Ibid., 17–18, original emphasis removed.

73. Ibid., 25.

74. Ibid., 18.

75. Ibid., 25.

76. Ibid.

backing of Kant's thing-in-itself, with the result that Bleuler's autism does not point toward the transcendental thing that, though unknowable, is ultimately real; rather, autism strives to know things that are simply not real at all. Its failure is thus absolute. Far from the transcending "interest of reason," an inherent drive to form conceptions of human purpose and divine nature which for Kant is part and parcel of reason's dignity (if simultaneously its frailty), autism stands for a merely failed version of genuine knowledge. Neither is Bleuler's autism a refuge of the individual person, a soul-like inner chamber, dense with private meaning. Rather, autism is itself part of the public universe, not concealed, unconscious, or mysterious but lying openly next to logic, bordering on it, another country of the mind with strange customs, but itself fully knowable by the reasoned observer.

There remain a handful of instantiations of autism which yet resist fitting into even the largest picture of autism we have drawn thus far. These instances we are first tempted to label "ideological," because they appear to cast as autistic ideas which have nothing inherently fantastic, speculative, or incorrect about them but which are evidently opposed to views personally held by Bleuler. "Die laienhaften Ansichten über die Irrenanstalten," he notes, "sind geradezu autistische, dem Gruseln vor den Geisteskrankheiten und dem Eingesperrtsein und ähnlichen Affekten entsprechend,"⁷⁷ giving no quarter to the idea that either an inmate or a "layperson" outside the asylum might reasonably object to the paternalistic, inherently coercive, and often violent "treatments" then in common use at institutions including the Burghölzli.⁷⁸ The "autistic" nature of such hypothetical objections is given as proof that "auch der Gesunde zieht

77. Ibid., 4–5.

78. Cf. Küchenhoff, "Autismus—Autoerotismus," 219–220.

entsprechend seiner Gemütslage und seinen Zu- und Abneigungen nur zu oft falsche Schlüsse.”⁷⁹

In other words, we may criticize the techniques of the asylum on the basis of our human sentiments, but such criticism does not merely happen to be wrong in Bleuler’s view—rather it *cannot* aspire to the level of truth for the simple reason that it is founded in sentiment.

The peculiar physiognomy of Bleuler’s mind comes out again when he adds ruefully, as further examples of this same type of autistic thinking: “Was gescheite Leute in guten Treuen gegen die Einführung der Eisenbahnen, gegen die Hypnose und Suggestionslehre, gegen die Abstinenz, gegen die *Freudschen* Lehren für Einwendungen gemacht haben, das sind ganz interessante Beiträge zur Tragikomödie des menschlichen Geisteslebens.”⁸⁰ The lack of homogeneity in such a chain of instances deserves underlining, as does the fact that at no point does Bleuler give arguments for the incorrectness of the thoughts he labels autistic. By implication, Bleuler’s contention is that the “realistic” thinker, if he is not to fall into autism, will with unquestioning certainty (1) support the construction and expansion of railroads, (2) believe in the therapeutic efficacy of hypnosis, (3) be a teetotaler, and (4) accept the doctrines of psychoanalysis as literally correct. If such diverse stances are taken as mere representative instances, we might easily extrapolate to the conclusion that there would exist no divergence of opinion on any single point of view among the hypothetical community of the non-autistic.

Bleuler treats such examples in a manner equal to any of the others he gives of autism’s effects. The mechanism— affective judgments influencing “logical” thought processes, leading to “false conclusions”—is reckoned to operate in a like manner across all of the given cases. So Bleuler does not separate any of the “aspects” or “axes” of autism as we have attempted to do here. He treats slips of the tongue, wishful daydreams, primitive myths, and schizophrenic

79. Bleuler, “Das autistische Denken,” 4.

80. *Ibid.*, 5.

symptoms in the same breath and with no shift in rhetoric. Likewise what we are provisionally examining under the label of “ideological” autism.

Having witnessed the seemingly uncontrolled expansion of the domain of autism to include such disparate phenomena, we are left with questions. In one respect, Bleuler’s gesture is simple: he seeks a concept, a counterpart to “reality,” to subsume and name the domain of all phenomena which do *not* belong to that reality, which escape the kind of determinism that applies to the facts we find in the outer world. But does this “all-which-is-*not*-real” concept have what is necessary to behave as a concept? Is there enough of a common nature to the things it subsumes to render it meaningful? What is gained by conceptualizing this domain, this set of things? How do the *concrete* instances Bleuler provides of autistic phenomena—including those which appear themselves subjectively determined—relate to the most general definition of autism as *any* thought that departs in any particular from the perfect reproduction of a stable external reality?

What, in other words, constitutes the “reality” of which Bleuler has so startlingly little doubt? As defined over-against the whole picture of autism, it appears to be a reality that encompasses, in the complete absence of hierarchy or stratification, the banal facts of objects, the norms of human sociality, and the “truths” of a strange amalgam of progressivist, positivist, provincial (as in Bleuler’s steadfast opposition to all consumption of alcohol), and even psychoanalytic ideologies.

One way in which these questions might be addressed would consist in showing that there is yet some other context within which Bleuler’s conception of autism finds itself. Not a *larger* context surrounding the autism-realism distinction from without—what could be larger than the entire domain of possible thoughts?—but rather an underpinning, a more specific, more

concrete structure, perhaps even located within the sphere of *life* rather than pure *thought*, which supplies the common motive of all Bleuler's far-flung examples of autistic things. This would be to explain the "transcendent" concept of autism as Bleuler articulates it on the level of the ontology of thinking by way of a hypothetical "immanent concept of autism," the face of autism turned *toward*, not away from, the world.

In the light of an immanent concept of autism, their out-of-placeness in Bleuler's psychopathological writings notwithstanding, the instances of "ideological" autism will prove not to be outliers. Rather, they will have been the very instances that pointed us toward the truth of the others. Discerning what direction they point in, and thus arriving at the most comprehensive possible "definition" of Bleuler's autism, means reaching both backwards and forwards in Bleuler's work. For autism as it appears in the context of his most intensive psychopathological investigations (without, as we have just seen, letting itself be subsumed under criteria of psychopathology) is just one manifestation of an overarching *pragmatic* concern of Bleuler's thought, which reaches from nearly his earliest works to some of his latest. I will term this concern—or more properly, this attitude—Bleuler's *anthroposkepticism*. In this light, autism becomes the name for the frailty of human reason as such, indeed the name of the human as a category, set against a soulless universe.

Bleuler's autism, phase three: anthropological

The text Uta Frith referred to as Bleuler's "bitter treatise" of 1919, *Das autistisch-undisziplinierte Denken in der Medizin und seine Überwindung*,⁸¹ exemplifies the apparent farrago of things bundled under the concept of autism: the autistic thinking on display here is

81. Eugen Bleuler, *Das autistisch-undisziplinierte Denken in der Medizin und seine Überwindung*, 3rd ed. (Berlin: Springer, 1922).

gathered from contemporary medical practice, of which the book is a critique, an exposé of doctors' faults and misguided treatments in use across Europe, a litany of errors stemming from what Bleuler sees as a failure to establish the facts of the efficacy of given treatments in given situations and to adhere to these. "Zu der Zeit," he writes,

da ich Unterassistent in unserem Absonderungshaus war, und solange ich nachher noch als Student die Sache verfolgen konnte, glaubte man bei Typhus durch Herabsetzung der Temperatur mit Salizyl das Fieber und damit die Krankheit zu bekämpfen und durch Alkohol die Kräfte erhalten zu müssen. Daß dabei sich jemals irgend etwas gebessert hätte, habe ich nie gesehen[.]⁸²

Such pointless treatments exemplify "autistic-undisciplined" thinking in medicine insofar as the doctor *wishes* his intervention were effectual when, at least according to Bleuler's observation, it is not. The bulk of the text thus comes out as a catalog of obsolete clinical practices. And yet, by way of its theoretical reflections on medicine—including psychiatry—this text, more than any other, reveals a grounding of Bleuler's autism which predates his invention of the word "autism"; remains stable and enduring throughout his works, more so than any of the theoretical presentations of autism within them; and has the capacity to account for the elements that seem not to fit in those presentations.

Das autistisch-undisziplinierte Denken postdates Bleuler's *Dementia praecox* by eight years, during which the concept of autism was intensively received and reworked in the field of psychiatry. (This process is analyzed in Chapter Two.) It belongs to a moment of reflection and reevaluation. Bleuler had come to feel that his autism was misunderstood, and was due for a fresh characterization by himself. *Das autistisch-undisziplinierte Denken* sets out to correct mistaken impressions and reestablish autism as Bleuler's own concept. By the time of its second printing in 1921, in light of the reviews of the first edition, he announces an even more radical

82. *Ibid.*, 11.

tack for his future works, moving to abandon the name “autism” to its fate and replace it with an entirely new one: *dereierendes Denken* (de-reifying thinking).⁸³ We are, then, using Bleuler’s retrospective correction of the concept to try to better understand how it had originally been intended.

The switch announced in the preface to the second edition of *Das autistisch-undisziplinierte Denken* is accomplished in Bleuler’s next book publication, *Naturgeschichte der Seele und ihres Bewusstwerdens*, where Bleuler introduces this “derealistic thinking” by noting: “Ich habe es bis jetzt ‘autistisches’ Denken genannt, weil es im Autismus der Schizophrenie zuerst gesehen wurde und dort am ausgesprochensten in die Erscheinung tritt.”⁸⁴ The causal logic at work here is blatantly circular, as it was of course Bleuler who named the “autism” of schizophrenia in the first place—this state could therefore not have bestowed its name upon the concept of autism, because it did not have that name before the concept was invented. But the effect of the sentence is Bleuler’s renunciation of his own control over how autism is deployed in the realm of psychopathology. It also underlines the fact that autism was not conceived primarily for use in psychopathology; its schizophrenic instances have no privileged place in the autistic domain.

Bleuler then continues: “Der Name wurde aber mißverstanden (sogar von *Jaspers* in seiner *Psychopathologie*). So war ich gezwungen, einen andern vorzuschlagen.”⁸⁵ If we turn to Karl Jaspers’s *Allgemeine Psychopathologie* of 1913, however, we find the concept of autism used in a sense that appears very much in line with Bleuler’s in *Dementia praecox*. Jaspers speaks in one passage of an “*Absperrung von der Wirklichkeit*” as the general marker of mental

83. *Ibid.*, v–vi.

84. Bleuler, *Naturgeschichte*, 191n.

85. *Ibid.*, 191n.–192n.

illness, and adds: “Besonders stark tritt dieses Verschließen des Menschen in sich selbst bei den schizophrenen Prozessen in die Erscheinung (*Autismus*, Bleuler).”⁸⁶ This would seem not only to echo formulations Bleuler uses in *Dementia praecox*, but furthermore, in the specific phrase *besonders stark bei den schizophrenen Prozessen in die Erscheinung treten*, to almost literally foreshadow what Bleuler writes in *Naturgeschichte* (“weil es *im Autismus der Schizophrenie ... am ausgesprochensten in die Erscheinung tritt*”—emphasis added), even as Bleuler there claims that Jaspers “misunderstood” him! The other passage in Jaspers’s 1913 *Psychopathologie* in which autism appears is one in which Jaspers speaks of “die Unfähigkeit, die Wirklichkeit als Wirklichkeit aufzufassen und in ihrer Bedeutung bei sich zur Geltung kommen zu lassen (Bleulers *autistisches Denken*: in sich und die Phantasien ohne Rücksicht auf die Realität eingesponnenes Denken).”⁸⁷ This too is in accordance, tonally and substantively, with Bleuler’s own earlier articulations of autistic phenomena. And what Bleuler adds, following his denunciation of Jaspers in *Naturgeschichte*, hardly represents a radical departure: “Dereieren kommt von reor, ratus sum (ratio, res, real), logisch, der Wirklichkeit entsprechend denken. Dereieren wäre also wörtlich: Denken, daß von der Wirklichkeit absieht oder abweicht.”⁸⁸ In sum, Bleuler restates parameters already given to the concept of autism at its outset, and declines to state specifically what about them has been misunderstood.

It may be, then, that to Bleuler’s lament that autism was misunderstood “even by Jaspers,” we have to add “... and even by Bleuler in his *Dementia praecox*!” Bleuler is issuing a self-correction, though he does not acknowledge it. He appears to be renouncing entirely what we introduced above as the “social” or “pseudo-ethical” aspect of autism—the one for which

86. Karl Jaspers, *Allgemeine Psychopathologie* (Berlin: Springer, 1913), 144.

87. *Ibid.*, 252.

88. Bleuler, *Naturgeschichte*, 192n.

Abraham's autoerotism serves as a precedent, which casts autism as a spiritual attitude, and which Jaspers takes up via the language of the "Verschließen des Menschen in sich selbst," etc.—and to be correspondingly underlining the "cognitive" definition of autism. But if we proceed a little further into *Das autistisch-undisziplinierte Denken*, we encounter what we had provisionally termed the "ideological" aspect of autism, and by drawing this out to its full extent, we glimpse more clearly than anywhere else the simple structure supporting Bleuler's conceptual architecture.

Das autistisch-undisziplinierte Denken in der Medizin und seine Überwindung opens with a panoramic survey of the follies of humankind.

Der Wissens- und Verständnistrieb des Menschen hat sich seit den ältesten Zeiten Theorien gemacht über die Entstehung der Welt, den Zweck des menschlichen Daseins, die Entstehung der kosmischen Erscheinungen, die Bedeutung des Bösen und über tausend andere, für ihn wichtige Dinge gemacht, Theorien, die keinen Realitätswert haben. Die Menschheit hat in Zauber und Gebet das Schicksal zu wenden gesucht, sie hat mit Mitteln, denen keine Wirkung zukommt, Krankheiten bekämpft und auf viele andre Weise ihre Kräfte unnütz und schädlich angewendet. Die Primitiven haben Tabuvorschriften ausgeheckt die für unser Empfinden unerträgliche Ansprüche an ihre geistige und körperliche Energie, ihre Zeit und ihre Bequemlichkeit stellen, und die nicht nur unnütz, sondern oft auch geradezu schädlich sind.⁸⁹

Seamlessly, it then launches into an account of these follies:

All das ist Resultat eines Denkens, das keine Rücksicht nimmt auf die Grenzen der Erfahrung, und das auf eine Kontrolle der Resultate an der Wirklichkeit und eine logische Kritik verzichtet, d. h. analog und in gewissem Sinne geradezu identisch ist mit dem Denken im Traume und dem des autistischen Schizophrenen, der, sich um die Wirklichkeit möglichst wenig kümmernd, im Größenwahn seine Wünsche erfüllt und im Verfolgungswahn seine eigene Unfähigkeit in die Umgebung projiziert. Es ist deshalb *das autistische Denken* genannt worden.⁹⁰

This is, on the whole, a new approach to the conception of autism. Let us take note of a few

89. Bleuler, *Das autistisch-undisziplinierte Denken*, 1.

90. Ibid.

features of the construction of this passage.

The body of evidence gathered in the first paragraph consists of what we could call collective human cultural practices. This is in contradistinction to the collections of autistic phenomena we have seen in Bleuler's psychopathological works of 1911–1912, which consisted of anecdotes gathered from individual patients. Here, instead, we have a synoptic view of human culture and history.

The subject of the first sentence, *der Wissens- und Verstandnistrieb des Menschen*, implicitly carries through the remainder of the passage. The effect is to state that human customs are actions carried out by a collective human subject whose nature is first and foremost cognitive. If such collective, pragmatic, cultural practices are reducible to attempts to *know* the world, then they can be judged against the standard of scientific truth-seeking, according to whether or not they rest on accurate observations and logical inferences. By this standard, they fail. Both their failure and the fact that they were conceived as *cognitive attempts* all along are confirmed in the second paragraph: “*All das ist Resultat eines Denkens ...*” (emphasis added).

Although the foremost drive in humans aims for knowledge of the world, the cultural practices Bleuler cites have another side to them, namely their striving to increase the comfort of the human condition. Next to its theories as to the “purpose of human existence,” there are humanity's attempts “to bend the course of fate”; correlative with its speculations on “the meaning of evil” are its efforts to fight disease; and so forth. The relation between these two faces of human striving, its hopeful aims and its circumscribed knowledge, is both one of deficiency—knowledge being inadequate to our human aims—and one of paradox: our meager knowledge, wishfully overestimated, abused, and misapplied, results in even greater burdens and suffering.

This is to present the relation between autism and realism as one of vicious paradox: the more we ask of our realistic capacities in the service of human self-improvement, the more surely we fall back into autism and its consequences, the “waste” of our powers and much “harm” to ourselves. In the previous instances we have seen, the relation between realism and autism has been one of side-by-side coexistence; at a given point, one is always either in one or in the other. Nowhere is the very differentiability of the two modes of thinking threatened the way it is here: autism and realism apparently forced together at the very limits of thought.

What Bleuler is primarily getting at in this description of autism and realism conjoined—the exemplary site of their dangerous mingling—is the science of medicine, his own profession. It is medicine that is asked to perform the heroic labor of transforming humans from creatures fully determined by nature into those capable of prolonging their lives and improving their comfort, and medicine which, in pursuit of this inexhaustible aspiration, constantly runs the risk of becoming magical, wishful, autistic. This becomes clear over the course of the ensuing discussion of the various particular sciences, arranged according to their susceptibility to autistic distortions.

The least autistic science by default is mathematics, as it is so internally consistent—so “autistic” in another sense of the word—that no “testing” of its “results” against outward reality is called for, and its logic is hence intact. But it is the engineer—“[d]er Techniker”—who “hat es allerdings, abgesehen vom Mathematiker, von allen Menschen am leichtesten, sein Denken streng in den Gleisen der logischen Deduktion zu halten.”⁹¹ Engineering is the least autistic science precisely to the extent that it operates in the most controlled environment for the testing of results, an environment in which the engineer simply “sich in sein Apparat hineinsetzt und

91. Ibid., 2.

daran verbessert, bis er läuft, oder bis die Unlösbarkeit der Aufgabe erwiesen ist.”⁹² Even perfect laboratory conditions, though, are not proof against autism, as Bleuler later concedes that “scientific thinking” as a whole is by no means to be taken for the opposite of autistic thinking. Autistic errors, wishful bending of rules and fabrication of conclusions, pervade the strictest scientific laboratories. If there is a type of thinking truly immune to autistic intrusions, it is rather a sort of *bürgerlich* common sense; and it is “gerade außerhalb der Wissenschaften, wenn die Anforderungen des praktischen Lebens dazu zwingen, beim Kaufmann, Fabrikbesitzer, Fürsprech usw.” that such “strammes, logisches Denken besonders häufig vorkommt.”⁹³

Bleuler’s interest in the thinking style of the merchant or finance man centers on their ability to use statistics and probability as guides to action. Hence a chapter of *Das autistisch-undisziplinierte Denken* is devoted to statistics as a way to improve medical decision-making.

The danger in medicine is that

[m]an überläßt die Beobachtung und ihre Kritik dem angeborenen Geschick und Ungeschick, die Bewertung der zeitlichen und räumlichen Zusammenhänge als kausale oder zufällige dem gesunden Menschenverstand mit seiner gesunden Sorglosigkeit; man hat in Ätiologie und Therapie ein gewisses Gefühl, daß allein etwas wie Statistik in den meisten Fällen die einzelnen Zusammenhänge aus dem Chaos der natürlichen Verwickelungen herausheben könne[.]⁹⁴

Replacing intuitive or emotional decision-making with statistics and actuarial science is for Bleuler the means by which the other sciences (medicine being the neediest case) can be made *less* autistic. This is also why the current state of natural science represents an advance over more primitive epistemologies—not so much because our absolute store of knowledge has increased (though it has) as because we have insight into what portion of our knowledge is

92. Ibid.

93. Ibid., 96.

94. Ibid., 4–5.

unconfirmed and “nur Wahrscheinlichkeitswert hat[.]”⁹⁵

The medical science which Bleuler confronts, far from yielding to the convictions of statistical reason, drives the conflict between realism and autism to its highest pitch. In all the fields of science, “gehen unsere Wünsche nach Erkenntnis und Eingreifen kaum irgendwo so weit über unser Können hinaus, wie auf dem der Abwendung von körperlichen und seelischen Leiden, von Krankheit und Tod.”⁹⁶ One reason for the discrepancy in medicine between its aims and its abilities is the sheer complexity of the situations it is forced to deal with.

Auch da, wo wir richtige Fragestellungen haben, ist die *Kompliziertheit und Unübersehbarkeit* mancher Probleme oft so groß, daß ihr das realistische Denken unmöglich gerecht werden kann; und die Grenzen zwischen ungenügend begründeter Hypothese und autistischer Scheinerklärung verschwinden.⁹⁷

Here, then, is that paradoxical, inescapable mixture and undecidability between a realistic thinking stretched to its breaking point and an autism with which this strained realism is forced into close quarters.

But on a higher order, medicine’s predicament stems less from the limitations of its abilities than from the infinitude of its task. An unsatisfiable demand is placed on the doctor by his

Klientel, die ungefähr aus der ganzen Menschheit, ihn selber eingeschlossen, besteht. Ihm wird—ins technische übersetzt—die Aufgabe gestellt, eine Flugmaschine zu bauen, mit der man beliebige Distanzen und Höhen und Stürme ohne Anstrengung und Gefahr überwinden kann.⁹⁸

In untransposed terms, medicine is an area

95. Ibid., 2. In his designs for applying actuarial techniques to the calculation of cost and benefit in medical “transactions,” Bleuler is perhaps prophetic: it is easy to recognize the role played today by “data” as a universal interface between knowledge and decision-making, science and policy, on levels micro and macro.

96. Ibid.

97. Ibid., 3.

98. Ibid., 2.

wo man direkt unmögliches verlangt, denn niemals werden sich alle Krankheiten verhüten oder heilen lassen, und dem Tod kann man nur vorübergehend ausweichen. Kein Naturwunder, daß die Medizin, zum Unterschied von allen anderen Wissenschaften noch am meisten autistisches Denken enthält. Und dabei kommen nicht nur die Bedürfnisse des Wissenschafters selbst, sondern noch viel mehr die seines Patienten in Betracht.⁹⁹

Therein lies the modern doctor's continuity with Bleuler's imagined ancestors, their "prayers and magic" answering to the same impossible demand. Bleuler's figure of the doctor is one to whom humankind brings its most unreasonable wish, a wish by nature inexhaustible, which at its outer limit is the wish to cheat death. But this doctor is not permitted to explain to her "client" precisely what is under her control and what is not: "[d]as dringende momentane Bedürfnis"¹⁰⁰ with which the client confronts her prevents it. Unable to deny this need and hold mercilessly to the realistic, she is forced into autistic actions. Her interventions are then determined by the patient's need for hope and her own wish to benefit the patient—"der Wunsch zu helfen ... wo eigentlich nichts zu helfen ist"; the fact "daß der Patient eines Trostes bedürfe."¹⁰¹ The "apparatus"—again speaking in the analogical language of engineering—with which the doctor is provided "dient denn auch häufig zum Trost, aber selten anders zum Fliegen als mit dem Wind,"¹⁰² whether the wind blows toward safety or toward fate.

There is neither help nor hope in nature: this, then, is the backdrop to Bleuler's remarks on medical science. Yet the stubborn belief that there should be, on the part of both patient and doctor, perennially reintroduces "autistic" tendencies into what was already a practically insurmountable task. The interlocking of autistic demands in medicine—the need for hope and comfort from the side of the patient, the wish for real benefit to the patient on the part of the

99. Ibid.

100. Ibid., 3.

101. Ibid.

102. Ibid.

doctor—makes it impossible for the profession to acknowledge what Bleuler clearly views as the sovereign soullessness of nature. A soulless nature can only be met with an equally soulless science, one from which the element of striving, wish, desire, hope, etc. has been purged, leaving only crystalline logic. This is why the way forward offered through statistics has precisely the virtue of *isolating* individual problems and *removing* them from “the chaos of their natural entanglements.”

The quasi-surgical removal of medical questions from the context of “nature” also removes them from questions of *meaning* and of *purpose*. There is no further need for (autistic) theories of the “meaning of evil”—in the form of sickness and death—as evil has no meaning in the language of statistics. The flip side of this is that health and life have just as little meaning in the grand scheme of things. Bleuler has “über den Zweck der Menschheit oder unseres Daseins ... noch nichts als autistische Mythologie gehört (weil diese Frage eine falsche Voraussetzung enthält, *kann* man gar nicht realistische darauf antworten)”¹⁰³: alluding to this “false assumption” is his typically deadpan way of stating that human existence is strictly purposeless.

“Für den, der sich gerne als Zweck der Schöpfung ansehen möchte, ist dies wenig tröstlich; für seine anthropocentrische Anschauung wird er indessen ausser seiner Eitelkeit keine Handhabe finden, während *gegen* eine solche Auffassung der Welt alle Analogie mit dem, was wir beobachten können, spricht.”¹⁰⁴ This is not a passage from *Das autistisch-undisziplinierte Denken*, but rather from one of Bleuler’s first publications, the “Versuch einer naturwissenschaftlichen Betrachtung der psychologischen Grundbegriffe” of 1894. Nevertheless the idea is the same: the view here criticized is that the word *purpose* has any meaning

103. Ibid., 2.

104. Eugen Bleuler, “Versuch einer naturwissenschaftlichen Betrachtung der psychologischen Grundbegriffe,” *Allgemeine Zeitschrift für Psychiatrie und psychisch-gerichtliche Medizin* 50 (1894): 168.

whatsoever outside the domain of survival functions—conscious actions determined by logical thinking. Though it predates the invention of the term “autism” by thirteen years and *Das autistisch-undisziplinierte Denken* by twenty-five, he already critiques here the same attitude that is the object of “autistic-undisciplined thinking in medicine,” and in the same terms—as unsupportable by observation of facts and logical deduction. Perhaps the first name for autism, then, is “anthropocentrism.”

“Versuch einer naturwissenschaftlichen Betrachtung” in fact contains a full sketch of the concept of autism, including its epistemological and psychopathological aspects, in the context of an anthroposkeptic program—thus serving as a complete blueprint for the Bleulerian edifice. The problem announced at its outset is that “Geist, Seele und Bewusstsein sind immer noch metaphysische Begriffe. Die Frage, ob eine Seele existiere, und was sie sei, gilt noch als so dunkel wie je.”¹⁰⁵ The argument of the text will be that the psychical functions of the ego (*Ich*) can be fully derived “aus bekannten Functionen der Nervenapparate,” and in such a manner that the ego so derived “auch wirklich existieren muss.”¹⁰⁶ There is then no need “noch eine zweite, metaphysische vom Nervensystem unabhängige Seele anzunehmen.”¹⁰⁷ In other words—and the argument is easy to imagine a neurologist of the nineteenth century making—a physiological, deterministic conception of the mind is both necessary and sufficient for psychology and (Bleuler adds here) psychopathology.

The first foreshadowings of the specific shape that will later be filled out under the rubric of autism come in the “[z]wei Voraussetzungen allgemeiner Natur” that Bleuler introduces as necessary for the overall argument to proceed. “Zunächst einmal muss ich die Wirklichkeit der

105. Ibid., 133.

106. Ibid., original emphasis removed.

107. Ibid.

äussern Welt annehmen Ferner muss die Richtigkeit der menschlichen Logik im Allgemeinen vorausgesetzt werden.”¹⁰⁸ In other words, we must assume the two constituents of what is later called, in opposition to autism, “realistic thinking”: reality itself as (accurately) reproduced in the mind, and logic as the formal rules for making admissible “analogies” to reality within the mind. And without these: “sonst existiere ich allein, und die Welt mit dem Leser und meinem Papier ist eine grosse Traumahallucination meines ‘Ich’ sonst ist alles Raisonniren unnütz.”¹⁰⁹ Such “idle cogitating”—“useless” because private, deprived of the nexus with reality—is later to acquire the name of “autistic thinking.”

This is Bleuler’s “Cartesian moment,” to borrow a turn of phrase from Foucault: the moment when, as preparation for a universally binding deduction of the basic facts of consciousness, certain possibilities must be rejected out of hand—namely that “I” am mad, or dreaming. But Bleuler then goes a big step further, bringing the preliminary section of the text to a close with the supplementary remark: “Auch halte ich die Existenz eines freien Willens, der—ausserhalb des übrigen psychischen Geschehens stehend—dieses dirigiren könnte, zum mindesten für nicht bewiesen und unwahrscheinlich.”¹¹⁰ Two years later he amends this to the firmer view that a fully fledged “Determinismus” is “in der ... Psychologie die einzige konsequent durchgeführte Anschauung[.]”¹¹¹ Whereas for Descartes, consciousness was the datum *sine qua non*, and free will was to be deduced from additional postulates about the existence and nature of God, Bleuler lets the conscious “I” be “constructed” from the more primitive data of reality and logic, in which manner no room is left for free will (or—though Bleuler does not say it—for God).

108. Ibid., 134.

109. Ibid.

110. Ibid., 135.

111. Eugen Bleuler, *Der geborene Verbrecher. Eine kritische Studie* (Munich: Lehmann, 1896), 2.

Having posited the dual criteria of what will be autism, “Versuch einer naturwissenschaftlichen Betrachtung” completes its sketch of the future concept by naming the life-forms in which autistic thinking will appear: “Unsere Ideenassoziationen halten sich ... nicht sklavisch an die durch die Erfahrung gegebene Bahnen. Gelegentlich weichen sie mehr oder weniger davon ab: bei Alteration der Nervensubstanz in Krankheit, im Schlaf und beim Spiel der Phantasie”¹¹²—to which is added in a footnote: “Je weniger ceteris paribus durch die Erfahrung die Assoziationen in bestimmte Bahnen gewiesen worden sind, um so freier, lebhafter, ist die Phantasietätigkeit (Kind, Wilder).”¹¹³ And to complete the “spectrum,” all this is followed with a discussion of the different degrees of recombination of ideas separating “die Phantasie des wachen Gesunden” from “das Arbeiten des Dichters, des Erfinders, des Componisten.”¹¹⁴ In sum: the mad, the dreaming, artists and poets, “savages,” children, and fantasists in the context of normal life all share a particular character of thinking, consisting in the departure of their associations from the reproduction of reality—the succinctest possible announcement of autism as it appears in the works of 1910–1912.

Here then is autism, fully formed by 1894 (just before Bleuler would have read Breuer and Freud’s *Studies in Hysteria* and gotten his first look at “Freudian mechanisms”), and embedded in a text whose primary aim is the carving out of the outlook that we have called anthroposkepticism, making the two conatal in Bleuler’s work. They are furthermore already interrelated: the “two presuppositions” for the anthroposkeptic program—reality and logic—are also the two pillars of “realistic” thinking, and “anthropocentrism” is condemned precisely for its

112. Bleuler, “Versuch,” 161.

113. *Ibid.*, 161n.

114. *Ibid.*, 161.

lack of a basis in observable reality.

The embeddedness of autism in anthroposkepticism accounts for the presence of so many examples of autism, even in the ostensibly psychopathological writings, which have nothing to do with madness and which extend to the most extreme “ideological” cases, which follow naturally from anthroposkeptic premises: railroads can only do good because the increase of commerce and physical well-being is a natural aim, against which something like the corrosion of traditional rural cultures can only ever be an autistic objection, based on something un-real; abstaining from alcohol is merely the obvious consequence of what Bleuler sees as overwhelming scientific evidence—and hence no different from accepting the doctrines of psychoanalysis as Bleuler understands them; the handling of mental patients should clearly not be determined by any concern for the inmates’ “freedom,” since this is a fundamental anthropocentric illusion; and so forth. To maintain the contrary of any of these positions is precisely as autistic as to think oneself in two places at once.

What had seemed to be the most eccentric and unmotivated instances of Bleuler’s autism, particularly the “ideological” examples, are the ones whose role is most transformed in light of Bleuler’s anthroposkepticism. In the accounts of Bleuler that approach him from within the history of psychiatry, placing his concept of autism in the history of psychopathological classifications, these are forced into a peripheral position from which they can be practically written off, since no definition that departs from traditional psychopathological premises can quite reach far enough to include them. But the most abundant and best-known instances of autism—those taken from the domain of psychopathological, mainly psychotic phenomena—are also compatible with an underlying anthroposkepticism. The delusions of the insane are simply individualized versions of the maddest delusion of humanity as a species: self-overestimation,

megalomania (*Größenwahn*). There is the poor nobody who thinks himself important enough to marry the princess, the asylum inmate who naively believes in his inherent right to freedom, the madwoman who, not content to be the bride of Christ, insists that she is God the father as well. On a more modest level, the momentary autistic thoughts of the neurotic and of the normal population are still—precisely insofar as they manifest affective strivings—autistic for the same reason: they credit things, small everyday things, to ourselves for which we can, when pressed, give no accounting in “reality.”

We should not confuse autism with madness, despite the way their respective definitions redouble each other in Bleuler’s psychopathological works. We need not be forced into attributing to Bleuler the view that belief in free will is “madness”—it is a product, rather, of *autism*, which is a category larger than madness and, for Bleuler, immeasurably more essential to the study of the human animal. Mental illness, in Bleuler’s own estimation, can only ever be a socially defined status.¹¹⁵ Autism, by contrast, is an unchanging feature of epistemology, and furthermore an anthropological observation of the highest order.

An anthropology founded on Bleuler’s autism would be anthropology from the constructed perspective of the non-human. The “anthroposkeptic” attitude can be summed up as holding that the area in which knowledge becomes necessarily “autistic”—i.e., of merely “personal” validity, unable to serve either practical needs or as a basis for further research, and ultimately tending toward the nonsensical, “useless,” and “harmful”—coincides with the zone in which “the human” is invested with a value exceeding its precisely calculable standing in a

115. “Wie jede andere Geisteskrankheit,” he remarks of schizophrenia, “wird diese Psychosengruppe vom Gesunden oder vom Psychopathischen nach sozialen Gesichtspunkten (Unfähigkeit, sich durchzubringen, in der Gesellschaft zu halten, usw.) abgetrennt.” Eugen Bleuler, “Probleme der Schizoidie und der Syntonie,” *Zeitschrift für die gesamte Neurologie und Psychiatrie* (1922): 373.

mechanistic universe. The human can here be understood either as the higher aspect of our species as opposed to our machinelike, animal share, or as singling our entire species out against other parts of nature. In either case, the attitude that esteems the human as signifying something, as being anything other than a wishful veil pulled over the workings of a machine, is *the closest we can come to a succinct and consistent definition of the autistic* as Bleuler understood it.

Conclusion: Bleuler's autism and "ours"

Bleuler's scientific writings take up the position that "purposiveness" is to be looked for exclusively in terms of utility; that anything *human*—in the sense of a remainder above nature, above the animal, above the *machine*—is a dangerous illusion; and, most critically for our project, that thinking grounded in emotion—affect—is invalid because *not* grounded in something *real*. These propositions are derived from an ideal knowledge consisting exclusively of facts and logical inferences. They stand in contrast to the "autistic" mode of thinking, which is fundamentally a result of *mistaking affects for real facts*, relying on affect alone to draw conclusions. This is a schematic, but not untrue distillation of Bleuler's theory of autism.

Today, the label "autistic" is applied in the *opposite* manner. The universe in which affective states have *no relation to truth* or to real conditions, the world made of facts and operating according to mechanistic rules—in short, what Bleuler takes as "realistic": this is what has increasingly come to be regarded as the fundamental character of the *autistic* world, in the modern sense of the word. The "mentalization" theory of autism, most famously articulated by Simon Baron-Cohen and Uta Frith (whom we quoted at the outset of this chapter), states that the autistic mind, when interpreting behavior, takes into account *only* factual states of affairs, bracketing out all inner or "hidden states of mind" that might otherwise be inferred as *grounds*

for concretely taken actions.¹¹⁶ Bleuler, of course, does not actually *deny* that affective states exist and influence thoughts and actions—on the contrary, this is precisely what he thinks motivates autistic thinking in his sense. So it is not that Bleuler *performs* autism in the Frithian sense; rather, he describes programmatically a mind that Frith might well label autistic, and instead uses *his* concept of autism to label everything that is *not* this. In thoroughly schematic terms: Bleuler aligns autism with affect and against factual-logical reasoning. Frith (as representative of the Baron-Cohen school and the modern consensus) does the opposite, aligning autistic thinking *against* the cognition of affect.

In light of this we might amend Frith’s judgment that Bleuler’s autism has “nothing to do” with our concept of autism to say instead that Bleuler’s autism is a kind of reverse of ours, a polar opposite or perhaps a mirror image. This, rather than further remove Bleuler’s autism from “our” concerns, may well bring it more into contact with the modern concept of autism. It would be a question of a switch in polarities indicating that the two poles are connected along a single axis. That axis is perhaps formed by the question: what kind of thinking is to be designated as “merely” subjective, private, self-contained, cut off from the world—autistic? Bleuler’s answer is that such autistic thinking is one based on affect, which he regards as the private side of the mind, over-against that which deals with outward, factual reality. We, on the other hand, are inclined to answer that “autistic” thinking is that thinking which attributes *too much* value to factual states of affairs, being ignorant of the ways in which affect, emotion, subtle social cues *do* constitute “reality.” “We,” then, have a notion of an intersubjective reality based on communicable affects that renders someone incognizant of these less, rather than more cognizant of reality. As the background constituting “reality” has changed, so has the figure of the subject

116. Frith, *Autism*, 158 (see Introduction, n. 11). See also Frith’s Chapter Ten: “Thinking about Minds,” 156–174, *passim*.

cut off from that background, existing within her own mind.

The switch in the polarity of autism is not a mere theoretical relation of symmetry between Bleuler's autism and "ours." The reception of the concept of autism, departing immediately from Bleuler, gives rise to an expansive discourse in which, at first, the two polarities here outlined are often mixed and crossed with one another, before gradually settling into the pattern that was then fixed in Kanner's and Asperger's works and has lasted since then more or less unchanged. To track this gradual trajectory is the task of Chapter Two.

Chapter Two

Autism between Affect and Logic: From Bleuler to Asperger

Introduction: autism's polarity switch

Chapter One concluded that in its original formulation by Eugen Bleuler, the concept of autism denoted the core and the crux of what it is to be a human being. To be a human is specifically to be a *desiring* being; to attach values to things; to envision the world as another possible world, this other world in tension with the really existing one as desires stand in tension with the actuality of their unfulfillment. All these qualities are captured in Bleuler's notion of autistic thinking as one that "turns away from reality" the better to flatter our appetites and self-regard. Such human egotism is not a pathology peculiar to a subset of persons labeled "autistic," but rather *the pathology of the human* itself. Each of us, then, has an autistic core that expresses the generality of the human—that is, its tendency to turn away from reality in protest—in the form of our particular strivings for self-assertion.

The strivings favored by the autistic tendency of the human mind are those which, by drawing each of us away from others and into ourselves, give us a sense of personal identity and private experience. Only in the autistic space of individual minds can, in Bleuler's conception, one's difference from others be lived. The outer world is by contrast one of stability, objectivity, univocity, unanimity: the observer vanishes in the face of the world's factuality. The world consists of matter; its arrangement is perceived by the mind and reflected as if in a mirror; language allows us to communicate real states of affairs and thus to extend our knowledge of reality beyond what is perceptible to any one observer, while logic enables us, within the strict bounds of inference, to extend that collective empirical knowledge into the invisible realm of

concepts and laws of nature while maintaining a proper—logical—connection to the real. All this, at least, to the extent that thinking and communicating are not bedeviled—as they inevitably are—by each person’s autistic instance. Disagreements in the realm of science, as in that of practical life, are invariably the consequence of autistic interference with the publicly available shape of reality—that is, an interference stemming from the *wishes and fears* of individuals.

What all of this has been gesturing towards is Bleuler’s characterization of the autistic sphere of thought in terms of *affect*. Autistic thought is affect-driven: what it represents, rather than the world as it is, are figments of the world as twisted and refracted by affect—which Bleuler understands as a primary force, closely related to the sex drive, issuing in desire and fear, whether these take on specific or vague form, achieve consciousness or not. There is, as it were, a constant inequality between our internal drive states and the objects of external reality; insofar as the resulting tension cannot find immediate discharge—reality not presenting us, at a given moment, with the objects of our desire within reach and in socially acceptable form—our thoughts take it upon themselves to make up the difference. This make-believe is what Bleuler understands as autism: or in other words, “[d]as keinem Menschen fehlende Bedürfnis, in der Phantasie Ersatz für ungenügende Wirklichkeit zu suchen.”¹

In this way Bleuler’s autism drives the life of fantasy: the fantasies, say, of romantic fulfillment and social prestige—or their opposites, egotistical misanthropy and paranoia. In whichever case, the antidote to such autistic thinking is a remorselessly sober insistence on the absolute value of the facts of any situation. (Bleuler assumes these to be readily available to the rational mind, and therefore always agreed upon by all members of the rational community.)

1. Bleuler, *Dementia praecox*, 304 (see Introduction, n. 35).

By the end of this chapter, the relation between autism and affect will have switched its sign—that is, gone from positive to negative, autism as an excess of affect to autism as a dearth of affect. The relation of autism to logic or rationality, conversely, will change from a negative to a positive: that is, we go from autism as the breakdown of logic and reason to autism as the hypertrophy of these same aspects of the mind. This takes place against the background of a countervailing shift in the conception of a normal and desirable mental attitude: whereas late nineteenth-century Europe considered rational intelligence the obvious measure of the healthy mind, by the 1940s emotional sensitivity and interpersonal attunement are widely considered as essential. In either case, autism figures as the negative of the healthy ideal: first as affect unchained, later—under the opposite sign—as the dangerous pathology of excessive abstraction.

The switch in autism’s affective polarity in this period needs to be understood against the backdrop of a tectonic shift in the culture of science and philosophy in German-speaking Europe. This is the rise of an interconnected set of cultural and scientific theories that have been collected, by the intellectual historian Anne Harrington, under the rubric of *holism*. Holism drives that shift in the sense of “reality” that was described above: from a logical world of material things to an interpersonal community constituted and sustained by an “irrational feeling of harmony.”² It is under the conditions of a holist psychology that a concept of autism will increasingly be defined as the absence of this harmony. Everything that holism abhors on a systemic level—the mechanistic, the hyperrational, the fragmented, the disembodied—it will project onto the phenomenon of autism. Autism thus becomes the objectified antitype of holism.

Autism as we know it today still reflects the holist attitudes that will be covered in depth in this chapter—namely in the widespread conviction that a normal person must have a faculty of

2. “sentiment irrationnel d’harmonie”; Eugène Minkowski, *La schizophrénie* (Paris: Payot, 1927), 109 (translation SHT).

“emotional intelligence,” and that the lack of this, which we call autism, represents a serious threat to one’s very personhood. Our notion of autism is famously traced to two papers that we count as the first clinical descriptions of this syndrome: one by Leo Kanner (1943) and one by Hans Asperger (1944). The title of Kanner’s paper is “Autistic Disturbances of Affective Contact.” As we show in Chapter Four, Kanner attaches as much significance to the positive concept of “affective contact”—that which the autistic is said to lack—as to the privative sense of its “autistic disturbances.” To Bleuler, the notion of an autistic disturbance of *affective* contact would have seemed strange, although the idea of autism as a breaking of “Kontakt mit der Wirklichkeit” would not. The difference is that Bleuler assumes this contact with reality to pass via the logical faculty—he calls it at one point “logischen Kontakt”³—whereas Kanner considers the more important sense of reality to consist of one’s affective bond with others.

The conception of autism that has developed from Kanner—autism as the inability to feel what others are feeling—has made it possible to claim, with a degree of public authority, that to be autistic is to be less than fully human. Consider a statement given in 1992 by the mother of an autistic child, in support of aggressive therapeutic intervention for her daughter:

There is something about autism that to me gave meaning to the phrase “death in life.” Autism is an impossible condition of being there and not being there; a person without a self; a life without a soul. . . . She may want it. I will not have it. She will be dragged, kicking and screaming, into the human condition.⁴

3. Bleuler, *Dementia praecox*, 304.

4. Quoted in Michelle Dawson, “An Autistic Victory: The True Meaning of the Auton Decision,” http://www.sentex.net/~nexus23/naa_vic.html. Accessed July 8, 2015. Not the least remarkable feature of this interpretation of autism is the use of a word that, linguistically analyzed, means nothing other than “self-ism” to designate “a person without a self.”

More recently, Robert Kennedy, Jr. “apologized ... for describing the growing number of children identified with autism ... as ‘a Holocaust’”⁵—implying, by his original statement, that autism kills the person.

In a recent book, Chloe Silverman—drawing support from Evelyn Fox Keller, among others—takes stock of how disability advocates frequently make statements to the effect that although a person with Down syndrome, for instance, may be lacking intelligence, “it is [his] ability to relate to others, his sensitivity to the needs of people, and his sense of humor that reveal ... his value as a person,”⁶ and how this type of argument signally fails where those redeeming qualities are said to be lacking, namely in the case of autism. Autism “poses a problem,” in Silverman’s understated words, to the conventional model of disability rights, based as it is on an empathic definition of the human.⁷ What a change, all in all, from Bleuler, for whom autism, conceived both as an erotics of thinking and as an “anthropocentric” attitude unjustifiable in the face of nature, was *the human condition itself*, the pathology of specifically *human* being.

To get an idea of what the starting and ending stages of autism’s “polarity switch” look like, we can take a small initial sample from two texts representative of the discourse around autism before Kanner and Asperger. One is from Bleuler’s *Dementia praecox* (1911), and sums up the conditions that bring about autism as twofold, a weakening of logic and a strengthening of affect: “Die Schwäche der logischen Funktionen gibt den Affekten ein relatives Übergewicht.”⁸ In

5. Joanna Walters, “Robert Kennedy Jr apologises for Holocaust reference in autism speech,” *The Guardian*, April 13, 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2015/apr/13/robert-kennedy-apologises-for-holocaust-comparison-vaccines>. Accessed July 8, 2015.

6. Silverman, *Understanding Autism*, 7–8 (see Introduction, n. 28). See also Evelyn Fox Keller, “Whole Bodies, Whole Persons? Cultural Studies, Psychoanalysis, and Biology,” in *Subjectivity: Ethnographic Investigations*, ed. João Biehl, Byron Good, and Arthur Kleinman (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007): 352–361.

7. Silverman, *Understanding Autism*, 8.

8. Bleuler, *Dementia praecox*, 289.

Bleuler's associationist psychology, this means that the mental links between ideas—the associations, which have what Bleuler considers the “logical function” of keeping our train of thought on its set tracks, as it were—have been loosened or broken off entirely, so that there is no longer any check on our affective impulses, which then commandeer the direction of thinking. The second quote, from Eugène Minkowski's *La schizophrénie* (1927), reflects the complete reversal of polarity autism undergoes under holist thinking. What is remarkable is that Minkowski uses practically the same analogy as Bleuler: one aspect of the mind serving as a “brake” for the other, keeping the dangerous one in check and maintaining harmony between the two, until the one is damaged and the other, let loose, hypertrophies and brings about a condition of autism. The respective places of logic (“intelligence”) and affect (Minkowski's “instinct”), however, are now reversed.

In all of life, intelligence and instinct ... weave themselves together and form a harmonious whole. ... But cannot this harmony suffer some notable disturbances under the influence of pathological modifications? Cannot the instinct, for example, suffer a lesion in the first instance? And in this case will not the intelligence, its natural brake removed, seek to supplement the deficient instinct for better or for worse, and will it not thus end up taking on monstrous forms?⁹

Not just in Bleuler but for centuries previously, madness had been conceived as un-reason, as injury to the rational capacity of the mind to represent reality. The idea that what Minkowski calls “instinct” constitutes an active layer of the psyche that can be the locus of a primary disturbance, a lesion “in the first instance,” is something new in psychiatry. What ties the subject to reality is no longer logical associations but instinct or *intuition*: “the intuition, which directs

9. “Dans la vie, l'intelligence et l'instinct ... s'entreprenètent et forment un tout harmonieux. ... Mais cette harmonie, ne peut-elle pas subir sous l'influence de modifications pathologiques des perturbations notables? L'instinct, par exemple, ne peut-il pas être lésé en première ligne? L'intelligence dans ce cas, privée de son frein naturel, ne cherchera-t-elle pas à suppléer tant bien que mal l'instinct défaillant et n'aboutira-t-elle pas ainsi à des formes monstrueuses?” Minkowski, *La schizophrénie*, 89–90 (translation SHT).

our activity and keeps it within limits.”¹⁰ And it is no longer affect but rather the rational intelligence whose tendency to hypertrophy, if unchecked, threatens to prize the subject loose from those bonds.

Autistic fantasy, previously concerned with wishes and fears, becomes now a “morbid rationalism” or “morbid geometrism.”¹¹ Bleuler had characterized autism as “die Logik der Gefühle”; now, it is nearly the identical paradox—“the logic of instinct ... if it is permitted to associate these two terms”¹²—which names what is supposed to be *lacking* in the state of autism. And whereas in Bleuler’s autism the normal stability and self-identity of concepts dissolves and gives way to constant, uncontrolled motion, fracturing, sliding, and recombination, Minkowski casts the autistic in opposite terms: as a “morbid stasis” (*statisme morbide*) in which “ideas are as immobile as statues”¹³ and “[t]he richness, the mobility of life disappear,” replaced by “an abstract formula.”¹⁴ He anticipates the current association of autism with sterile scientific interests by evoking the way in which the autistic person, “deprived of the ability to assimilate all that is composed of movement and duration, tends to construct his behavior out of factors and criteria whose proper domain ... is uniquely that of logic and mathematics.”¹⁵

What has resulted from the conception of autism as hyperrational and hypoaffective is an association between autism and the mathematical so strong that today’s authors cite it as justification for the view that the reason many forms of autism remained “unthinkable diagnostic

10. “l’intuition, qui guide notre activité et la maintient dans les limites.” Ibid., 173 (translation SHT).

11. Eugène Minkowski, *Au delà du rationalisme morbide* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1997); “géométrisme morbide”: Minkowski, *La schizophrénie*, 116.

12. “la logique de l’instinct ... s’il est permis d’associer ces deux vocables”: Paul Divry, quoted in Minkowski, *La schizophrénie*, 131 (translation SHT).

13. “idées sont immobiles comme des statues”: ibid., 100 (translation SHT).

14. “une formule abstraite”: ibid., 108 (translation SHT).

15. “privé de la faculté d’assimiler tout ce qui est mouvement et durée, tend à construire son comportement de facteurs et de critères dont le domaine propre ... est uniquement la logique et les mathématiques.” Ibid., 104 (translation SHT).

categories until the mid- to late twentieth century” was *because computers did not yet exist*, “the public’s fascination with autism” being premised on “the idea that people with autism are technologically gifted and are particularly adept with computer technology.”¹⁶ But as we have just seen, such an association considerably predates the “information age.” It had solidified years before Kanner and Asperger started their work on autism, let alone published the papers that made them famous as its alleged discoverers. This chapter presents its emergence.

Asperger and Kanner thus were not the first to describe autism in terms of an affective deficit. This view had been amply set out for them by previous authors. Surveying these developments means, first of all, revealing the extent to which autism was talked about in the period between its invention by Bleuler and its modern adaptation on the part of Asperger and Kanner. Existing accounts of autism touch on the Bleulerian moment but neglect all subsequent literature on autism up until Kanner and Asperger’s innovations. The effect is to imply that Bleuler’s concept lay idle in the intervening years, which could hardly be further from the truth. Autism had, in fact, a highly privileged place in the psychiatric literature of the 1920s and ’30s, forming a *discourse of autism* here described for the first time.

The chapter proceeds as follows: first, a brief general introduction of holist ideas is followed by a more detailed explanation of their adoption in psychiatry and psychopathology, and then a discussion of the prominent role that the concept of autism took on in tandem with these ideological developments. In the second half of the chapter, key texts by four main holist authors—Ernst Kretschmer, Vera Strasser-Eppelbaum, Ludwig Binswanger, and Hans Asperger—are presented, each of which deals simultaneously with holist methodology and the

16. Majia Holmer Nadesan, *Constructing Autism: Unravelling the “Truth” and Understanding the Social*. (New York: Routledge, 2005), 3–4. Nadesan is not so much endorsing this view as citing the commonplace association between autism and computing in service of her social-constructionist account of modern autism. The view itself is nonetheless current.

theory of autism. The last of these is the 1944 paper by Asperger that is currently regarded, alongside Kanner's paper of the preceding year, as one of the first descriptions of the autistic syndrome as we know it.

The reasons for reading Asperger's founding document of modern autism rather than Kanner's are twofold. First, Asperger worked in a European milieu where he took in the influence, more or less directly, of the other authors discussed here; whereas Kanner, working in the United States, was in fact adopting a version of holism imported from Europe and somewhat watered down in the process. Second, Asperger's text is a fascinating theoretical statement in its own right, one that pushes the received tenets of holism in an entirely new, arguably subversive direction. Reading Asperger as a committed holist—but also as uniquely sensitive to some paradoxes that had developed in the preceding discourse of autism—lets us see not only how deeply grounded his description of autism was in the larger discourse preceding him but also what strange potential lurked in the depths and subtleties of his thinking. Finally, this sets up a fuller reading of the Aspergian autistic type, which will follow in Chapter Three.

Holism: the new assumptions

The individual strands of holism are many and various, and moreover often seem defined less as ideas in their own right than as combative reactions to a worldview they all hold in contempt: that of nineteenth-century positivism and progressivism. Harrington describes these new currents in German science as directed “against any and all forces that would condemn one to being a cog in a Bismarckian political machine, a ‘human motor’ in an industrialist's factory, a meaningless

play of cells and atoms in a scientist's laboratory."¹⁷ What these notions have in common is the analogy between the person, or society at large, and a machine—in other words, something that can be taken apart into its smallest pieces and understood as merely the sum of these parts.

Against this, holism marshaled the “evocative image”¹⁸ of wholeness:

The documents of this struggle are filled with calls to authenticity, to natural life, and above all to *wholeness*. Wholeness ... was now different than it had been during the era of systems-building in the time of the Romantics; and it was different again than it had been during the years of struggle for national unification. It still bore clear traces of those earlier legacies—transformed in various ways—but for the first time, it also began to privilege the growth and cultivation of the “whole” self—body and mind—as a necessary foundation for collective wholeness.¹⁹

What this new ideology of wholeness chiefly derives from its Romantic and national-revolutionary forebears is the demand for an *organic* bond, a community grounded in nature and in shared sensibility. The machine represents the progress of a rationality whose method is to take apart and recombine, to render parts interchangeable, and to dispense with the soul. Holism not only opposed these tendencies with its conviction that parts were meaningless if abstracted from their organic whole; it asserted, moreover, the ethical priority of the soul over the intellect, the organic over the artificial, the immediate over the mediated; the intuitive over the rational.

In the institutions of science, psychology very much included, holism stood for a wholesale overturning of basic assumptions and methods on a scale that can hardly be overstated. The very idea that the ultimate aim of science was to identify the constituent parts of the observable universe and to construct ever finer causal models of natural processes was suddenly in question. This attitude—which we, following Ludwig Binswanger, will simply refer to as *Naturwissenschaft* or natural science—had been glorified by the progressive nineteenth

17. Anne Harrington, *Reenchanted Science: Holism in German Culture from Wilhelm II to Hitler* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 24.

18. *Ibid.*

19. *Ibid.*

century, but was now accused of treating nature as if it were a machine, taking a violent, dismantling set of instruments to what was in fact an organic body. The alternative, holism contends, is to regard nature as a living universe of *forms*, and to conceive of forms as meaningful only if grasped as wholes. The model of causality, in sum, was to be replaced by a new basic model of nature, which went by the name of *morphology*. Enjoying an added prestige because of its association with Goethe, the “science of morphology,” Harrington confirms, “was resurrected as a ‘paradigm science’” wherever holism was gaining ground in this period.²⁰

The historian of psychology Ulfried Geuter does not exaggerate when he writes: “Morphological thought represses causality.”²¹ Indeed, it sought to replace causality as the unifying concept behind the workings of the universe. Things were to be understood as linked together not by causal mechanisms—which, in the holists’ view, encouraged the idea that nature could be mastered and controlled as humans learned to exploit these mechanisms for their own rational aims—but by the affinities (or antipathies) existing between the forms and structures of nature.

The replacement of causality with morphology is the first of four transformations that together characterize the advent of holist psychopathology. (They are reviewed in table form at the end of this section.) The next is a change in the mode of observation applied to the objects of science. The investigator’s angle of vision must go from the narrowest, one capable of penetrating appearances and detecting subtle mechanical elements, to the widest—a gaze prepared to discern the overall shape, structure, and interrelationships of things.

20. *Ibid.*, 29.

21. Ulfried Geuter, *The Professionalization of Psychology in Nazi Germany*, trans. Richard J. Holmes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 111.

The object of such observation is no longer the symptom, as it had been under the regime of Naturwissenschaft. The symptom was an isolable thing and a sign of an underlying process, an entity thoroughly embedded in the causal order of nature. The new object of observation is the whole character of a patient, meaning the way in which her psyche and her experience of the world are structured. No part of a character can be understood on its own, apart from the structure of the whole.

The third of our four transformations concerns what to do with the objects of observation once they have been discerned, or in other words what form the end product of research is to take. Under Naturwissenschaft the goal was to arrive at a *theory* about the observed symptoms: how do they hang together, in what groupings; what underlying disease entities do these groupings represent; and what fundamental processes cause these arrangements to emerge? But holism will replace the constructing of theories—that is, causal models of isolated processes—with a thoroughly different act: the arranging of forms in larger structures of relation to each other. This is known, in holist discourse, as the practice of *typing*, its end product as a *typology*.

That the morphological-typological paradigm had entered the main stream of European psychology is confirmed with Karl Bühler's 1923 *Krise der Psychologie*, something of a must-read for all in the field. Bühler—the sagacious arbiter of all the rivalrous tendencies in the psychology of the day (which included a large swath of philosophy as well, from which psychology proper had only recently begun to distinguish itself)²²—rarely allows palpable enthusiasm to float his rhetoric above firm ground; but there is more than a whisper of it here as concerns “den genialen Blick des Entdeckers ... jenen Blick, mit dem Goethe z. B. die Urform der Pflanzen aus einem oder einigen Exemplaren herauszuschauen glaubte. Solch ein

22. See Martin Kusch, *Psychologism: A Case Study in the Sociology of Philosophical Knowledge* (New York: Routledge, 1995).

Entdeckerblick,” Bühler continues,

ist den forschenden Psychologen unserer Zeit mehr als je vonnöten. Wer unter ihnen z. B. daran geht, das Gesamtgepräge der Menschen, Charaktere, Temperamente, Begabungen mit den Mitteln der Wissenschaft zu erfassen, der prüfe sich zuvor, ob er den Blick, mit dem allein man Typen entdecken kann, besitzt oder nicht.²³

No less an authority than Bühler thus paints psychology in its highest form (i.e., as practiced by those genuinely gifted with the gaze of discovery) as the search for types. The way in which he does it suggests that the type is the *most* general denominator of “das Gesamtgepräge der Menschen”—in other words, something that marks out (*prägt*) the person (*Mensch*) as a whole (*Gesamt-*), and which could also be called the *form, shape, or design* of the person.

Finally, the fourth major transformation concerns the practical application of the psychopathologies stemming from Naturwissenschaft and from holism, respectively. A psychiatrist trained in the tradition of Naturwissenschaft, having observed the symptoms and constructed a theory of the cause of a given mental disease, saw himself as eminently prepared to supply the individual patient with a therapeutic intervention aimed at removing the disease from the person. The indicated therapy depended upon the proper diagnosis of the disease in question—less upon the individual characteristics of the patient, insofar as these could be separated from the trouble at hand. Holism, as we can now readily predict, refuses to regard the person as separable from the disease. The disease, if there is one to speak of, is not a foreign process attacking the patient but an outgrowth of the patient’s personal disposition or *Anlage*. The diseased patient and the healthy person before the onset of illness are regarded as mere aspects of a single, unified structure of experience. Rather than seek to excise the disease process, then, we must try to recognize more clearly the nature of the structure of experience we are dealing with—to discern the type to which this person belongs. And on that basis, what can

23. Karl Bühler, *Die Krise der Psychologie*, 2nd ed. (Jena: Fischer, 1929), 11.

be done is to assign the person to a place in the world that is suited to their type. This practice can be termed, broadly speaking, *selection*. In Germany, selection would take on a societally pervasive role under National Socialism. It would be conceived as one massive apparatus selecting, at one end, the best exponents of the “Germanic type” for positions of leadership in the military²⁴ and, at the other end, persons exemplifying what was known as the *Gegentypus* (“antitype”)²⁵ for marginalization, sterilization, internment, or extermination.

We do not discuss the more overtly politicized holist psychopathologies here. We should note, however, that the typological program in which we are interested tended to deploy itself quite similarly regardless of the varied political tendencies of its exponents. The similarity extends to the leading role taken on by the concept of autism in the new organization of pathological types: the *Gegentypus*—a concept developed by the Nazi psychologist E.R. Jaensch—was in fundamental respects derived from the idea of autism.²⁶ (The place of autism in Nazi psychiatry generally is again taken up in Chapter Three’s discussion of Asperger.)

The four transformations just identified in the turn from a psychology grounded in *Naturwissenschaft* to one inspired by holism are recapitulated in the following table:

Table 1: Fundamental distinctions between Naturwissenschaft and holism

	Naturwissenschaft:	Holism:
Underlying model:	Causality	Morphology
Object of description:	Symptom	Character/type
End product of research:	Theory	Typology
Practical application:	Therapy	Selection
Paradigm concept:	Schizophrenia	Autism

24. See *ibid.*, 83–124.

25. Erich Rudolf Jaensch, *Der Gegentypus: psychologisch-anthropologische Grundlagen deutscher Kulturphilosophie, ausgehend von dem was wir überwinden wollen* (Leipzig: J.A. Barth, 1938).

26. See *ibid.*, 14–15; 37–60 *passim*.

We have added, in the bottom row, one further criterion: the replacement of schizophrenia with autism as the model disorder, the concept of mental abnormality best exemplifying the total approach of the scientific regime in question: Naturwissenschaft in the case of schizophrenia and holism in that of autism. We will now say more about autism in particular, and why it belongs so closely to the larger apparatus of holism.

The exemplary status of autism for holistic psychology

The texts we consider in this chapter are all epochal texts in the sense that each of them provides a specific forward thrust to the theoretical movements encompassed by holism; more than one of them has left a strong legacy extending well beyond the time frame considered here. They differ substantively in many ways, but they all share a specific pattern, consisting of a “methodological” and an “applied” segment. In their methodological segments, each text makes a critique of the *naturwissenschaftlich* methods traditionally used in psychiatry, and makes the case for moving beyond them into a new, holist paradigm. This is centered around the proposal of a new *typological* psychiatry, along the lines discussed above.

The applied segments of the texts in question all ostensibly present a concrete example of the new typology that was announced in the methodological segment. They introduce, as it were, *one* type in order to give an idea of what a type looks like and how the holist methods go about discerning and describing it. The curious thing is that *all* the texts choose “autism” or an “autistic” type as their prime example; moreover, all but one of them refuse to name any other concrete types, letting autism be the sole object empirically dealt with by the methods of holist inquiry. (The exception is Ernst Kretschmer, who, we will see, functions as a transitional stage between the older regime and the newer. He does present a full typology, but within it lays the

overwhelming emphasis on the autistic type.)

The pairing of holist methodology and autism as a privileged object of investigation is so salient, and so consistently repeated across multiple texts of considerable import, that it raises questions not just about the alleged generality of the methods in question but likewise as to the purported status of autism as an empirical object of investigation. Is it really just one object among others, or does it become, under such treatment, a virtual negative image of the holist method? What we will see in the readings of individual texts to follow is that the self-image of holism—as standing for the whole, the organic, the harmonious—is repeated, in negative relief, on the level of the object “autism.” Autism becomes a figure for the partial, the artificial, the imbalanced—all those qualities, associated with the mechanist vision of science, that holism rejects.

Our itinerary will first take us back for a look at the immediate reception of Bleuler’s concept of autism in the psychiatric literature. This serves primarily to establish a point of reference for the changes that follow. We will then observe these changes through the reading of texts by Kretschmer, Strasser-Eppelbaum, and Binswanger. Finally we will introduce Hans Asperger, one of the co-discoverers of modern autism, in the context of the holist tradition.

The professional reception of Bleuler’s autism

Autism began as a *symptom* in the full, naturwissenschaftlich sense of the word outlined above. It was a symptom specifically of schizophrenia, the flagship diagnosis of the psychiatric regime that preceded holism. It was in this way that the terms “schizophrenia,” as a reconceptualization of what was broadly known as dementia praecox, and “autism,” as a symptom of schizophrenia, were introduced together by Eugen Bleuler in 1910.

Erwin Stransky—a confirmed rival and by no means universally accepting of Bleuler’s innovations in the theory of dementia praecox—welcomed, in a review of Bleuler’s monograph, the creation of the concept of autism: “Sehr glücklich scheint mir auch ein anderer, von *Bleuler* in die Psychopathologie der Dementia praecox eingeführter Begriff: der ‘Autismus,’ wie *Bleuler* ... die Loslösung des seelischen Lebens so vieler Schizophrenen von der Wirklichkeit und das Überwiegen des Binnenlebens bei ihnen nennt.”²⁷ Others soon adopted the term into the everyday parlance of psychiatry. Its acceptance was both immediate and, in most instances, casual: as if a phenomenon already on the minds of many had only been waiting to be pointed out. By 1913, “autism” requires no special explanation when it appears in another article by Stransky, amidst a discussion in which Bleuler’s name does not even appear, but in which it is noted that paranoid hallucinations “bauen sich ... sehr wesentlich auf den autistisch ausgesponnen[en] Produkten einer überwuchernden Phantasietätigkeit auf.”²⁸ Here the concept of autism is used, crucially if not acknowledged as such, to draw the connection between fantasy—a normal product of private, inner life—and its exaggerated expression in delusions. The difference between a normal and a pathological form of the same thought is that the latter has become *autistic*, in the sense of detached from socially constituted reality. Even earlier—1912, the year following the publication of *Dementia praecox*—Maier used autism just as easily, and in the same sense, to make a negative differential diagnosis: a patient cannot have dementia praecox, since “[s]chizophrene Assoziationsstörungen fehlen gänzlich, ebenso konnte nie eine autistische Einstellung der Affektivität beobachtet werden.”²⁹

27. Erwin Stransky, “Zur Entwicklung und zum gegenwärtigen Stande der Lehre von der Dementia praecox (Schizophrenie),” *Zeitschrift für die gesamte Neurologie und Psychiatrie* (1912): 633.

28. Erwin Stransky, “Die paranoiden Erkrankungen,” *Zeitschrift für die gesamte Neurologie und Psychiatrie* (1913): 389.

29. Hans Maier, “Über katathyme Wahnbildung und Paranoia,” *Zeitschrift für die gesamte Neurologie und Psychiatrie* (1912): 585.

Oberholzer (1914) mentions “[das] von *Bleuler* als Autismus bezeichnete Abschluß des Schizophrenen von der Außenwelt,” which is “mit Leichtigkeit auch bei unserer Kranken”—a case study in catatonic shock—nachzuweisen³⁰; he then uses it to describe the patient’s “autistische[] Phantasien” that had forced her withdrawal from reality.³¹ For Krambach (1915), it is “[d]iese schizophrenen Symptome (Gefühlsstörung und Autismus)” which “erweisen den Fall als Dementia praecox paranoides.”³² After relating a patient’s fantasies of grandiosity, of being held captive together with Mary Stuart and of the doctors’ approaches to her being intolerable insults, Sokolow (1915) comments: “Hier tritt der Autismus der Patientin noch deutlicher hervor.”³³ From all of these examples it is clear that the new terminology of autism was held to be specifically valuable in a way that justified its replacement of more traditional categories such as delusion (*Wahn*), which on the face of it would seem to be apt in cases like the above.

One reason for autism’s appeal may have been its positive connotations: of retreat into a rich, inner, private world of self-sufficient fantasy. Even as one patient might struggle for “Erlösung aus ihrem Autismus,”³⁴ others exhibit a contrary “ausgeprochene[s] Streben nach Autismus,”³⁵ or pine for a refuge, “ein Zustand von Autismus ... in welchem die Kranke lebt, gleichsam von der Wirklichkeit getrennt, deren harte, unerbittliche Notwendigkeiten sie

30. Emil Oberholzer, “Über Shockwirkung infolge Aspiration und psychischen Shock bei Katatonie,” *Zeitschrift für die gesamte Neurologie und Psychiatrie* (1914): 117.

31. *Ibid.*, 118.

32. Reinhard Krambach, “Ueber chronische paranoide Erkrankungen (Paraphrenie und Paranoid),” *Archiv für Psychiatrie und Nervenkrankheiten* (1915): 923.

33. Paul Sokolow, “Weitere Experimente über die Auslösung der Gehörshalluzinationen durch periphere Reize,” *Archiv für Psychiatrie und Nervenkrankheiten* (1915): 216.

34. Kurt Binswanger, “Über schizoide Alkoholiker,” *Zeitschrift für die gesamte Neurologie und Psychiatrie* (1920): 154.

35. Kurt Schneider, “Verse einer Schizophrenen,” *Zeitschrift für die gesamte Neurologie und Psychiatrie* (1919): 391.

wegweist, verneint.”³⁶ Rhetoric of this kind, seemingly invited by the idea of autism, further eased its transition into broader use as a category of cultural, not just pathological, analysis. Speaking of the kind of intensely inward religious communities that had flourished, in both Germany and Switzerland, since the rise of Pietism in the eighteenth century, the now-famous Rorschach wrote in 1919 of “das Kultivieren des Autismus, wie es in vielen Sekten blüht” as a cultural factor that could readily combine with an individual’s schizophrenic disposition to produce certain clinical states.³⁷ Along a related line, autism moved into the nexus between pathology and aesthetics: the year before, a French-language article in a Swiss journal had applied the idea of autism to give a new shine to the old pastime of analyzing Rousseau’s abnormal personality. Jean-Jacques’ “self-abandonment in reverie,” its author wrote,

this distancing himself from action, this ability for self-satisfaction in a fabricated world: here, pushed to an extreme degree, are the signs of a pathological temperament; they form what Bleuler has called “autism,” that is, the fact of turning away from reality, of withdrawing into oneself, of no longer living but in dreams.³⁸

A connection with autoerotism, the concept out of which Bleuler had extracted autism (see Chapter One), recurs here as well, as “masturbation, by opening a vast field of maneuvers to the exercises of his imagination, further encouraged his autism.”³⁹

These are instances of autism’s discursive penetration at the level of professional journals in the early years following its introduction by Bleuler. We have not attempted a systematic presentation of them, but it should be clear that most if not all of them exhibit two basic

36. Maurycy Bornstein, “Über einen eigenartigen Typus der psychischen Spaltung (‘Schizothymia reactiva’),” *Zeitschrift für die gesamte Neurologie und Psychiatrie* (1917): 125.

37. Hermann Rorschach, “Weiteres über schweizerische Sektenbildung,” *Schweizer Archiv für Neurologie und Psychiatrie* 4 no. 1 (1919): 386.

38. “abandon à la rêverie, cet éloignement de l’action, cette faculté de se complaire en un monde factice, voilà bien poussés à ce degré extrême les signes d’un tempérament pathologique; ils forment ce que Bleuler a nommé l’‘Autisme,’ cet-à-dire le fait de se détourner de la réalité, de s’enfoncer dans soi-même, de ne plus vivre que dans ses rêves.” V. Demole, “Analyse psychiatrique des confessions de Jean-Jacques Rousseau,” *Schweizer Archiv für Neurologie und Psychiatrie* 2 no. 1 (1918): 278 (translation SHT).

39. “la masturbation ouvrant un vaste champ de manoeuvres aux déploiements de son imagination, favoria encore son autisme.” *Ibid.*, 286 (translation SHT).

characteristics. First, they hew closely to Bleuler's concept of autism as a "subjective," irrational state, generative of wishful or fantastical thoughts, utterances, and behaviors. For our argument, then, they anchor one end of the arc that takes autism from its irrational and hyperaffective guise to one of hyperrationality and hypoaffectivity. Secondly, they treat autism as an isolable entity or symptom in the larger context of the psychology of madness.

The transformation of autism under holist psychology will remake it from a symptom into a *form of existence*, and simultaneously from a hyperaffective to a hypoaffective state. (*Both* of these aspects are fundamental to our understanding of autism today; both originate before Asperger and Kanner.) The first author we will consider in light of this transformation is Ernst Kretschmer, a student of Bleuler's and soon to become one of the most famous psychiatrists in the world. Kretschmer does not himself achieve the transformations of autism just named, but he opens up a space for them by expanding Bleuler's concept of autism to include *both* its symptomatic usage and the new treatment of it as a human *type*; both its hyperaffective or "irrational" manifestations and the hyperrational ones that will increasingly gain attention.

Ernst Kretschmer: a broad spectrum of autism

Probably no single work better heralds the holist turn in the German "psi-sciences" between the world wars—a turn to holist methods and typological aims—than Ernst Kretschmer's *Körperbau und Charakter* of 1921. Though written by a psychiatrist trained in the tradition of Kraepelin and closely allied with Bleuler, Kretschmer's work unmistakably announces a radical new aim for psychopathology: the establishment of a typology transcending the categories of the diseased and the healthy, a stylistics of character.

The foreword to the first edition of *Körperbau und Charakter* is by Robert Gaupp, an

eminent psychiatrist of Bleuler's generation and Kretschmer's teacher at Tübingen. Gaupp observed that he and his protégé stood "mitten in einem Lehrreichen Wandel der Anschauungen über die letzten Voraussetzungen aller wissenschaftlichen Erkenntnis und über die tiefsten Zusammenhänge zwischen Leib und Seele auf dem Gebiete des krankhaften Geschehens."⁴⁰ The ground had been well prepared by "Jahrzehnten mühevoller und erfolgreicher Arbeit des Sammelns und Ordners"⁴¹ in the psychiatric clinic, the fruit of which consisted in the rich depictions of manic-depressive illness and schizophrenia, "die uns *Kraepelins* Meisterwerk aus dem verwirrenden Chaos der klinischen Erscheinungen herausgehoben und in zwei große Formenkreise vereinigt hatte."⁴² But these now called for supplementing. The destiny of Kraepelin's great "forms" lay outside psychiatry strictly defined—their real home was in the exalted sciences of characterology, morphology, typology:

So ruft die *klinische* Forschung ... nunmehr den *Genealogen* und *Biologen* zu Hilfe; die *introspektive Psychologie* wagt sich in subtiler Analyse an das Verständnis des scheinbar Unverständlichen und holt sich aus der karikierenden Verzerrung der seelischen Anomalie die Bausteine für eine verstehende Psychologie des Gesunden und Kranken, für eine in Theorie und Praxis einheitliche *Charakterologie*. Ihr Studium weist zurück auf die Fragen der *Vererbung*; diese Fragen hinwiederum erhalten ihre Antwort in der Erforschung *morphologischer Vorgänge*.⁴³

Thus, psychology, heredity, and biology would be interwoven into a universal characterology, and this in turn would be grounded in the master science of *morphology*. Why begin with psychology, heredity, and biology? Because they were the eminently *typological* sciences of the day, the fundamentals of holism, and the paramount domains of the intuitive gaze. They were, in other words, at the cutting edge of the comprehensive refounding of science as the practice of *discerning forms*.

40. Robert Gaupp, "Vorwort zur ersten Auflage," in Kretschmer, *Körperbau und Charakter*, iv (see Introduction, n. 34).

41. Ibid.

42. Ibid., v.

43. Ibid., iv.

Gaupp closed his foreword with the words: “So wendet sich das Buch nicht bloß an den Psychiater, sondern an alle psychologisch Interessierten, denen die Typisierung menschlichen Wesens als eine wichtige Aufgabe empirischer Forschung erscheint.”⁴⁴ The comment is revealing in that it implies that the “type-ing of the human” *can* be conceived as a general and unifying, as well as an urgent and compelling, objective of science. So the science of the type, and the closely associated idea of a morphology, became the basis for a grand synthesis of empirical sciences.

The particular thesis proclaimed in the title of *Körperbau und Charakter* is a physiognomical one: Kretschmer asserts a formal correlation between the physical shape of the body and the non-physical “shape” or structure of the inner life. This thesis, which Kretschmer purported to establish statistically—would be widely accepted and reproduced by his colleagues. Asperger cites it as a basic tenet of his research, with direct relevance to his discovery of autism, and as Kretschmer’s most valuable insight.⁴⁵ (How he uses it will be seen in Chapter Three.)

The physiognomical thesis belongs to the overall holist orientation of Kretschmer’s work. It was, however, not the only argument made in *Körperbau und Charakter*. The other aim of this work was the formal definition of the relevant body and character types themselves. Of these there were in essence two, and on the level of character they were modeled upon what Kretschmer saw as the two poles of mental illness: the manic-depressive and the schizophrenic. These had been established and defined by Kraepelin (who used the terms “manic-depressive illness” and “dementia praecox”; Kretschmer preferred Bleuler’s innovative concept of “schizophrenia” for the latter). These “zwei Formenkreise,” as Kretschmer calls them, are the

44. Ibid., v. Another realm in which typology had long held sway as the highest order of epistemology was, of course, the study of art and literature as derived from biblical hermeneutics.

45. See Asperger, “Die ‘Autistischen Psychopathen,’” 77 (see Introduction, n. 30).

starting points for his entire program, which then extends along two axes. (The full system is schematically presented in the table below.)

On one axis—the vertical one in our presentation—Kretschmer takes each of Kraepelin’s psychotic forms as the endpoint of a spectrum extending from manifest psychosis to ordinary shadings of character, normal variants which, in this system, can be understood as shadows cast by one or the other domain of madness. There are three zones along this vertical axis: psychosis, psychopathy, and normality. The psychotic forms, as we know, are “manic-depressive illness” and “schizophrenia.” Their respective psychopathic zones are the “cycloid” (because of the tendency of manic-depressive illness to “cycle” between its manic and depressive phases) and the “schizoid.” Finally, those whose characters are within the normal are classified as “cyclothymic” or “schizothymic,” depending on whether their traits tend toward the cycloid or the schizoid. The “psychopathic” zones of cycloid and schizoid—clearly abnormal, but not yet psychotic—are the areas to which Kretschmer devotes the most attention. Between the two of them the schizoid is clearly the focal point of Kretschmer’s research; and it represents for him, as we will soon see, a continuation and a transformation of Bleuler’s research on autism.

Meanwhile, if the spectra of the schizoid and the cycloid occupy a vertical axis, spanning different degrees of severity from normal to psychotic, the second axis of Kretschmer’s work is a horizontal one connecting the *psychical* manifestations of the schizoid and cycloid forms with *somatic* counterparts. This is the physiognomic axis. The cycloid character, according to Kretschmer, is predominant in those whose body type is what was called “pyknic,” that is, tending toward the soft, rounded, heavysset, plump. The schizoid character was contrastingly identified with the body types “athletic”—i.e., the median, the well-proportioned—and “leptosome” (also called “asthenic”). The leptosome—in which the schizoid traits were,

naturally, more pronounced than in the relatively neutral athletic type—was most pithily defined as showing “geringes Dickenwachstum bei durchschnittlich unvermindertem Längenwachstum,”⁴⁶ the kind of drawn, “stretched” figure that might be remarked in the paintings of El Greco. Kretschmer’s illustrations show narrow, almost “collapsed” chests, gangly limbs, angular faces with too-large ears, narrowed eyes, curious expressions.

Table 2: Kretschmer’s typology of physique and character

Degree of severity	Cycloid type		Schizoid type	
	Body	Character	Body	Character
Psychotic	Pyknic	Manic-depressive	Pronounced leptosome	Schizophrenic
Psychopathic	Pyknic	Cycloid	Leptosome/asthenic	Schizoid
Normal	Pyknic	Cyclothymic	Athletic	Schizothymic

The leptosome body type reappears in often startling detail in Asperger’s autism paper of 1944. There, its physical features are brought into the properly hermeneutic orbit of autism, interpreted as outward signs, but signs in no lesser sense, of the general trouble simultaneously affecting emotional and intellectual expression. That is, the particulars of the body are made to correspond *meaningfully* to those of the inner life; there is a formal correspondence of essences. Kretschmer does not yet go so far. He uses an apparatus of physiometrics and statistics—essentially the same apparatus as the “racial biology” of his time, toward which Kretschmer remained cool⁴⁷—to “prove” the simple correlation of body type and character.

Kretschmer devotes about equal space in his book to body and to character types, as well as to the respective types of each (pyknic and leptosome, cycloid and schizoid); yet it is readily apparent that the work’s *raison d’être* is the depiction of the schizoid character. If elsewhere it is primarily a matter of cataloguing features relatively well known and filling out the requirements

46. Kretschmer, *Körperbau und Charakter*, 17.

47. *Ibid.*, iii.

of the typological system, in the sections devoted to the schizoid Kretschmer's rhetoric changes gears; he begins to rhapsodize about the schizoid psyche. Kretschmer's enthusiasm for the schizoid was so exaggerated that he faced the accusation, from multiple reviewers, of wanting to shoehorn healthy people of merely "strong" or "pronounced" character into this category.⁴⁸

The basis for this true accusation is that Kretschmer treats the schizoid as something with a strongly defined form; whereas its counterpart, the cycloid character, proved hard if not impossible to "define" in the same way, for the simple reason that it seemed always to collapse into the merely ordinary, whose formal properties are indistinct. "Viel weniger klar," Kretschmer complained, "zeigen sich bisher die Umrissse der Persönlichkeitstypen des zirkulären Formgebiets,"⁴⁹ seeing as this type was defined by its being fundamentally in harmony with its human surroundings. Exceptional characters did, by this logic, belong to the schizoid exclusively.

Here is Kretschmer's introduction to the schizoid character—framed, at the outset, in contrast to the cycloid and its tendency to disappear into the background of normality:

Zykloide Menschen sind schlichte, unkomplizierte Naturen, deren Fühlweise direkt, natürlich und unverstellt an die Oberfläche steigt, so daß sie im allgemeinen bald von jedermann richtig beurteilt werden. Schizoide Menschen haben eine Oberfläche und eine Tiefe. Schneidend brutal oder mürrisch dumpf oder stachlig ironisch oder molluskenhaft scheu, schallos sich zurückziehend—das ist die Oberfläche. Oder die Oberfläche ist gar nichts; wir sehen einen Menschen, der wie ein Fragezeichen uns im Wege steht, wir fühlen etwas Fades, Langweiliges und doch unbestimmt Problematisches. Was ist die Tiefe hinter all diesen Masken? Es kann ein Nichts sein, das schwarze, hohläugige Nichts—affektive Verblödung. Hinter einer schweigenden Fassade, die ungewiß in verlöschenden Launen zuckt—nichts als Trümmer, schwarzer Schutt, gähnende Gemütsleere oder der schneidende Hauch der kältesten Seelenlosigkeit. Wir können es aber der Fassade nicht ansehen, was dahinter ist. Viele schizoide Menschen sind wie kahle römische Häuser, Villen, die ihre Läden vor der grellen Sonne geschlossen haben;

48. See W. Strohmayer, "Zur Genealogie der Schizophrenie und des Schizoids," *Zeitschrift für die gesamte Neurologie und Psychiatrie* (1925): 199. Strohmayer cites Ewald and Bumke as representatives of this view.

49. Kretschmer, *Körperbau und Charakter*, 98.

in ihrem gedämpften Innenlicht aber werden Feste gefeiert.⁵⁰

It is the dimension of depth, the fact of there being an *inner* and an *outer*, an invisible and a visible, and the differential established along this axis, that truly marks out the problem of the schizoid. The schizoid poses a hermeneutic challenge—a hermetic surface, together with the promise of meaning lying beneath, if it can be deciphered—where the cycloid (“bald von jedermann richtig beurteilt”) presents no such epistemological difficulty.

The schizoid thus could be said to have an important formal property, namely *hermeneutic difficulty*, in common with aesthetic objects. Furthering the hermeneutics of the schizoid and deepening its kinship with the object of art is a defining attribute of Kretschmer’s prose style: his romantic, even gothic streak, which comes to the fore mostly when he is talking about the schizoid. Though Kretschmer included a sizable portion of humanity under the label “schizoid character,” he defines the type as if it were a character from literature. This introduces an aesthetist or “aristocratic” trope. “Die Blüten schizophrener Innenlebens kann man nicht an Bauern studieren; Könige und Dichter sind gerade gut genug dazu,” he even comments, adding in a footnote: “Besonders wichtig sind die Selbstdarstellungen von Hölderlin, Strindberg, Ludwig 1. von Bayern.”⁵¹ Hölderlin—with whom Kretschmer claimed distant kinship⁵²—becomes a perennial point of reference, and lends his name to a specific subtype of the schizoid.

A paragraph later, Kretschmer identifies the schizoid as equivalent to Bleuler’s autism: “So sind schizoide Menschen. *Autismus* nennt es *Bleuler*. Das In-sich-hineinleben.”⁵³ As for Bleuler, autism is the concept that establishes an inner-outer dimensionality to schizophrenic or schizoid existence, by allowing the “inner life” to come into its own. This is dramatically

50. *Ibid.*, 128.

51. *Ibid.*, 128–128n.

52. See Martin Priwitzer, *Ernst Kretschmer und das Wahnproblem* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2007), 7ff.

53. Kretschmer, *Körperbau und Charakter*, 129.

rendered in the image of the forbidding Roman villa and the—mysterious, possibly perverse—festivities within.⁵⁴ In Kretschmer, unlike Bleuler, the autistic inner life is not to be deciphered with the aid of psychoanalytic associations. But the hermeneutic problem autism poses is similar, in the sense that an exterior “like a question mark” relates, by laws as yet unknown, to an interior possibly rich in significance, possibly empty and dark: even the inner life “kann ein Nichts sein, das schwarze, hohläugige Nichts.”

We simply do not know: a barrier or shadow stands before us. Kretschmer is less interested in translating the logic of autism than in the darkness that remains unilluminated:

Man kann nicht wissen, was sie fühlen; manchmal wissen sie es selbst nicht; oder nur unbestimmt, drei Sachen gleichzeitig verschwommen und doch gefühlsstark ineinander, durcheinander, in einer geahnten mystischen Beziehung; oder in ein eigensinniges Schema das Innigste und das Gemeinste mit Zahlen und Nummern zusammengezwängt. Was sie aber fühlen, ob es eine Banalität, eine Schrulle, eine Gemeinheit oder ein Märchenschatz ist, das ist für niemand—als für sie allein.⁵⁵

One thing we *can* glean from this depiction is that within Kretschmer’s schizoid-autistic, there was ample room for variation in the imagined contents of autistic experience: mysticism and mathematics, “das Innigste und das Gemeinste mit Zahlen und Nummern zusammengezwängt.” Elsewhere we are introduced to a schizoid family group, a “ganze Sippe von Pedanten und soliden, gewissenhaften Sparern, unet durchs Leben zuckenden Verstimmten, Erfindern, Sinnierern in ihrer menschenscheuen zarten Ängstlichkeit, ihren Mißtrauen, ihrer Schweigsamkeit, ihrer mürrisch abweisenden Menschenfeindschaft.”⁵⁶ Gruesome criminals and

54. One is put in mind of Gilbert Osmond’s Palazzo Roccanera in Henry James’s *Portrait of a Lady*, “a dark and massive structure overlooking a sunny *piazzetta* ... which had frescoes by Caravaggio in the *piano nobile* and a row of mutilated statues and dusty urns in the wide, nobly-arched loggia overhanging the damp court where a fountain gushed out of a mossy niche”; and where, in some inner chamber, Osmond’s sunny and angelic ward Pansy is “immured.” The symbolism of the castle is the first “evil omen” of the novel’s slowly revealed tragedy of temperaments, which divide themselves very much in alignment with Kretschmer’s schizoid and cycloid. Henry James, *The Portrait of a Lady* (New York: Modern Library, 1966), 363–364.

55. Kretschmer, *Körperbau und Charakter*, 129.

56. *Ibid.*, 109.

sensitive poets, elsewhere, mark out some of the wide boundaries of schizoid existence.

The generalizable formula for the diversity of the content of schizoid psychic life is Kretschmer's famous "psychaesthetische Proportion." This proposes that any schizoid individual is positioned somewhere on a spectrum of feeling-tones running from "überempfindlich" (hypersensitive) to "kühl" (cool). However, in a crucial twist, the most typical schizoids are "nicht entweder überempfindlich oder kühl, sondern ... überempfindlich und kühl zugleich."⁵⁷ This diversity of schizoid character traits should be considered in light of what we outlined above as one of the general trajectories in the discourse of autism between Bleuler and Asperger: the "polarity switch" from an autism characterized mainly by *irrational* thoughts and behaviors to one primarily identified with the *hyperrational*. Within this broad trajectory, Kretschmer holds an almost perfect "middle" position—or rather, his schizoid comes with a concept of autism easily broad enough to take in both irrational and hyperrational forms. The two could be said to mingle freely here in the most expansive matrix of "autistic" sub-types. Bleuler's cases—who were, as we recall, schizophrenic and, in his view, "autistic" insofar as *affect* had commandeered their psyches, eliminating the capacity for objectivity—border on Kretschmer's schizoid on one side; while on the other side we might locate, in Kretschmer's "Pedanten und soliden, gewissenhaften Sparern," for instance, cases that could come under the rubric of Asperger syndrome—insofar as they seem confined within narrow limits of rationality and calculation, unconcerned with or impervious to human companions and the emotional life.

There is, in fact, a suggestion—though no more than a suggestion—that Kretschmer took note of more or less the population that, later, would form the basis for Asperger's description of his "autistic psychopath," the modern "Aspie." Describing them requires a uniquely inventive

57. Ibid., 132.

formulation, drawing on the category of the “post-psychotic personality” that was quite prominent in schizophrenia-related discourse in the wake of Bleuler. “Wir finden manchmal Schizoide,” Kretschmer recounts,

die so aussehen, wie wenn sie gleichsam schon vor der Geburt eine schizophrene Psychose durchgemacht hätten, die von Kindheit auf schon so schwachsinnig, störrisch, verschroben, feindselig und untraktabel sind, wie es die meisten schizoiden Menschen erst später werden, wenn sie schwere Psychosen hinter sich haben. Der angeborene antisoziale Schwachsinn dieser schizoiden Färbung kann durch katatonische Schübe im späteren Lebensalter seine sichere Zugehörigkeit zum schizophrenen Formkreis verraten.⁵⁸

The infantile schizoid, in other words, is *like* a post-psychotic person, but from birth, as if the psychosis had been lived through while this particular soul was still awaiting a body.⁵⁹ This is all Kretschmer has to say about this specific variant—but allowing for the figurative nature of the language, there is nothing in these two sentences that Asperger would seriously object to if applied to his patients. And what here agrees with Asperger is not inconsiderable: the singling out of children who have the condition from birth (or a young age); the choice of the words “störrisch, verschroben ... untraktabel”; the phrase “antisoziale[r] Schwachsinn,” which captures a certain view of modern autism rather masterfully; finally, the idea that, while not schizophrenic, these patients have a “schizoide[] Färbung” that attaches them to the “schizophrenen Formkreis” as staked out by Bleuler. (Asperger too will explicitly enclose his autistics within the qualitative parameters of Bleuler’s schizophrenia.)

58. Ibid., 130–131.

59. A similar formulation is used by Walter Benjamin to describe the characters populating the writings of Robert Walser (himself a person who has been posthumously diagnosed—with much confidence, if questionable relevance—as having Asperger Syndrome): “Es sind Figuren, die den Wahnsinn *hinter sich haben* [emphasis added] und darum von einer so zerreißen, so ganz unmenschlichen, unbeirraren Oberflächlichkeit bleiben. Will man das Beglückende und Unheimliche, das an ihnen ist, mit einem Worte nennen, so darf man sagen: *sie sind alle geheilt*.” Walter Benjamin, “Robert Walser,” in *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 2, part 1 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1980): 327. Another of Benjamin’s turns of phrases that would be at home in Kretschmer comes just before, when he says that these same figures “kommen aus der Nacht, wo sie am schwärzesten ist, einer venezianischen, wenn man will, von dürftigen Lampions der Hoffnung erhellten, mit etwas Festganz im Auge, aber verstört und zum Weinen traurig” (ibid., 326–327).

Kretschmer's schizoid, in sum, generalizes Bleuler's conception of autism into a form of experience of improbable breadth. It represents the concept of autism at the highest ebb of its historical trajectory: as a truly general concept of the self in its interiority and as the heightened experience of exceptional personalities, whether heroic, artistic, or insane. It is a consummately *formal* concept, threatening to slide into substituting for the concept of form itself: as we saw, the schizoid is the *strongly formed* personality, by comparison with which the normal type appears practically *formless*. The schizoid-autistic is thus a particular form that also stands in for form *tout court*, a paradigm object of morphological science.

Kretschmer's schizoid-autistic type is the forerunner of what Binswanger calls a *Gestalt des Bewusstseins* and Asperger a *durchorganisierende Idee des Menschen*: that is, a human essence that has an important property of matter—being formed, shaped—without actually being anything concrete. The specificity of the type consists in its *structure*, or at least the *idea* of its structure, since it does not have a physical structure that could be, say, drawn on a page. Such a structure of experience has the subtle nature of something that is not material enough to be *seen* (*gesehen*), but is yet sufficiently concrete and “given” that it *can be intuited* (*geschaut*). Hence it has the properties of a phenomenological object. This brings us to the next great phase in holistic psychiatry, the phenomenological movement, which (at least in the psychiatric context) was one of the manifestations of holism more generally. It was moreover wholly centered on autism as its exemplary problem.

Vera Strasser-Eppelbaum: a phenomenological original

The course of what would be called “phenomenological psychiatry” was determined by Ludwig

Binswanger and Eugène Minkowski; but for a prescient and wholly original anticipation of it we must mention the almost entirely forgotten Vera Strasser-Eppelbaum. A sometime sculptor, Dadaist, and Russian revolutionary, Strasser (who would eventually drop her original family name, Eppelbaum) completed her doctorate in 1911 under Bleuler at the Burghölzli. She was in Zurich concurrently with Binswanger, but despite the similarities in their work there was minimal contact between the two. (In response to her inquiry, Binswanger informed Strasser that she was free to attend “[n]ur öffentliche Sitzungen” of the Zurich group of the International Psychoanalytic Association.) It appears that, whether for their passionate socialism or their adherence to Alfred Adler (the two being, moreover, largely concomitant), Vera and her husband Charlot Strasser were marginalized in both psychiatric and psychoanalytic circles; but they had extensive contact with bohemian society in Zurich.⁶⁰

In 1915 Strasser-Eppelbaum published a short article on “Das autistische Denken in der Dementia praecox.” There, in the course of a few pages, Strasser executes with exceptional clarity the two coordinated moves that mark out the pattern we are tracing in this chapter—and does so before any other author. One of these moves, we recall, is to reject the mechanist, “natural-scientific” methods of psychiatry in favor of a holistic framework and an explicitly theorized intuitive gaze as essential for the proper knowledge of psychotic states. The other is to raise autism specifically to the level of the “primary disturbance,” to fix upon it as the privileged example or leading characteristic of such states. In both respects, Strasser-Eppelbaum anticipates Binswanger by seven years. Roughly contemporary with Karl Jaspers, who is often cited as a forerunner of phenomenological psychiatry, Strasser-Eppelbaum goes significantly further in the direction of full-fledged phenomenology, and thereby stakes her claim to being the first

60. See Annatina Wieser, “Zur frühen Psychoanalyse in Zürich” (dissertation, University of Zurich, 2001), 196.

phenomenological psychiatrist. Strasser-Eppelbaum does not draw on Husserl or the official vocabulary of academic phenomenology; but she elaborates, in her own terms, a view extremely similar to Binswanger's.

Bleuler had examined autism in *Dementia praecox* under the rubric of a "secondary symptom." That is to say, it was something that could be observed by a clinical gaze and interpreted by a clinician's empathetic understanding, but it was not the underlying cause of the disturbance, being instead the effect of primary processes occurring on the physiological level. Departing from an associationist concept of the mind-brain, Bleuler considered the primary physiological disturbances in dementia praecox to consist in the "loosening of associations," the breakdown of the elementary fabric of thought. Further psychological symptoms such as the autistic withdrawal from reality were then understood as consequences of this primary dissociation, subject to mitigating factors in the individual's circumstances and psychical temper; hence their "secondary" status.

The central device of Strasser-Eppelbaum's 1915 paper is to switch autism from a secondary to a "primary symptom." This sounds modest but carries huge implications. It is more accurately perhaps a change from the status of symptom in general to something else. This something else is what later phenomenologists will call a "structure of consciousness" or "way of being in the world." Strasser-Eppelbaum, for her part, calls autism "das Resultat der vollen, ausgiebigen Reaktion eines Menschen auf das ganze Weltempfinden."⁶¹ By this she means to relocate attention from the supposed *mechanisms* of abnormal psychical phenomena to the level of *experience*: the change in consciousness autism represents must be understood on the basis of the subject's experience of it, which has the character of a *global* alteration, a change at the level

61. Vera Strasser-Eppelbaum, "Das autistische Denken in der Dementia praecox," *Zeitschrift für die gesamte Neurologie und Psychiatrie* (1915): 79, original emphasis removed.

of the constituted *whole*. The operative terms *Mensch* and *Welt* thus relocate psychological tension and conflict from the elemental level of brain-mind units to the plane of life-experience: at the root of psychosis stands the entire situation of a fully constituted subject in relation to its environment. That is not to say that the overall conflict between subject and environment *causes*, in a retroactive or psychosomatic sense, whatever elementary logical or physiological disturbances are observed in schizophrenia. Rather, autism has moved from the causal plane to a different plane of understanding, where what matters is not the order of (physical or psychological) causation but that of a pure understanding and “unfolding” of the phenomenon of madness—a phenomenological explanation. Autism is now *the* primary, the first-order concept, in the phenomenology of psychosis, “das veränderte gesamte Ich ... ihre manifest gewordene, psychische Grundkonstruktion.”⁶²

Such an entity as this autistic psyche can only be perceived, understood, and described through the use of intuition, Strasser-Eppelbaum explains—“eine Fähigkeit, deren Wesen sich nicht in Worte fassen läßt,”⁶³ by which autistic being is grasped “als Ganzes,” “in seinen Gesamtzusammenhängen von innen aus.”⁶⁴ Intuition thus implies *getting inside of* the intuited object and returning, as it were, with findings from the interior. Continuing in this manner, Strasser explains that in order to intuit autism

muß man sich in eine besondere Art des logischen Denkens hineinfühlen. Man muß ein logisches Denken absolut subjektiver Qualität, eine sozusagen *subjektive Logik* zu bauen versuchen. Man sollte ein Individuum konstruieren können, das für sich eine Vielheit und eine Einheit, außerhalb von Raum und Zeit ist, und als solches vielleicht seinem konstitutionell vorgebauten Lebensplan mit *subjektiver Zweckmäßigkeit* folgt.⁶⁵

The subjective logic of the autistic largely replaces, for Strasser-Eppelbaum, Bleuler’s

62. Ibid.

63. Ibid., 71–72.

64. Ibid., 70.

65. Ibid., 72.

complicated apparatus of associations, affectivity, and emotionally laden “complexes” as the posited explanation for the manifest qualities of the psychotic. But it leads to the same result— “[d]ie *Abwendung vom Realen*,” which, for Strasser-Eppelbaum as for Bleuler, is called “autism.”⁶⁶

To intuit autism according to Strasser-Eppelbaum’s method is thus to enter into another subjectivity, one whose “subjective logic” is fully self-sufficient and bears no relation to external reality. This leads to the paradoxical conclusion that in order to *fully* intuit—that is to say, inhabit—the autistic, the investigator herself would have to abandon her connection to reality. Without herself drawing out its paradoxical implications, Strasser-Eppelbaum states as much:

In diesem Spezialfalle ist Intuition nur dann möglich, wenn wir versuchen, uns dem zu Untersuchenden unter *Abwendung von der Realität*, von der Außenwelt, zu nähern. So stoßen wir uns nicht an dem Unnatürlichen, an dem, was uns Normalen oft so bizar und unlogisch erscheint, wenn wir die Verhältnisse auf uns selbst beziehen. Wir verstehen doch einen anderen nur dann, wenn wir uns selbst in die nämliche Lage versetzen können.⁶⁷

If to intuit is to become-like, then in order to intuit the essence of autism, we have to adopt something very like an “autistic” attitude; and this, given the specific nature of autism as an attitude of radical subjectivity, an “*Abwendung von der Realität*,” raises the question: what, then, becomes of the possibility of *objective* intuition? What can the investigator actually say about the autistic psyche that will do justice both to the singular nature of that psyche and to the requirements of scientific objectivity, that is, intelligibility?

Potentially even more worrisome is the question: if we can find no other terms in which to describe the attitude taken up by the clinical observer of autism than those same terms used to describe the essence of autism itself, what of the very possibility of such a “phenomenological”

66. *Ibid.*, 79.

67. *Ibid.*, 72 (emphasis in original).

method in psychopathology? None of these questions is acknowledged by Strasser-Eppelbaum. But in our next author, Binswanger, they acquire somewhat more urgency, and at least a makeshift solution is tentatively found.

Ludwig Binswanger, part one: autism as phenomenology

Ludwig Binswanger, descendant of a longstanding tribe of Swiss alienists, joined so many others of his generation at the psychiatric finishing school that was the Burghölzli asylum under the direction of Bleuler. His early influences were Bleuler and Freud; but a decisive impulse came with his reading of Edmund Husserl, the founding father of phenomenology. Binswanger's claim to fame is as the founder of phenomenological psychiatry, the movement to incorporate the pure philosophical thought of Husserl, and later of Heidegger, into psychiatry and psychopathology as applied fields. Binswanger always preferred the term "psychological phenomenology," giving priority to the latter term, at least until he adopted the name that has stuck to him ever since—*Daseinsanalyse*.

Binswanger must also have been well read in the scientific theories of holism broadly speaking, because what he so thoroughly clothes in a rigorous Husserlian vocabulary is often little more than an impassioned statement of holist ideas in a psychopathological context. So when Binswanger, addressing a congress of psychiatrists in 1922 on the ostensible subject of phenomenology, alluded to the "Theorienmüdigkeit" afflicting most branches of science at the time and praised the "Rückkehr zur Anschauung, Beiseiteschiebung der Theorien" that had provided biology in particular with a way forward,⁶⁸ many in his audience would have detected his reference to the famous holist biologist Jakob Johann von Uexküll. "Biology is in its essence

68. Ludwig Binswanger, "Über Phänomenologie," *Ausgewählte Vorträge und Aufsätze*, vol. 1 (Bern: Francke, 1947): 13–49, at 24.

‘Anschauung,’” Uexküll himself had written. “I seek only to make the plan of the animal *anschaulich*.”⁶⁹ Binswanger, for his part, will mobilize the kind of intuitive gaze that *Anschauung* denotes here in service of his analogous project of making evident the plan or structure of consciousness, what he calls “Arten oder Gestalten des Bewusstseins,”⁷⁰ bringing these “mit der phänomenologischen Methode zunächst klar zur anschaulichen Kenntnis.”⁷¹

The way Binswanger proceeds to sketch out a program for phenomenological psychiatry constitutes the most perfect example we will see of the general pattern with which this chapter is concerned: an extended critique of the Bleulerian paradigm, an idealized evocation of the holist alternative, and an “example” of the application of the holist method to the problem of—autism. Binswanger’s own argumentation forces the question: is autism just *one* “Art oder Gestalt des Bewusstseins” among others; or is it in some sense the general structure of consciousness itself?

Binswanger begins with a typical holist critique of empirical science. The “Naturforscher” or natural scientist of the nineteenth-century kind is one by whom “das wahrgenommene körperliche oder seelische Ding, der wahrgenommene Vorgang, begrifflich in seine Eigenschaften, Elemente oder Funktionen zerlegt wird,” who “hält ein Objekt dann für naturwissenschaftlich erfasst, wenn es aus der Summe seiner Eigenschaften, Elemente oder Funktionen begriffen oder erklärt werden kann.”⁷² If you are one of these, as Binswanger tells his audience, and are confronted with an asylum patient whose utterance is indecipherable, bizarre,

so können Sie Ihr Augenmerk auf den Wortlaut dieses Satzes richten und darüber das *Urteil* fällen, dass es sich hier um eine bizarre oder verschrobene Redeweise handle, und Sie können dieses Urteil wieder zur Grundlage eines *Schlusses* machen, des Inhalts, dass

69. Quoted in Harrington, *Reenchanted Science*, 40.

70. Binswanger, “Über Phänomenologie,” 21.

71. *Ibid.*, 40-41.

72. *Ibid.*, 14.

der Kranke an Schizophrenie leide. Der *Begriff* “bizarre Redeweise” wird so der Krankheitsgattung Schizophrenie logisch untergeordnet; mit anderen Worten Sie haben einen Subsumtionsschluss vollzogen, einen bestimmten Akt des *Denkens*.⁷³

Binswanger himself highlights all of the terms in this sequence that form a word-group around the idea of *thinking*—a process incorporating all of the “correct” rules of logic. One will, by these means, eventually arrive at an “explanatory” theory of schizophrenia—which, however, consists merely of a scholastic maze of hair-splitting concepts arrayed in an abstract hierarchy.

“Sie hätten,” in Binswanger’s hypothetical,

ausser Wahnideen optische, akustische, haptische Halluzinationen, leibhaftige Bewusstheiten, schizophrene Bedeutungserlebnisse, traumartige Bewusstseinszustände usw. “entdeckt.” Immer haben Sie das Abstrahierte zu neuen Ganzheiten (Begriffen) zusammengefasst und haben Sie auf diesen Begriffen Urteile und Schlüsse aufgebaut, die Sie zu Theorien zum Zwecke ihrer Erklärung ausbauen werden.

Anders der psychopathologische *Phänomenologe!*⁷⁴

The psychopathological phenomenologist—Binswanger’s ideal, intuitive investigator—takes a stance that outwardly differs little from that of the natural scientist: it is a position of careful, dedicated observation of the phenomena.

The difference is a matter of how the observer is said to relate to and handle the object, how the interface between them is understood. In the case of the natural scientist, this is an act of *Zerlegung*, a “cutting up” or “dismantling” of the object on the part of the observer in order to recombine its elements on the theoretical, conceptual, linguistic-rational plane. The phenomenologist, by contrast, “vermeidet ... alle *indirekten* sprachlichen und begrifflichen Fixierungen und Zerlegungen seines Untersuchungsobjektes,”⁷⁵ by way of “einer andern Art direkter oder primärer Kenntnisnahme,” of which “die Naturwissenschaft nichts [weiss].”⁷⁶

73. Ibid., 35, emphasis in original.

74. Ibid., 36, emphasis in original.

75. Ibid., 25.

76. Ibid., 14.

The phenomenologist, as well as all “die echten Künstler,” are “Menschen, die wissen, dass es ... ausser der begrifflichen Zerlegung in einzelne Elemente noch ein anderes, ursprünglicheres und totaleres geistiges Erfassen [gibt],”⁷⁷ a mode of “grasping” things by way of the spirit which however, unlike the natural scientist’s, does not involve disturbing their “original” totality or wholeness. Such immediate and direct knowledge of things is predicated on a corresponding modality of perception, on the fact “dass es ausser der sinnlichen Wahrnehmung noch eine andere Art unmittelbarer, direkter Kenntnissnahme oder Erfahrung von etwas gibt.”⁷⁸

This mode of perception is Binswanger’s *Anschauung*, which

bedeutet hier ... wie immer wieder hervorzuheben ist, gerade nicht sinnliche, etwa visuelle *Anschauung*, betrifft ... nicht die unmittelbaren Wahrnehmungsinhalte der äusseren Sinne, auch nicht diejenigen des inneren Sinns ... sondern *Anschaulichkeit* steht hier vor allem im Gegensatz zur *Mittelbarkeit*, zur Indirektheit des unanschaulichen oder anschauungsleeren *Denkens*. Der Terminus technicus *Husserls* heisst, im Gegensatz zur sinnlichen *Anschauung*, *kategoriale Anschauung*, vor allem aber *Wesensschau* oder (phänomenologische) *Intuition*.⁷⁹

Thus we come full circle from the critique of thinking—as fundamentally characterized by “mediacy” and “indirectness”—to the positing of an intuition defined “first of all in opposition” to those qualities, i.e., as immediate and direct, also as “full” in opposition to the “empty” (anschauungsleer) quality of rational thought. These are among the basic dichotomies asserted by all representatives of holism, a sensibility to which Binswanger owes far more than to his ostensible idol at this time, Husserl.

The first examples Binswanger provides of categorial intuition in practice are lifted from the realm of art and literature. Thus the painter Franz Marc, with his famous blue horses, “hat nicht einzelne Pferde gemalt, wie sie sinnfällig in der Natur herumlaufen, sondern das (hier nicht

77. Ibid., 15.

78. Ibid.

79. Ibid., 17.

näher zu beschreibende) *Wesen* des Pferdartigen, Pferdhaften”; while Van Gogh sees “in dem Baum nicht den einzelnen so und so beschaffenen Baum, sondern ein Drama; in dem jungen Korn nicht die einzelnen Halme, sondern ‘etwas unaussprechlich Reines und Sanftes,’ ‘das eine ähnliche Rührung erweckt wie z. B. der Ausdruck eines schlafenden Kindchens.’”⁸⁰ These qualities are the “Washeiten”⁸¹ of the respective objects—the “horseness of the horse,” as it were, or that quality “des ‘Reinen, Sanften, Rührenden’”⁸² that does not belong originally to either the wheat field or the sleeping child but which, from some higher sphere, finds its way into each. They are phenomenological essences for Binswanger insofar as they coincide with the objects that bear them but are *not identical* with them, nor are they the sum of the object’s properties, but forms or shapes of a higher order.

As a kind of recurring motto, “das Grundprinzip jeglicher Phänomenologie mit kurzen Worten aussprechend,” Binswanger quotes a line from Flaubert’s correspondence: “A force de regarder un caillou, un animal, un tableau, je me suis senti y entrer”—and then continues: “Also Betrachten, Schauen und nochmals Schauen, und als Resultat ein Hineinversetzt werden in den angeschauten (unbelebten oder belebten Natur- oder Kunst-) Gegenstand.”⁸³ When it comes to psychopathological investigations, Binswanger models his own attitude explicitly on Marc’s or Flaubert’s, going so far as to quote the latter’s words a second time to capture the way in which the phenomenologist is to listen to a patient:

Während der deskriptiv vorgehende Psychopathologe das abnorme seelische Geschehen in natürliche Klassen, Gattungen und Arten einteilt ... sucht der psychopathologische Phänomenologe immer und immer wieder das mit den Worten Gemeinte sich zu vergegenwärtigen, von dem Wortlaut und seiner Bedeutung sich dem Gegenstand, der Sache, dem Erlebnis zuzuwenden, auf das die Wortbedeutung hinweist. Mit anderen

80. *Ibid.*, 15.

81. “Quiddities”; *ibid.*, 19.

82. *Ibid.*

83. *Ibid.*, 15. Flaubert’s French reads: “When I look at a stone, an animal, a picture, I feel myself enter into it.”

Worten, er sucht sich in die Wortbedeutungen einzuleben, statt Urteile aus den Wortbegriffen zu ziehen Auch hier heisst es: “A force de regarder l’objet se sentir y entrer!”⁸⁴

This is the point at which Strasser-Eppelbaum had already arrived: the need for intuition to enter into and inhabit the structure of experience under investigation. And just like Strasser-Eppelbaum (though without acknowledgment of her work), Binswanger—once he turns from aesthetic objects to psychological structures—seizes on autism as the object most suited to investigation by intuitive means.

“Führt uns unser Beispiel,” Binswanger asks—the example, that is, of a patient whose utterances, in classic schizophrenic or autistic fashion, appear highly metaphorized, but whose metaphors are private and opaque, lending his speech a veneer of incomprehensibility—“nicht auf Schritt und Tritt in die Welt hinein, für die wir das Wort Autismus gebrauchen? Und sind wir nicht noch ganz ausserstande, diese Welt zu *sehen*, unmittelbar wahrzunehmen?”⁸⁵ This reflects the basic difference between Bleuler’s approach and Binswanger’s: where the former held that an opaquely metaphorical utterance could be unlocked by discovering what personal meaning its terms had in relation to the patient’s life experience, the latter holds that such deciphering is a mere distraction from the real task, which is the pursuit of “*unmittelbare* Kenntnis [des Autismus].”⁸⁶ This would be equivalent to the ability to simply inhabit the literal meaning of the deranged expressions, to re-experience them for ourselves.

The approaching danger that already announces itself here is that of a confusion between observer and observed, as hinted at also in Strasser-Eppelbaum’s realization that, in order to understand the autistic person in a holistic sense, it might be necessary to adopt an autistic

84. Ibid., 36–37.

85. Ibid., 39.

86. Ibid.; emphasis in original.

attitude on one's own part. Binswanger, while never acknowledging it, goes so far as to interweave the patient's opaque metaphors *into his own theoretical remarks on those very metaphors*, such as when he explains that the relation between expression and inner state must be understood "symbolically" or "mittels möglichst materialer Angleichung, die den Empfindungen die nötige Resonanz gibt."⁸⁷ (Both of these quotations are apparently of the patient himself, but are placed seamlessly into the midst of Binswanger's account of the phenomenological method.) Generally speaking, the utterances of madness are here taken no longer as the unreliable speech of a mad person, but as utterly trustworthy accountings of the experience of madness. This experience, however, comes more and more to resemble that of the phenomenologist.

The conflation of observer and observed comes to a head in Binswanger's first attempt to establish the essence of autism, which he puts in terms of

qualitativen und quantitativen Veränderungen der Akte der kategorialen Anschauung, der Intuition im weitesten Sinne, also des primären oder unmittelbaren Innewerdens oder Kenntnisnehmens der ästhetischen, logischen, ethischen, metaphysischen und religiösen Wesen und Werte."⁸⁸

Binswanger himself notes that this means letting "acts of categorial intuition" play "eine *zweifache Rolle*":

eine auf seiten des Forschers: der Forscher erfasst in ihnen die phänomenologisch gereinigten psychopathologischen Wesensbegriffe; die andere auf seiten des Forschungsobjektes: die krankhaft veränderten kategorialen Anschauungsakte werden untersucht.⁸⁹

What he does not acknowledge is that there is as yet no criterion on which to distinguish the two kinds of categorial intuition in question—or rather what are described as two instances of the *alteration* of categorial intuitions. In the one case these are clearly stated to be "krankhaft

87. Ibid., 38.

88. Ibid., 43.

89. Ibid.; emphasis in original.

verändert”—though exactly what “krankhaft” means here is unclear, as Binswanger immediately goes on to state that it is less a question of “einem Verlust oder einer Herabsetzung” than of “einer qualitativen Verschiedenheit, einem Anderssein.”⁹⁰ And at this point we recall that those acts of categorial intuition Binswanger attributes to the phenomenological investigator are likewise *changed* or *othered* from the ordinary. They were in fact originally introduced as a mark of differentiation between people: not everyone sees, or intuits, the way the artist or the phenomenologist does. “Nun gibt es aber Menschen”—this is how Binswanger put it—“die wissen, dass es ausser der sinnlichen Wahrnehmung *noch eine andere* Art unmittelbarer, direkter Kenntnisnahme oder Erfahrung von etwas gibt.”⁹¹ The *otherness* of this vision is exemplified by Franz Marc’s decision to make his horses blue. “Er schlägt damit ... der Natur ins Gesicht, und trotzdem hat er etwas geschaut und zum Ausdruck gebracht ... nämlich das eigentliche ‘Wesen’ des Pferdes.”⁹² How is this “other” seeing, replete with anti-natural attributes and restricted to a small group of people, to be distinguished from the “qualitativen und quantitativen Veränderungen der Akte der kategorialen Anschauung” which define the autistic attitude? The autistic and the phenomenologist have now been described in precisely the same terms.

The problem persists decades later, in one of Binswanger’s latest works, *Schizophrenie*, which represents more or less his final statement on the topic that had preoccupied him since his first encounter with phenomenology—the nature of the autistic difference. One of the five cases discussed there, “Ilse,” is characterized, partly using language borrowed from Gaston Bachelard, by “le besoin de pénétrer à l’intérieur des êtres⁹³ ... *direkt* ins Innere der Mitmenschen

90. Ibid.

91. Ibid., 15.

92. Ibid.

93. “the need to penetrate into the interior of beings” (translation SHT).

einzudringen, zu wissen, ‘was *in Euch* ist’⁹⁴: not only does the French recall to us the very similar words of Flaubert Binswanger quoted in 1922, but the motif is identical. “Ilse is autistic” could be seamlessly replaced with “Ilse is a phenomenologist.”

Is the phenomenologist seeing autistically? The best answer we can give is perhaps simply that at this point in his thinking, Binswanger lacks criteria by which to clearly differentiate the intuitive gaze from the experience of the autistic; to describe either, he reaches for the same language.

Binswanger, part two: autism as death

Binswanger lifts the veil of autism, only to see—himself. But he recoils from his own image there. It prompts him to make one further move in an attempt to securely establish the *otherness* of the autistic. So he calls us back from what had appeared to be a stopping place, namely the definition of the autistic as a “difference in the acts of categorial intuition”:

Doch zurück zur Phänomenologie des Autismus! Auch mit der Haltung, die die schizophrene Person der Welt der Werte gegenüber einnimmt, ist der Autismus noch nicht phänomenologisch getroffen. Die autistische Person selbst gilt es in das geistige Auge zu bekommen, und das gelingt nur durch einen *Rückgang* von *all* den erwähnten Phänomenen auf das Grundphänomen “autistische Person.”⁹⁵

To define this *Grundphänomen*, Binswanger now turns to those qualities identified with the “natural-scientific attitude.” Autism becomes explicitly a figure for the opposite of holism, for everything Binswanger degrades and deplors in the tradition of science; an equivalent to the *Zerlegung* of experience; ultimately a negative figure of thinking itself in its purported toxicity to life.

94. Ludwig Binswanger, *Schizophrenie* (Pfullingen: Neske, 1957), 38, emphasis in original.

95. Binswanger, “Über Phänomenologie,” 44.

The only hint of this new shift given in the 1922 lecture is a vague and allusive gesture on which Binswanger concludes—saying, when it comes to the phenomenological targeting of the “Grundphänomen ‘autistische Person,’” that “[h]ier begegnet sich die Phänomenologie mit anderen modernen Strömungen in der allgemeinen Psychologie, insbesondere mit dem Intuitionismus *Bergsons* und der Rekonstruktionspsychologie *Natorps*,”⁹⁶ without explaining in what regard or to what end. However, with the help of Binswanger’s book-length *Einführung in die Probleme der allgemeinen Psychologie*, published in the same year 1922, a good deal can be filled in behind these two names.

The neo-Kantian philosopher of science Natorp and the fount of French “irrationalism” Bergson are perhaps not the first two names to be thought of in relation to each other. Binswanger, however, readily yokes them together in service of the mission that, in his interpretation, is also that of Husserlian phenomenology, and that we also recognize as the general problematic of holism: the detachment of an intuitive psychology, a “subjectivizing science” (*subjektivierende Wissenschaft*), from any vestige of “objectivizing” (*objektivierende*) natural science tainted by the presence of “thinking.” In a key passage in his *Einführung*, Binswanger quotes Natorp to the effect that the basic unit of natural-scientific psychology—the idea (*Vorstellung*)—is nothing but the frozen trace of a movement of the soul that continually escapes our attempts to pin it down, a snapshot of a moment that not only is no more but that in fact *never was* until a deliberate intervention, an act of abstraction, fixed it as such. The movement of the soul is manifest in what Natorp refers to as *Streben*, the exponent of the truly *active* character of consciousness; *Vorstellung*, on the other hand, is something already completed, hence accessible only in retrospect: “Streben allein ist actio, Vorstellung ist immer

96. *Ibid.*, 44–45.

schon actum.”⁹⁷ Our attachment to the notion of the idea (Vorstellung) as a real part of mental life is a correlate of the prestige we accord—unduly, in Binswanger’s estimation—to the “principles of thinking” (Prinzipien des Denkens). All of this shields us from what Binswanger considers the proper conception of experience as inseparable, ungraspable dynamic flow.

Auf diese Weise ist es ganz ausgeschlossen, zu einem Begriff des Bewußtseinsstroms, des Strömens, Fließens, der *erlebten* Dauer zu gelangen, da es im *Wesen* der Prinzipien des Denkens liegt, Stillstände eintreten zu lassen, zu trennen und zu scheiden und auf das Abgetrennte den “Finger zu legen.” Gerade umgekehrt geht der Psychologe vor: das “ungerufene von selbst ins Gemüt Kommen,” das “unabsichtlich Dichtende,” das Fließende, werdende, fesselt sein Interesse, die Prinzipien des Denkens kommen bei ihm nicht nur hintennach; er sucht sie vielmehr auszuschalten, rückgängig zu machen, umzukehren.⁹⁸

To “turn off” and reverse the principles of thinking, to surrender to the stream of consciousness: this is the striving in which Binswanger repeatedly enlists the unlikely triumvirate of Natorp, Bergson, and Husserl. Again and again the mantra is repeated: “objectivity”—isolating an object, distinguishing it from others, abstracting and dismantling the originary fullness of consciousness—is death. In words of Natorp’s: “Die Zerlegung wäre wie die Sektion des Leichnams des Bewußtseins; Bewußtsein aber bedeutet Leben, d. h. durchgängige Wechselbeziehung.”⁹⁹

All this time, Binswanger has ostensibly been talking about method: “objectivity” as the method of the old natural science, “subjectivity” and “intuition” as its new, holistic remedies. The natural scientist stands at a distance from the world, drily cutting it up into slices in order to avoid dealing with the overwhelming force of its appearances in their raw form. The phenomenologist—at least, Binswanger’s phenomenologist, who has less in common with the

97. Ludwig Binswanger, *Einführung in die Probleme der allgemeinen Psychologie* (Berlin: Springer, 1922), 97.

98. *Ibid.*, 222, emphasis in original.

99. Quoted *ibid.*, 92.

scholastic Husserl than with other holists and *Lebensphilosophen*—embraces raw nature as a whole, learns to move with it, since it is above all in constant motion and flux.

Here we finally see clearly that, when talking about scientific method, Binswanger is in fact also already talking about what would be considered the *objects* of science, or rather about one object in particular. Autism, first presented as a phenomenon to be discovered and explored *by means of* the phenomenological method, comes to the fore in the way it does in Binswanger partly because it is a metonym for the methodological discussion he is simultaneously carrying on. The consequences are still working themselves out in Binswanger’s late writings. Consider that, having characterized the natural-scientific method as introducing artificial *Stillstände* into the flow of nature, and the objective processes of *thinking* as interrupting and deadening the unstoppable *movement* of experience—having done this in the *Einführung* of 1922, Binswanger will later, in a text dated 1956, name as the essential characteristic of autistic experience the “‘Stillstand[]’ oder ‘An-ein-Ende-geraten[]’ seiner *eigentlichen* geschichtlichen *Bewegtheit*.”¹⁰⁰ Here Binswanger—using the tortured pseudo-Heideggerian style of his later years—appears to recognize, and actually to embrace, the very confusion between “method” and “object” that we are trying to get at here:

Wenn auch für uns “Bewegtheit der Existenz” natürlich nicht “Bewegtheit eines Vorhandenen” bedeutet, so lassen wir auch hier die apriorische oder “ontologische Aufklärung des ‘Lebenszusammenhanges,’ d. h. der spezifischen Erstreckung, Bewegtheit und Beharrlichkeit des Daseins” und damit “den Horizont der zeitlichen Verfassung dieses Daseins” im Hintergrund, uns beschränkend auf den Aufweis der verschiedenen Strukturen der *faktischen Abwandlung* jener Bewegtheit[.]¹⁰¹

In other words: the characteristic of movement, of being-in-motion, is repeated on what Binswanger, channeling Heidegger, regards as both the ontological and the ontic levels. The

100. Ludwig Binswanger, *Drei Formen missglückten Daseins* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1956), x, emphasis in original.

101. *Ibid.*, x–xi, emphasis in original. The quotations are from Heidegger’s *Sein und Zeit*.

recognition of such movement on the ontological level would be his understanding of the aims of pure phenomenology or “method.” On the ontic level, however, the same character of motion is present in really existing beings—persons—and the disruption of that *ontic* motion is what Binswanger posits at the heart of the autistic way of being in the world. If the holistic and the mechanistic “methods” represent motion and stillness, respectively, on the “ontological” level, their counterparts in the ontic realm of human subjectivity are, respectively, the healthy and the autistic attitudes.

By this late stage of his career, Binswanger has taken to referring to the healthy forms of Dasein simply as “love,” while the diseased forms still collectively pass under the name “autism.”¹⁰² In Bleuler’s psychoanalytically inflected system, autism, being a state of mind in which affect had gained the upper hand and governed thought by way of the patient’s erotic complexes, could be said to stand for an excess of love: Bleuler’s autism was, after all, a gloss on Freud’s *autoerotism*. Here, it is love’s utter deprivation.

With this concept of autism as stasis, as sterility, as the rigor mortis of the stream of consciousness, Binswanger arrives at the end point of the main arc described in this chapter: from Bleuler’s hyperaffective concept of autism to the hypoaffective, hyperrational guise it has worn up to the present day. Another phenomenological psychiatrist, Eugène Minkowski, from whom we quoted extensively in the chapter introduction, takes the same line as Binswanger and expresses in even starker and unambiguous terms the idea of autism as a “morbid geometrism”

102. By this later phase Binswanger does not use the term “autism” as much as before; but he claims as the overarching achievement of his life’s research “die durch die Daseinsanalyse möglich gewordene Auflösung des schizophrenen Kardinalsymptoms des *Autismus* in verschiedene Weisen des Daseins oder In-der-Welt-seins.” Binswanger, *Schizophrenie*, 26. Principal among these forms of Dasein are what Binswanger (borrowing, in each case, from previous authors) terms *Verstiegenheit*, *Verschrobenheit*, and *Manieriertheit*.

of the intellect, a loss of touch with the “irrational feeling of harmony” that is now assumed to sustain a person’s all-important *contact with reality*.

Both Asperger and Kanner, to whom we trace our modern description of the autistic syndrome, likewise theorized autism as a *disorder of contact*. We have already seen that Kanner—whom we will discuss in more depth in Chapter Four—built this into the title of his foundational autism paper, “Autistic Disturbances of Affective Contact.” With the qualifier “affective,” he moreover indicates that he is following what we have here presented as the holist line, whereby the relevant sort of “contact with reality” that humans have is affective in nature and serves primarily a social function, binding them first and foremost to other humans. Asperger, however, is different.

Asperger in and against the holist tradition

The theme in our presentation of texts by Kretschmer, Strasser-Eppelbaum, Binswanger, and (in the chapter introduction) Minkowski has been the juxtaposition of holism with autism: the most original contributions to the development of holist methods in psychopathology coincide, as a rule, with a predilection to study those phenomena considered under the name “autism,” to the practical exclusion of other topics. The juxtaposition is motivated by two factors: initially by the desire to evoke under autism the antitype of the ideal holist investigator, a figure for the pathological concentration of the sterile mechanist worldview holism abhorred; later, though, also by a growing realization that the deeper they pressed their intuition into the interior of this “autistic” attitude, the more their descriptions of what they found there came to resemble themselves. Thus far it has been Binswanger who went furthest along these lines.

Our final task in this chapter is to introduce one more author as the culmination of the dual movement linking autism and holism—the negative, and then the positive identification; antitype and type. This is Hans Asperger, now considered alongside Leo Kanner as the first doctor to identify and describe an autistic syndrome within the parameters that still hold today—i.e., as clearly distinct from schizophrenia, observable in early childhood, and manifesting certain qualitatively constant traits. These traits as currently understood—in terms of “mindblindness,” lack of empathy, or obsession with partial objects and rote tasks of memorization and classification—reflect the undiminished power of the image of the holist antitype. The autist still figures as an embodiment of the principles of mechanism or a “soulless” worldview, as evidenced by one of the most famous postwar autism case studies, Joey “the Mechanical Boy.”¹⁰³ Much of the popular image of autism today purports to be Asperger’s legacy (perhaps even more so than Kanner’s). But we understand very little about Asperger himself, his original conception of the autistic type, and his particular relationship with the holism that so pervaded his environment—and which has now faded into an invisible, though still very operative, background for our assumptions about autism.

One reason for our neglect of Asperger’s holist commitments is the unavailability in English of his main statement of scientific and methodological principles. When Uta Frith published her translation—still the only one existing—of Asperger’s fundamental 1944 paper on “‘Autistic Psychopaths’ in Childhood,” she omitted what she briefly dismissed as “a general and somewhat discursive introduction” that “consists of a discussion of various then current typologies, whose aim it was to categorise personalities in normal as well as pathological forms,” and “finishes with the suggestion that it is possible to overcome their limitations by using general

103. See Bruno Bettelheim, *The Empty Fortress* (New York: Free Press, 1967), 233–342.

descriptions as well as individual case studies.”¹⁰⁴ The summary terms thrown out here do no justice at all to what Asperger’s introductory text actually is: a fully thought-out, if paradoxical, meditation on holism in the human sciences and a statement of the fundamental beliefs framing his perception of autism, without which his clinical description of the autistic type—the description from which we claim to derive the accepted criteria for “Asperger Syndrome”—is not fully comprehensible.

The introduction to Asperger’s 1944 paper is a statement of holism fully in line with the others we have examined in this chapter; and the 1944 paper as a whole thus exhibits the structure laid out here as typical of the larger holist discourse of autism: a motivated interlinking of holist methodology and autism as a privileged example of a human “type.” But Asperger goes further than the authors we have already considered: sensitive to the paradoxes of simultaneous rejection of and identification with autism that dog the writings of, say, Binswanger, Asperger lays the groundwork for a conception of autism unburdened of this ideological dichotomy and free to express its positive attributes.

Hans Asperger is a thinker steeped in holism, who regards it as the very highest aim of science “zu einer *Typologie* zu gelangen, welche der Vielfalt des Lebens gerecht wird”—thus betraying simultaneously his belief in *life* as that for the sake of which we engage in the pursuit of knowledge, in the irreducibility or *un-analyzability* of life itself (against the tradition of *Naturwissenschaft*), and lastly in the *type* as the necessary theoretical vehicle of a life-oriented science. Asperger’s critique of the existing typological literature takes a fairly typical form, criticizing it for not having gone far enough in its valuation of the *whole* person, for having too

104. Frith, ed., *Autism and Asperger Syndrome*, 37n. (see Introduction, n. 18).

many lingering attributes of analytical Naturwissenschaft. First Asperger targets Kretschmer for being too “one-dimensional” in his system, based as it is around the schizoid-cycloid axis. But Asperger next dismisses the “multi-dimensional” typology of Kurt Schneider in no less vehement terms: even with a full range of types (“die hyperthymischen, depressiven, selbstunsicheren, fanatischen, geltungsbedürftigen,” etc. etc.¹⁰⁵), it is an injustice to label a person with any *single*, overriding characteristic such as these. Next up for critique is Paul Schröder, a prominent child psychiatrist and representative of the ideological stream of holism under the Nazi regime. (There will be more to say about Schröder in Chapter Three.) Schröder, like Asperger, condemns the insufficiency of Schneider’s typological system, but he fails to go far enough for Asperger in his proposed remedy, which is to grade each person on a multitude of different characteristics and arrive thus at a blended picture of the whole character. No—this is still too systematic; too willing to regard character traits as isolable, measurable quantities; insufficiently “plastisch und lebendig”¹⁰⁶: altogether too reminiscent of Naturwissenschaft.

Asperger demands a typology qualitatively different from any of these, one which “anstatt zu versuchen, von den nach einem System geordneten Teilen zum Ganzen zu kommen, umgekehrt von der als ganzer erfaßten Persönlichkeit zu den einzelnen Wesenszügen geht.”¹⁰⁷ In further accordance with an uncompromising holism, Asperger’s method “geht von der *Intuition* aus, von dem Versuch, das *Aufbauprinzip* der Persönlichkeit zu erfassen; wir suchen, die Züge aufzuzeigen, von denen aus die zu beurteilende Persönlichkeit *durchorganisiert* ist.”¹⁰⁸

At the end of his lengthy disquisition on holist method, Asperger announces the aim of his text: “Diese Arbeit hat es sich zum Ziel gesetzt, an einem Beispiel die Richtigkeit und

105. Asperger, “Die ‘Autistischen Psychopathen,’” 77.

106. *Ibid.*, 79.

107. *Ibid.*, 81.

108. *Ibid.*, 82.

Brauchbarkeit der oben entwickelten Gedanken zu erweisen.”¹⁰⁹ That *Beispiel* or example is, of course, the autistic type—what Asperger calls the “autistic psychopath” and what serves as the basis for our modern conception of “Asperger Syndrome” and thereby of much of the autism spectrum. What we take to be a clinical paper about a new syndrome is, in its author’s original conception, a defense of holist ideas by way of an example.

Of course, the “example” of autism here is no more a mere example than it was in any of the other authors we have read; it is just as integrally interwoven with Asperger’s statements on method. The end result, however, is different. Asperger’s autistic is not the negative objective correlate of his holist ideals. In fact, if we read closely Asperger’s statement of method, followed by key passages in his description of the autistic type, we can glimpse them coinciding to form a *positive* figure of productive knowledge, an image of the autistic as the ideal, *intuitive* scientist.

Asperger’s positive autism

Asperger’s opening paragraph sets up an elementary tension between two orders of experience already familiar to us from the authors examined above: that which is given to the senses in a pure and immediate way, and that which constitutes our coming to terms with such immediacy by way of its secondary elaboration through the understanding. The task of science, which is really that of *thinking* in general, is to bring some kind of order to bear on the manifold of sense impressions.

Ordnung und Erkenntnis des Aufbaues der Dinge ist eines der letzten Ziele der Wissenschaft. In der Fülle der Erscheinungen des Lebens, die voller Gegensätze sind, die mit verschwimmenden Grenzen in einander übergehen, sucht der denkende Mensch dadurch einen festen Standpunkt zu finden, daß er den einzelnen Erscheinungen einen Namen gibt, sie abgrenzt gegen die anderen Erscheinungen, Zusammenhänge, Ähnlichkeiten und Gegensätze feststellt, kurz, die Dinge in eine Ordnung, in ein System

109. *Ibid.*, 83.

bringt. Diese Arbeit ist eine wesentliche Voraussetzung des Erkennens.¹¹⁰

Science, thinking, or cognition is here introduced as a necessary mechanism for coping with a sensory envelope that in its raw state is overwhelming to the human mind—a swimming chaos, within which the toehold of rational knowledge appears as life-saving. This is a holism that is not allergic to thinking, but that rather acknowledges its necessity. Thinking—in other words, engaging in the activities of analysis, abstraction, conceptual naming, and so forth—will in fact prove to be the only way to do justice to the strictly unthinkable originary nature of experience. Asperger will take the *negative* image of thinking that appeared indispensable to holism and weave it back into a holism of a higher order.

The paradox in Asperger—his holding together the orders of immediacy and of reflection in a relation which is both conciliatory and contradictory—is redoubled upon the encounter of scientific knowledge with the exemplary object of knowledge that is *the human*. The human appears as a kind of object that carries with it something of the originary “fullness” of things, in the form of its *singularity*, even as it enters into the scope of scientific classification. In Asperger’s words (which follow directly upon the last-quoted passage):

Die Wissenschaft vom Menschen mußte ähnliche Wege gehen. Nirgendwo aber sind die Schwierigkeiten größer als hier:

Jeder Mensch ist ein einmaliges, unwiederholbares, unteilbares Wesen (“Individuum”), darum auch letztlich unvergleichbar mit anderen. In jedem Charakter finden sich einander scheinbar widersprechende Züge—gerade aus Gegensätzen und Spannungen lebt ja das Leben.¹¹¹

Here, the human person exhibits the same elemental attributes as the sensory manifold at large in the first paragraph: immediacy and non-differentiation (“einmaliges, unwiederholbares, unteilbares Wesen”), the existence of contradictions (“scheinbar widersprechende Züge,”

110. Ibid., 76.

111. Ibid.

“Gegensätzen und Spannungen”), and an inherent resistance to being known in the sense of categorized, rendered either identical with or distinct from other categories (“unvergleichbar mit anderen”). This means that the “human sciences,” to take a literal translation of Asperger’s *Wissenschaft vom Menschen*, serve as the test case for science in general, insofar as the difficulties to be overcome anywhere are here concentrated so as practically to constitute an impossibility.

Are our efforts to combine categorical knowledge with the ultimate nature of the human as the ideal, yet impossible object of knowledge doomed? It appears so:

Endlich ist der Mensch das rätselhafteste Geschöpf auf Erden; das innerste Wesen einer Persönlichkeit wird weder dem offenbar, der sich selbst zu erkennen sucht, noch auch dem Blick des Gegenübertretenden, der in einen andern eindringen will.¹¹²

Note the simultaneous dismissal of *both* self-knowledge *and* knowledge by another person, which would logically rule out any ultimate knowledge of persons altogether. To fully know the essence of a personality would be equivalent to using the means of science to *regain access* to the fluid state of pre-scientific immediacy, the originarily given plenitude of experience. Yet this is exactly what Asperger proposes to do:

Trotz oder vielleicht gerade wegen dieser Schwierigkeiten ist es das heiße Bemühen denkender Menschen seit je, die Menschen zu erkennen und auch, sie einzuordnen, eine Reihe von Bildern menschlicher Charaktere aufzustellen und gegeneinander abzugrenzen, also zu einer *Typologie* zu gelangen, welche der Vielfalt des Lebens gerecht wird.¹¹³

To be precise: the gap between the imperatives of scientific knowledge and the irreducible nature of the human is not to be closed; rather, a way will be revealed by which, “in spite of or perhaps precisely because of” the difficulty or impossibility of the declared aim, *justice* will be done to the manifold of life in the exemplary figure of the human person (“der Vielfalt des

112. Ibid.

113. Ibid., emphasis in original.

Lebens *gerecht* wird”). This method is what Asperger calls *typology*.

Asperger calls for a typology whose elements are singularities, entities theoretically “incomparable to others” (unvergleichbar mit anderen). We can designate this as the first paradox of his method: its juxtaposition of the order of *singularity* with that of *identity and difference*, the latter being the presupposition of a system in which types are both identical with themselves and distinct from others. This is the order of scientific or rational knowledge (“thinking”). The order of singularity, on the other hand, is that of the preconscious phenomenal world (the “plenitude of appearances”), which does not yet know the *identity* of the subject since there is as yet no *difference* established from others. Behind his proposal of “eine Reihe von Bildern menschlicher Charaktere,” then, Asperger evokes a typology of singularities, the juxtaposition of two seemingly incompatible orders.

Now we will see Asperger acknowledge this first paradox—the apparent contradiction between singularity and typology—and elaborate the way in which he proposes to bridge it. This is a variation on the intuitive method in psychiatry that we have seen in our other authors.

[S]teht man bei dieser Art von Beurteilung nicht vor lauter Einzelpersönlichkeiten, die miteinander gar nichts zu tun haben, untereinander nicht vergleichbar sind, sich nicht ordnen und nicht einordnen lassen? Bedeutet darum eine solche Wesensschau nicht letztlich einen Verzicht auf Wissenschaftlichkeit, die ja Ordnung nach Ähnlichkeiten und Verschiedenheiten fordert?

Dem ist nun nicht so. Wenn wir uns bemühen, die kindliche Persönlichkeit als eine durchorganisierte Einheit zu sehen, bei der Körperliches und Charakterliches, alle am Motorischen und am Vegetativen sich abspielenden Ausdruckserscheinungen—und die seelischen Vorgänge und Wesenszüge einander entsprechen, eins aus dem andern deutbar sind, so sehen wir doch die einzelnen Kinder nicht als isolierte, mit anderen nicht vergleichbare Wesen. Wenngleich ein jeder Mensch einmalig und im Zentralen seiner Persönlichkeit unwiederholbar ist, so ordnen sich doch, wenn man mit unseren Augen sieht, immer wieder einzelne Charaktere zu Gruppen, zu Typen, die nicht nur in der sie durchorganisierenden Idee Beziehungen zeigen, sondern auch in zahlreichen Einzelheiten ihres Äußeren und ihrer Verhaltensweisen, in all den Zügen, die uns vom Wesen eines Menschen künden, oft erstaunlich genau übereinstimmen.¹¹⁴

114. *Ibid.*, 83.

The idea—still quite nebulous at this stage—seems to be that *if* the essence of a person can be grasped in terms of a single, through-organizing idea, and if this through-organizing idea can be shown also to unify all the particular traits of the individual in a single, meaningful constellation, then this idea can be used as the basis for a type consisting of those who share the same through-organizing structure, without thereby reducing their individual manifolds to artificial categories. The through-organizing idea, Asperger implies, belongs to the primal order of nature in a way that fixed categories such as “intelligence” or even, tellingly, “empathy” do not.¹¹⁵

Whatever we may think of it, the method is reliant on the physiognomical thesis for which Asperger praises Kretschmer: the notion “daß bis in feine Einzelheiten körperliche und seelische Konstitutionen einander entsprechen.”¹¹⁶ Asperger, however, goes much further: where Kretschmer saw the correlation between body and character type as merely a statistical regularity, Asperger casts it as a motivated, semiotic relationship in which the essence or through-organizing idea *expresses itself* in the body, as well as in voice, behavior, and the thought process, to name just some aspects.

It is here that Asperger announces the “example” by which he will demonstrate the rightness of the method just sketched out: the type he calls the autistic psychopath. The basis on which the type as such is recognizable consists of characteristic eccentricities of gaze, voice, speech, gait and movement; as well as through the similarly eccentric patterns of thinking manifest in the content of autistic speech and the peculiarities of autistic behavior. All of these are interpreted, however, as signs of a single through-organizing idea: autistic aloneness, the

115. See *ibid.*, 79–81.

116. *Ibid.*, 77.

absence of contact. “Der autistische ist nur ‘er selbst.’”¹¹⁷ Here is a second paradox: a type that is held together by nothing other than the idea of the self deprived of relationality, and yet characterized by a precisely definable set of eccentric (in a double sense: ec-centric as “removed from the center” and as “outside of the norm”) traits. And this paradoxical type is what is supposed to *resolve* the first paradox—the incommensurability of type and individual. How?

Here, as with our other holist authors (notably Binswanger), the key is to read Asperger’s autistic type not as a true *object* of his scientific method (as he makes it out to be), but as the *allegory* of this method. The autistic type itself instantiates, embodies, and also provisionally solves the entire problematic. Asperger’s autist figures as a radical instantiation of both the order of nature and that of thinking, interlacing them in one personality, one through-organizing idea.

(1) *The autist as instantiation of the order of nature*: If the ordinary natural phenomenon is a not-yet-named-and-categorized “appearance,” and the ordinary human a special case of “ein einmaliges, unwiederholbares, unteilbares Wesen”—what we have been calling a *singularity*—then the autist, who is “nur er selbst,” a “besondere[r] Mensch[],”¹¹⁸ further characterized by “originelles Erleben,”¹¹⁹ his *own way* of experiencing, is even more singular than other persons. He is in fact a *figure of singularity* itself, a fact to which even his lack of human contact speaks. In his peculiar unwillingness to copy the generally used forms of language, preferring instead his own original names and categories for the things around him, he moreover seems to remain unusually in contact with the pre-scientific state of nature itself, that “Fülle der Erscheinungen” in which the ordinary person must find “einen festen Standpunkt” through language. Asperger calls this ordinary copying of linguistic (and social) forms a process of “mechanization,” to

117. Ibid., 84.

118. Ibid.

119. Ibid., 115.

which the autistic “Originalität des Denkens und Erlebens” is opposed in the starkest terms.¹²⁰

The mechanized world, of course, resonates as the polar opposite of the holist vision of nature, such that here too the autist figures as the human instantiation of the order of nature.

(2) *The autist as exponent of the order of thinking*: The order of thinking was characterized by Asperger as performing acts of identifying, naming, “typing” the appearances of nature. Its highest calling was the (ultimately impossible) task of *knowing oneself and others*, that is, coming to terms with that inexhaustible object of knowledge, the personality of persons: as we have already seen, “das innerste Wesen einer Persönlichkeit wird weder dem offenbar, der sich selbst zu erkennen sucht, noch auch dem Blick des Gegenübertretenden”; in spite of which it is “das heiße Bemühen denkender Menschen seit je, die Menschen zu erkennen.” This was all laid out in Asperger’s methodological introduction. Now we find, in his clinical description of the autistic type, that if strictly speaking no one can ever fully know herself or another, nevertheless Asperger’s autist comes closer than the ordinary person to this ideal: he is endowed with

eine besondere Selbstbeschau und eine sichere Beurteilung anderer Menschen. Während das “normale” Kind dahinlebt, seiner selbst kaum bewußt, dabei aber ein richtig reagierender Teil der Welt, denken diese Kinder über sich nach, stehen sich selber beobachtend gegenüber, sind sich selbst zum Problem ...¹²¹

So whereas the normal person affords the status of a “richtig reagierender Teil der Welt” at the price of *not* truly thinking (“seiner selbst kaum bewußt”), it is precisely the autistic who occupies the place of Asperger’s “denkender Mensch.” It is the autistic—the pure *self* or “autos,” as

120. Ibid., 107.

121. Ibid., 116.

Asperger underlines¹²²—who best fulfills the ancient injunction “*gnothi seauton*” (“know thyself”), containing the same Greek root. And it is not only themselves that they know so well:

So wie diese Kinder sich selbst beschauen, so haben sie oft auch ein erstaunlich richtiges und reifes Urteil über die Menschen der Umgebung, spüren sehr gut, wer ihnen gewogen ist und wer nicht, auch wenn er sich ganz anders gebärdet, haben ein besonders feines Gefühl für die Abnormalität anderer Kinder, ja sie sind, so abnorm sie selber sein mögen, geradezu überempfindlich dafür.¹²³

The last quality, the autistic sensitivity to abnormalities of character, even brings them close to the position from which Asperger speaks as a scientist of character. And there is yet more that speaks to the autist’s gifts in characterology (which we should not forget is the highest branch of science in the eyes of holism), namely their ability to read works of art:

sie wissen auch um den Sinn selbst sehr “schwerer” Kunstwerke, mit denen viele Erwachsene nichts anfangen können, etwa romanischer Plastiken oder Bilder von Rembrandt, urteilen treffsicher darüber, nicht nur welche Vorgänge auf einem Bild dargestellt sind, sondern auch *was dahinter steht, welche Charaktere die dargestellten Personen haben, welche Stimmung aus einem Bild spricht*. Man bedenke, daß viele Erwachsene niemals zu jener Reife und *Bewußtheit der Persönlichkeit* kommen, welche zu einem solchen Wissen gehört!¹²⁴

And as these children read the faces of Rembrandt and other masters, discerning what takes place behind them, so their constant thinking engraves itself on their own faces—“Das frühe Denken hat das Gesicht geformt”¹²⁵—contributing to the early maturity (*Reife*) that Asperger consistently remarks in both their physiognomies and the content of their judgments.

This is perhaps the best place to see how Asperger’s physiognomical convictions work themselves out in practice: all those eccentric particularities of the autistic type—from the features of the face to the unusual linguistic formulations—are, taken together, the concrete forms of thinking. As such, they correspond meaningfully to the inward aspect of autism, which

122. Ibid., 84.

123. Ibid., 117.

124. Ibid., 116.

125. Ibid., 112.

is—the self, alone, thinking. Thinking is here a mental *and* a bodily process simultaneously, a way of receiving impressions and of expressing one’s essence that is distinct from, but not clearly inferior to, the ordinary person’s automatic, “mechanized” emotional reactions to the social environment.

Thinking here stands fundamentally opposed to mechanization. It is the fulcrum of the “besonders schöpferisches Verhältnis zur Sprache” and “Eigenständigkeit der sprachlichen Formulierung” that Asperger discerns in the autistic type, by which they are capable “ihr originelles Erleben, ihre originellen Beobachtungen auch in einer sprachlich originellen Form auszudrücken.”¹²⁶ The picture of a mind grounded in “original experience,” guided by “fine feeling,” and expressing itself “creatively” by way of “mature” (*reif*) and “precise” (*treffsicher*),¹²⁷ albeit often neologistic language is practically that of an ideal scientist, the creator of a kind of concept of which “autism” itself is among the best examples—in Asperger’s words “eine der großartigsten sprachlichen und begrifflichen Schöpfungen auf dem Gebiet medizinischer Namensgebung.”¹²⁸ Bleuler in forging it—and Asperger perhaps too, in reinterpreting it—are succeeding as intuitive or holist scientists precisely insofar as they are thinking autistically, which is to say, *thinking*.

Conclusion

Asperger set out looking for the way in which science, by means of thinking, could *know* the pre-scientific absolute. (Only thus could the true holist program, in the eyes of this most committed holist, be accomplished.) In the autist, he has found a person who embodies this whole

126. *Ibid.*, 115.

127. *Ibid.*, 98.

128. *Ibid.*, 84.

movement (one is tempted to say: a movement of the spirit, in the Hegelian sense) in himself: both the chaos of primordial nature (which the autistic experiences in a form that distinctly stands out from ordinary experience, lending him some of his many “archaic” qualities) and the intuitive leaps of abstract, conceptual thought.

Speaking as himself the most fervent of holists, Asperger thus corrects holism’s exclusion of thinking from its rhetoric and ideology. As Karl Bühler noted in a sharp critique of Ludwig Klages, perhaps the most polemical holist of all: just because two things, such as thinking and feeling, can be separated for purposes of analysis does not make it necessary to posit a relation of metaphysical animosity between them.¹²⁹ Rather than insist, as many others did, that the holist conception of experience renders all thinking fruitless, even toxic, Asperger makes the tension between the orders of thought and experience productive. The two now work together; in the autistic mind, each is raised to an extreme pitch of intensity.

The intensity of autistic knowledge, however, creates a new dividing line: it goes together with an objective *distancing from society*, from norms of feeling and reactivity. The social distancing of the autistic is primary: Asperger means to show “daß der Grundstörung der Autistischen Psychopathen eine Einengung der Beziehungen zur Umwelt ist, daß die Persönlichkeit dieser Kinder von da her zu begreifen ist, daß sie von da aus ‘durchorganisiert’ ist.”¹³⁰ This is a source, first and foremost, of *conflict*—conflict resulting precisely from the social demand for automatic mechanization of reactions and the autistic inability to be anything *but* original, anything but spontaneous, anything but “himself.”¹³¹ Social distancing is however *also* the precondition for just that autistic intensity of thought that Asperger is concerned to bring

129. Karl Bühler, *Ausdruckstheorie. Das System an der Geschichte aufgezeigt* (Jena: Fischer, 1933), 155.

130. Asperger, “Die ‘Autistischen Psychopathen,’” 120–121.

131. See *ibid.*, 122–123.

forth. What might appear as another paradox—the pairing of *distance* with *insight*—Asperger explains as a necessary relation:

Wie verträgt sich aber eine Kontaktstörung mit jener besonderen Klarsichtigkeit, welche aus den eben geschilderten Wesenszügen spricht, wie kann ein Mensch mit gestörten Beziehungen so viel so bewußt erleben? Dieser Widerspruch ist nur ein scheinbarer. Das normale Kind, besonders das kleinere, welches richtig in der Umweltsituation steht, richtig darauf reagiert und mitschwingt, tut das aus seinen gesunden Instinkten, kommt aber meist nicht zu bewußter Beurteilung; dazu gehört ein Abstand von den konkreten Dingen. Der Abstand vom Einzelding ist die Voraussetzung [*sic*] zur Abstraktion, zur Bewußtwerdung, zur Begriffsbildung. Gerade die verstärkte persönliche Distanz, ja die Störung des instinkthaften, gefühlsmäßigen Reagierens, welche die Autistischen charakterisiert, ist also in gewissem Sinn eine Voraussetzung für ihre gute begriffliche Erfassung der Welt.¹³²

The “disturbance of instinctive, emotional reactions” that appears here, the constant irritation between autist and society, is a concrete social conflict that *produces* a beneficial “abstraction,” or the activity of thinking. It is the opposite of the metaphysical conflict characteristic of crude holism, the battle line between thinking and feeling that is taken as the reason for the social exclusion of the thinker. For Asperger, the thinker is not exiled as punishment for thinking; instead, he stands apart *in order better to think*.

Asperger issued these sentiments from Vienna in the midst of World War Two, as many of those who were thinking, and who stood apart from society, were being forcibly and fatally removed from it. He himself was, for all the nuance in his portrait of the autistic, a compliant worker in the edifice of Nazi psychiatry. How his complicity relates to the boldness of his almost infinitely rich notion of autistic subjectivity is the point of departure for the next chapter.

132. *Ibid.*, 117–118.

Chapter Three

Hans Asperger: Autism as the General Possibility of Thinking

Introduction

Chapter Two discussed the rise, across interwar Europe and especially in German-speaking countries, of a broadly interconnected set of ideas that the scholar Anne Harrington gathers under the name of *holism*. Holism, in its various guises, tends always to cast in a negative light the legacies of technological and political progressivism inherited from the nineteenth century, accusing these of detaching human beings from the fabric of nature and rendering them interchangeable and manipulable, like parts in a giant machine. Correspondingly, holism preached an understanding of humans as inseparable from the context of nature and culture (culture understood as an organic outgrowth of nature, and thus as local and differentiated, as opposed to the nineteenth century's cosmopolitan, homogenizing concept of "civilization"). Holism also strove to grasp individual humans as organismal wholes, to insist that the person comprised a unity of a higher order than the components "mind" and "body" and the many smaller constituent parts of each of these. Before analyzing—that is, dismantling—the human into a collection of functional pieces, holism maintained, we must develop a richer understanding of how persons interact with each other, and with their environment, at the level of the whole.

More specifically, Chapter Two was concerned with how the rise of holist ideology in the practice of science interacted with the concept of autism. One of the most important concepts in the psychopathology of the time, autism had always connoted a way of being fundamentally disconnected from the surrounding *reality*: this is how Eugen Bleuler had defined it on the occasion of its first use in 1910. But for Bleuler, who was more comfortable with nineteenth-

century positivism than the new stirrings of holism, “reality” meant the world of objects, facts, and logical relations; hence Bleuler’s autism connoted a contrasting thought-world of irrationalism, fantasy, and unrestrained affect. Those who, following Bleuler, took up the concept of autism but placed it in the new ideological context of holism, reversed the terms: now “reality” was conceived as an “irrational feeling of harmony” (in the words of Eugène Minkowski), and normative relations between people were grounded more in affective rapport than in logical understanding. Autism, therefore, came to stand for the opposite of what it had previously connoted: the failure of affect rather than its excess, and a corresponding hypertrophy of “cold,” logical reasoning.

If we recognize the connection between autism and the failure of affect made by these holists, it is because it remains the dominant model for our concept of autism today, which rests on the notion that the autistic person cannot discern the contents of other minds. “Although the terms may be more sophisticated,” writes Chloe Silverman, “the argument remains the same: people with autism fail at empathy.”¹ This is the concept of autism that we are in the habit of tracing back to two foundational clinical descriptions: one published by Leo Kanner, of Baltimore, in 1943, the other by Hans Asperger, of Vienna, in 1944. It holds more or less true that Kanner’s description of autism portrays the condition as a lack of empathy, as will be seen in Chapter Four. But in the case of Asperger—the subject of this chapter—things are less clear. This despite our reasonable expectation that Asperger, even more than Kanner, would be in tune with the holism that prevailed in German-speaking Europe: Asperger, after all, was the one working in Vienna, and also the one notably more inclined to incorporate speculative philosophical notions into his medical work. Asperger is in fact the subtlest thinker to have made

1. Silverman, *Understanding Autism*, 8 (see Introduction, n. 28).

a major contribution to the history of autism, and his foundational 1944 paper, “Die ‘Autistischen Psychopathen’ im Kindesalter,” is by a great distance the most difficult and the most rewarding text in this history.² Reading it is the task of this chapter.

That Asperger’s Vienna was under the rule of the Nazis as he completed his work on autism does not alter—in fact, it strengthens—our expectation that Asperger would subscribe to a holist view of autism as affect-deficient. This is because, as new research by Edith Sheffer reveals, such a view of autism was already quite prevalent in Asperger’s immediate milieu. In most fields, and certainly in those of psychology and psychiatry, a version of holism functioned as official Nazi science policy. This was widely recognized and reflected upon even before the fall of the regime. In a 1944 pamphlet, “German Psychology under the Nazi System: 1933–1940,” the emigres Frederick Wyatt and Hans Lukas Teuber wrote that National Socialism’s “irrationalist ideology” was “the expression of still deeper and more universal cultural trends” rooted in the “romantic conservatism characteristic of certain German academic quarters.”³ The influence of these trends on the field of psychology was such that “the more philosophical a particular research, the more marked was the impact of NS [National Socialist—SHT] ideology.”⁴ Asperger’s research, as already noted, was philosophical to a high degree; and no philosopher held a higher place in Asperger’s estimation than Ludwig Klages, to whom Wyatt and Teuber devote a whole section of their pamphlet.

In the view of Wyatt and Teuber (based on their first-hand experience of German academic psychology), Klages’s “romantic irrationalism and anti-rationalism” was “a powerful factor in paving the way among the educated of the generation after the first war for the later NS

2. See Introduction, n. 30.

3. Frederick Wyatt and Hans Lukas Teuber, “German Psychology under the Nazi System: 1933–1940,” *Psychological Review* 51, no. 4 (July, 1944): 229–230.

4. *Ibid.*, 230.

doctrine.”⁵ Their encapsulation of Klages’s doctrine is worth quoting in full, for the multiple themes it introduces are of great importance for the general conception of autism among the Nazis and for Asperger as well. Klages, they write, “is more radical than the earlier representatives of *Lebensphilosophie*”—*Lebensphilosophie* being a term commonly used at the time to name what we are calling holism. These earlier *Lebensphilosophen* (among them many of the figures discussed in Chapter Two) “considered consciousness and reason as mere functions and derivatives of the original unity of mind and body.” But Klages goes further.

For Klages the intellect is a superimposed and hostile power, asphyxiating the originally intuitive and prophetic mind of primeval man and culture. Klages “proves” over and over again that the only path for psychology is to turn away from rationalist and causal procedures to the primeval level, where symbolic relations between original givens and their expression can be obtained by “divination.” Klages advocates a renewal of the symbolic language of primitive myth and folklore in order to provide an instrument for his *Ausdruckslehre* (science of expression).⁶

And this is indeed the philosopher to whom Asperger gives sole credit for his own ability to see and to conceptualize autism in the form that has so consequentially carried down to the present!

Klages’s *Ausdruckslehre* or theory of expression, the focal point of Asperger’s intense interest in Klages, requires its own discussion in a later section of this chapter. For now we note that Klages’s anti-intellectual metaphysics is the intensification, to a sort of fever pitch, of the holist mindset we found in so many of the authors who contributed to the discourse of autism between Bleuler and Asperger. Their version of autism corresponds to Klages’s concept of intellect as a tendency in the human mind whose main effect is to suppress and to harm the more “primeval” sphere of irrational feeling and symbolic awareness. And Klages in turn feeds the currents of Nazi psychology and psychiatry, in which—as we will likewise see in the course of the chapter—autism is used to designate children who lack the pre-rational spirit of community,

5. *Ibid.*, 231.

6. *Ibid.*, 230–231.

who cannot empathize, who are therefore “socially useless” and subject, according to a eugenicist logic, to imprisonment, sterilization, or death. This sense of autism was directly transmitted to Asperger via the institutions in which he worked and the mentors from whom he learned.

Yet in spite of working in a Nazi institutional setting and being under the spell of Klages, Asperger’s own conception of autism as little resembles the Nazified one found all around him as it does the one we entertain today and like to ascribe to him. (Another way of putting this is that our prevalent notion of autism as a “lack of empathy” has far more in common with the Nazis’ than either of these does with Asperger’s original conception.) Asperger’s autism does not fit comfortably within the ideological dichotomies of holism and mechanism or empathy and intellect. Rather than reach for these ready-made oppositions and align autism with one or the other of their terms, Asperger starts from scratch, from his own observations of the set of patients he calls “autistic psychopaths” (in keeping with his era’s sense of “psychopathy” as any moderately severe inborn disturbance of the personality). Out of these observations he fashions a set of *sui generis* concepts to describe what he sees as the autistic mode of being in the world and the corresponding kind of “expression” that governs autistic movement, speech, and behavior. (This, of course, is where Klages comes in, as will be seen, with his theory of expression.)

Asperger’s concept of autism takes the word itself very seriously: fastening on the etymology *autos* (Greek for “self”), he chooses the term autism to designate those who he feels are most fundamentally *themselves*. To be oneself to such an exceptional degree, however, entails being *less* the other things that the average person is: a member of society, a being conditioned to react in ways determined by social convention rather than by one’s own spontaneous impulses. That is to say, Asperger views ordinary socialization, or the being of the

non-autistic person, as essentially learned, conditioned, even “mechanized”—everything other than spontaneous and original. And thus he zeroes in on the autistic person’s most concretely lived form of difference: the distance between him and society, his way of standing socially apart—in a word, his *aloneness*.⁷ It is in this sense that he is *only himself*, and thus *more himself* than others. This being-oneself-alone is what Asperger posits as the inner essence of autism.

But besides its inner essence, autism also has an outer surface, a way of appearing in the world to others. This is, in Asperger’s conception, the domain of autistic *expression*. It plays on a plethora of registers: not just the manifest content of utterances—the thoughts expressed in them, that is—but the manner of speech; also the quality and movement of the gaze and the way of carrying oneself; lower-level, even involuntary gestures and basic physical behaviors; and last but not by any means least, the very contours of the autistic body and face are taken to express something of the essence of autism. We will deal with the particulars of these quasi-physiognomical traits later. What matters is to note that Asperger conceives of the autistic *person*—a unity of body and mind—as a whole, and as uniformly expressive, as *signifying* across all its registers. This is what, most specifically, Klages’s theory of expression helps Asperger to see.

All these registers stand in a relationship of formal signification to the inner essence, that is, to autistic aloneness. All autistic expressions, by means of their formal aspect, signify the aloneness of the autistic self. This formal aspect consists in their distance from the normal forms of expression, their distortions, their eccentricity. The autistic person’s attention is uninhibited by the collective social will; consequently it, and with it his gestures, thoughts, and speech, goes precisely where it wants at all times. “Er läßt seine Gedanken spazieren gehen,” Asperger writes

7. Because all of Asperger’s autistic case studies are male—he considered autism a fundamentally masculine trait—and not for any other reason, male pronouns will be employed in this context.

of one patient, “seinen eigenen Problemen nach.”⁸ But even flagrant eccentricities of behavior can be interpreted in the same way: even as the patients “benehmen ... sich beim Essen ungemein unappetitlich, sind von oben bis unten beschmiert, ‘malen’ mit dem Essen herum,” they still “hängen dabei ihren eigenen Problemen nach.”⁹ These problems can themselves be of a formal, even an aesthetic nature: of one autistic boy who “hatte schwere Konflikte beim Essen, weil er nicht aufhörte, die Fettaggen seiner Suppe, die ihn so sehr interessierten, zu betrachten, hin- und herzuschieben,” Asperger merely comments, “sichtlich wurden ihm die wechselnden Formen lebendig und bedeutsam.”¹⁰ The image of “changing forms” becoming personally “alive and meaningful” could independently function as an encapsulation of the highest holist ideals of science!

There is, of course, more than just this formal aspect to the “expressions” of the autistic; they signify more than the generic form “autistic aloneness.” They also convey, that is, contents of thought, observations, insight. At bottom the autistic person is, in Asperger’s view, a *thinking being*, and one whose judgments are astonishingly well informed—not in spite of his distance from society, but because of it. They are rooted in his *original experience (originelles Erlebnis)*. The connection between social apartness and original thought and experience is one of Asperger’s most important theoretical contributions; and it is not confined to the set of people conventionally termed autistic, but applies to thinking in general.

These themes most central to Asperger’s original concept of autism have not been much commented on in the existing literature. This is for a variety of reasons, including the

8. Asperger, “Die ‘Autistischen Psychopathen,’” 101.

9. *Ibid.*, 126–127.

10. *Ibid.*, 122.

unavailability in English of the complete text of Asperger's 1944 paper and the fact that Asperger broaches these themes via Klages—not an easy means of access even for German speakers; but most of all because of a stubborn need to make the image of autism we glean from Asperger fit the image we already have of it. This means shoehorning Asperger into the terms of ideological debates into which he does not fit, about which he seems not to have cared much. Just as in aesthetics, in order for the forms of modernism to be accepted as artistically valid, the terms of debate had to be shifted from the question of realistic representation (at which much of modern painting, say, demonstrably “fails”) to that of specifically modern modes of experience and their sensuous expression; so with autism the terms would have to shift in the same sense in order for Asperger to come into his own. It would no longer be a question of the autistic “failure” to correctly apprehend the emotions and intentions of the human environment; instead, we would speak of a different mode of apprehension and expression, one conditioned by the uniquely autistic style of existence.

Difference or disability: the debate around Asperger's syndrome

For the most part, modern commentary on Asperger turns on two questions. One is the question of Asperger's personal politics in light of his Nazi milieu. The other is the question to what extent, and for what reasons, his account of autism offers a hopeful prognosis, a positive view of the autistic person's ability to live in and contribute to society at large, as opposed to a more negative view of autism as a serious disability and a fundamentally impoverished mode of existence. The same question pervades the contemporary politics of autism: is it a disability, or merely a difference? The case for the latter is based largely on Asperger's account of the autistic mind as original, creative, and—at least in circumscribed areas—highly intelligent.

Lorna Wing, who brought Asperger to prominence in 1981 with her publication “Asperger’s Syndrome: A Clinical Account,” was skeptical of those observations of his that spoke to the positive qualities of autistic intelligence, and felt free to “correct” what she took to be his misprisions by way of her own interpretations. Thus Wing asserts she “would disagree with Asperger’s observations” of an “especially intimate relationship with language” and “highly sophisticated language skills” among his patients, finding instead that “[d]espite the eventual good use of grammar and large vocabulary ... the content of speech is impoverished and much of it is copied inappropriately from other people or books,” giving “the impression of being learned by rote.”¹¹ This downgrading of what Asperger calls “autistic intelligence” to the level of mechanical reproduction in fact contradicts the very fundament of Asperger’s view of autism—not intelligence per se, but *originality*—but that is for later. In short, Wing treats autism as a distinct disability, with its roots in an innate incapacity for empathy.

Only quite recently have some other serious attempts been made to come to terms with Asperger as a thinker and to explain what his work represents. Steve Silberman’s *NeuroTribes* (2015) takes a doubly positive stance—both toward the nature of autism itself and toward the politics of Asperger the historical man. His account of autistic intelligence and creativity is the opposite of Wing’s—enthusiastic through and through. Silberman recounts what a supervisor at Microsoft Corporation told him: “All of my top debuggers have Asperger syndrome. They can hold hundreds of lines of code in their head as a visual image. They look for the flaws in the pattern, and that’s where the bugs are.”¹² The peculiarly autistic ability to contribute to the development of new technologies in computing and finance is something Silberman regards as unambiguously good for everybody.

11. Lorna Wing, “Asperger’s Syndrome: A Clinical Account,” *Psychological Medicine* 11 (1981): 115–130, at 117.

12. Silberman, *NeuroTribes*, 12 (see Introduction, n. 25).

Meanwhile, Silberman weighs in on the historico-political argument as well, and puts forward no less positive an image of Asperger in this regard. He paints a bright portrait of Asperger the man as engaged in a modest but brave struggle with his Nazi superiors to save the lives of as many autistic children as possible. His historical thesis is that had Asperger not been so long neglected, we would all along have entertained a more enlightened view of autism and spared ourselves much anguish over the recent so-called “epidemic.”

The historian Edith Sheffer—whose work on autism is ongoing at the time of this writing—comes down on the other side of the historico-political question, and brings her own evidence for this position. Her presentation of the assumptions Asperger inherited from his influential teachers and superiors is both exhaustive and uniformly dark in its political tones; against such a backdrop she makes the case for reading Asperger’s text as a product of broadly fascist assumptions. “The idea of autism pervaded the Third Reich long before anyone defined it,” she writes—the idea, that is, of children who appeared “to have less community feeling, who forged weaker social bonds and did not align with collectivist expectations.”¹³ Insofar as Asperger provided a precise clinical account of a subset of such children, and applied to them the label of “autistic psychopaths,” he fulfilled a demand on behalf of the regime. Sheffer’s account lends a new level of detail to our view of the system of which Asperger was undeniably a part—that is, child psychiatry as a whole under National Socialism—and presents the first concrete view of *how* Asperger interacted with this system. We will see more of this account in the course of the chapter.

The questions of both the historical and the contemporary politics of autism deserve full consideration on their own terms. Certainly there can be no question, especially now in light of

13. Edith Sheffer, “Fascist Psychiatry: Social Spirit and the Idea of Autism,” paper presented to the Central Europe Workshop, University of Chicago, November 12, 2014, p. 1. Cited with permission of the author.

Sheffer's findings, of defending Asperger's moral example. Our concern here is more with Asperger's *text*—chiefly the 1944 autism paper—its subtle argument, the ideas behind it, and the implications of a close reading of it. No fascist or Nazi logic will be able to account for the considerable complexities of this text or its exceptionally textured observations and descriptions of autism. Indeed, all the nuance in the text could, if anything, only have damaged Asperger's political standing in the eyes of his colleagues. That is not to say that it must be read as an attempt to counteract their politics, though some of it *can* be read in this way. It simply suggests at the very least that Asperger cared sufficiently about the nuances he observed that he was unwilling to forgo their fullest possible description for the sake of any external expediency. His presentation of them reflects a thinking firmly rooted in holist principles—that is to say, an organicist belief in the irreducibility of prelinguistic experience—yet at the same time unusually alive to the role of language and reason in rendering that experience accessible. He is a radical holist who, instead of rejecting the rational-linguistic as anathema to natural life, folds it back into a holism of a higher order.

There can be no doubting that Asperger's holism was a product of early experiences that remained with him to the end of his life. So to ease our way into his mature thinking, we begin with some brief scenes from his youth.

Asperger's path from the *Jugendbewegung* to the *heilpädagogische Abteilung*

Hans Asperger was born in 1906 in Vienna, the city in which he would live, work, and—in 1980—die. The formative experience of his youth was without doubt the so-called *Jugendbewegung* or Youth Movement, which between roughly the 1890s and 1930s saw the formation of a plethora of local youth groups, including Asperger's, the “Fahrende Scholaren”

(“Itinerant Scholars”), a subgroup of “Bund Neuland.”¹⁴ Cooperating with or rivaling each other, at times coming together for large congresses, the youth groups were uniformly devoted to the idea of renewing German culture as a whole by cultivating a generation of youth who would know how to live in accordance with nature and to serve the ideals of the spirit, ultimately “[i]n Freiheit und Verantwortung das eigene Leben zu gestalten.”¹⁵ The Youth Movement was infused with holism of the kind discussed at length in Chapter Two—that ideology that pitted nature, and an organic notion of culture, against the depredations of modern technology and a “mechanistic” civilization. Asperger frequently confessed his love of nature—“des natürlichen im Menschen und im außermenschlichen Bereich”¹⁶—and decades later, in a 1977 lecture, still called the Youth Movement the “edelste Erscheinung deutschen Geisteslebens.”¹⁷

In 1934, Asperger delivered a ceremonial address at a particularly important meeting of the Fahrende Scholaren. It expresses an overall sense of nostalgia, of recognition that the times have changed and the Youth Movement as a whole has been forced to come to terms with some (nameless) external realities; the words are vague enough, but surely Asperger is taking into account Hitler’s seizure of power in Germany the year before. Looking back at the not so distant past, however, he delivers the following lines: “Wir hatten uns ein strahlendes Jugendreich gebaut. Seine Kraft und Geschlossenheit beruhte zum Teil darauf, daß es sich abschloß von der Wirklichkeit, vom Leben draußen.”¹⁸ The words “abschloß von der Wirklichkeit” are of great interest in light of Asperger’s future contribution to the theory of autism, for they echo, quite

14. Maria Asperger Felder, “‘Zum Sehen geboren, zum Schauen bestellt.’ Hans Asperger (1906–1980: Leben und Werk),” in Rolf Castell, ed., *Hundert Jahre Kinder- und Jugendpsychiatrie. Biographien und Autobiographien* (Göttingen: V&R unipress, 2008), 100. See also Franz M. Kapfhammer, *Neuland. Erlebnis einer Jugendbewegung* (Graz: Styria, 1987), 103ff.

15. Asperger Felder, “‘Zum Sehen geboren,’” 100.

16. Ibid.

17. Asperger, *Probleme*, 2 (see Introduction, n. 36).

18. Quoted in Kapfhammer, *Neuland*, 105.

precisely, Eugen Bleuler's original definition of autism as "der Wirklichkeit abgewandt," performing an "Abschluß gegen die Außenwelt."¹⁹ These and many similar formulations circulated widely in the psychopathological literature of the time. Asperger, by this time a medical doctor and an assistant in the *heilpädagogische Abteilung* (department of "curative education") of the Vienna University childrens' clinic, would have come across them; certainly his comments on Bleuler in the 1944 paper demonstrate a thorough familiarity with and an approving attitude toward his work on autism. Perhaps, then, Asperger's first comment on autism comes earlier than heretofore acknowledged, here in the 1934 Youth Movement speech, and by way of paraphrase; if so, it is in a thoroughly positive sense that he invokes Bleuler's concept, namely as the purest expression of that "noblest manifestation of German spirit."

In 1935, Asperger became the head of the *heilpädagogische Abteilung*; in 1943, he completed his paper on autism; and the following year, 1944, it appeared in the *Archiv für Psychiatrie und Nervenkrankheiten*. But in the meantime, still in 1934, he completed a brief but highly consequential internship in Leipzig under the supervision of Paul Schröder, an eminent child psychiatrist. He learned much from Schröder, but even more from another man who happened to be in Leipzig at the time: the philosopher and characterologist Ludwig Klages. It was the authority of Klages that would eventually enable Asperger to overcome Schröder's paternal influence and forge his own, radically new conception of autism.

When he returned to Vienna from Leipzig, Asperger felt he was bringing back the key to unlock a peculiarly vexing problem, one that had obsessed him since before he had become a doctor and that was to supply him with a lifetime of work thereafter. In retrospect, in his 1977 speech, he put it thus:

19. Bleuler, *Dementia praecox*, 55 (see Introduction, n. 35).

Man hatte von Jugend an gelernt, Kinder in der Hand zu haben, sie zu erkennen und zu führen. Zu diesem Erkennen gehörte—das war so klar, daß es schon “eingefleischt” schien—sowohl intellektuelles Verstehen wie auch Mitschwingen in einer Situation (die Auslese in den Gruppen der Jugendbewegung erfolgte nach diesem Hauptkriterium: war der junge Mensch, den wir für die Gruppe werben wollten, fähig für solche Gemeinsamkeit, Gemeinschaft?—andere zog man nicht an oder sie wurden, kamen sie eine Zeitlang, abgestoßen; man machte sich da zunächst keine tieferen Gedanken, welche Persönlichkeitsqualitäten dazu gefordert wurden).

Das aber suchte man zu ergründen, sobald man als Arzt, nun mit Wissen über die biologischen Grundlagen ausgestattet, an eine Arbeitsstätte kam, welche gestörte Kinder “heilpädagogisch” beeinflussen will.²⁰

The problem is that of social belonging and nonbelonging, which had confronted Asperger as a leader in the Youth Movement, and which had at first inspired “no deep thoughts,” but which now takes on an intellectual as well as an instinctive fascination: what are the qualities that determine whether a given child is accepted into a spiritual community (*Gemeinschaft*) or not? Such acceptance and rejection happen as it were of themselves, before reflection; but Asperger now wants to think them out scientifically. This is an announcement of the problem of autism, one that grows, with Asperger, out of the fervent holism of the Youth Movement and into the institutions of medicine under National Socialism, where holism flourished but took on a different and darker cast.

Autism and child psychiatry under the Nazis

Though we are dealing with Asperger’s retelling of events some four decades later, there is a sinister logic traceable in the connection he draws between participation in the Youth Movements and participation in *Gemeinschaft* generally. In the later 1930s, the various official Youth Movements were being absorbed into or replaced by organs of the Nazi party,²¹ and the

20. Asperger, *Probleme*, 2.

21. See Peter D. Stachura, *The German Youth Movement 1900–1945* (London: Macmillan, 1981), 121ff. See also Sheffer, “Fascist Psychiatry,” 7.

very word *Gemeinschaft* had become a charged signifier of national and *völkisch* communion, to the marked exclusion of elements deemed biologically impure. When Asperger states that the criteria for “selection” (*Auslese*) operative in the Youth Movements not only carried over unchanged into the question of *Gemeinschaftsfähigkeit* (“aptitude for community”), but were moreover now to be articulated on “biological foundations,” he invites us to think the worst: that his scientific aim was to determine the biological criteria for acceptance into a national-racial community or for the elimination of undesirable elements.

Even from the perspective of 1977, Asperger seems to invite us to view his autistic patients as figures for what was rejected from the ideal community of the Third Reich. Immediately following upon the passage just quoted, Asperger narrates his initial observation of autistic children in the new, medicalized environment of the *heilpädagogische Abteilung* (he refers to himself, with a curious third-person flourish, as “the adept of science”): “Und da fielen dem jungen Adepten der Wissenschaft Kinder auf, die ganz anders waren, als er in seinen bisherigen pädagogischen Erfahrungen kennengelernt hatte: hochintelligent (mit interessanten Besonderheiten) und trotzdem so schwierig in ihrem gesamten Verhalten, daß sie in der Familie und/oder der Schule kaum zu halten waren.”²² Asperger’s account of things thus implies that autism was his own medicalized notion of what rendered certain people unsuited for participation in the Youth Movements and, by extension, incapable of taking part in the new society of National Socialism.

Had Asperger indeed used autism as a diagnosis of undesirability for the Nazi project, the idea would have fit quite naturally into the psychiatric thinking of his colleagues and superiors. This is the lesson brought home by Sheffer’s unprecedentedly fine-grained picture both of the

22. Asperger, *Probleme*, 2.

Nazi politicization of child psychiatry and Heilpädagogik and of Asperger's concrete involvement with these institutions. As a young doctor, Asperger relied for his career upon a generation of senior colleagues who served as teachers and mentors to him. These people had by and large embraced National Socialism with an ease that Asperger personally did not feel. But as Sheffer shows, they had also shaped the field of Heilpädagogik within which Asperger was determined to operate, and had developed a forceful consensus around the problem of the asocial or autistic child and his value, or lack thereof, to the new Germanic community.²³ Ultimately I will suggest that Asperger's work undermines this consensus in principle; but it is no less important to read him in the context of the Nazi discourse of autism that surrounded him.

Heilpädagogik operated via the mechanism of *selection*: the doctor's trained gaze would first discern the structure of a given child's personality, then assign the child to one of two categories: potentially valuable to society, or socially worthless and irremediable. The fate of the "socially useless" ranged from bad to worse: "remediation" in those cases deemed marginal enough to have some social potential; otherwise "preemptive incarceration, forced sterilization, or ... death."²⁴ What makes this bleak machinery particularly relevant to Asperger's work on autism—which he submitted for publication in 1943, at the height of Nazi domination—is that the political selection mechanism relied on criteria for the determination of social utility that seem strongly to anticipate Asperger's description of autism. To put it simply: it appears as though what Asperger called autism was a kind of distillation of the Nazis' negative type of child. If, as Sheffer contends, Nazism demanded "emotional alignment" with the "national community" as the highest requirement of a person, then children who appeared "to have less

23. Sheffer's work is forthcoming under the title "*No Soul*": *Hans Asperger and the Nazi Origins of Autism*, and is cited here with the author's permission.

24. Sheffer, "Fascist Psychiatry," 1.

community feeling, who forged weaker social bonds and did not align with collectivist expectations” were by definition anathema. Had the idea of autism not existed, the Nazis would have had to invent it: “[autism] was [Nazism’s] opposite.”²⁵

In the politically inflected theories of the asocial child that Asperger inherited from his mentors, the terms “autism” or “autistic”—which were in common circulation in psychiatric literature at the time—were sometimes used, sometimes not. If there was a single crucial concept for these theories, it was not autism but *Gemüt*. This was used in a particular way that differs notably from its most common meaning in modern-day German, which is that of a disposition, character, or state of mind. For our authors, *Gemüt* was considered a quality of the psyche, similar to intelligence; but while intelligence narrowly defined signifies the ability to reason with facts and information, *Gemüt* stood for a person’s capacity to process emotion and form emotional bonds with others. Sheffer translates it as “social spirit.” It is not unlike our contemporary “emotional quotient” or “empathy quotient” (both abbreviated EQ, in opposition to the standard “intelligence quotient,” IQ): and here is a direct link to our conception of autism, for the empathy quotient was developed by the cognitive scientists and autism specialists Simon Baron-Cohen and Sally Wheelwright as a rough diagnostic tool (a low empathy score correlates with autism).²⁶ For the majority of German child psychiatrists of the Nazi period, likewise, *Gemüt* stood for a measurable quantity of emotional “stuff” in a person’s makeup. Schröder, Asperger’s teacher at Leipzig, liked to present *Gemüt* as the biological basis of a person’s capacity for love of a philanthropic kind (Greek *agapê*), and as early as 1931 declared: “an *Gemüt* bringt als Anlage jeder Mensch sein Teil mit ... einer sehr viel und einer erschreckend

25. Ibid.

26. Simon Baron-Cohen and Sally Wheelwright, S. “The Empathy Quotient: An Investigation of Adults with Asperger Syndrome or High Functioning Autism, and Normal Sex Differences,” *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders* 34, no. 2: 163–175.

wenig, in allen Gradabstufungen und in lückenloser Reihe.”²⁷

Sheffer shows in painstaking detail how a deficit of *Gemüt* was raised to the status of the *most* undesirable trait within a system whose declared aim was the physical elimination of all undesirables, and how Asperger, simply by virtue of his position in the institution of Heilpädagogik, conformed to these aims, even to the point of signing off on the transfer of children declared *gemütlos* and socially undesirable to a killing facility.²⁸ Yet even as Asperger’s work on autism is linked by way of both concepts and institutions to the murderous eugenics of National Socialism, nothing reveals Asperger’s fundamental distance from the logic of this collective program better than his treatment of the central concept of *Gemüt* in his foundational paper on autism. Accordingly, we will turn to examine this next, as the key to unlock Asperger’s broader theory of autism as well as his underlying convictions.

Asperger on the use, and disadvantages, of *Gemüt*

Asperger’s 1944 paper—his seminal description of modern autism—opens with a theoretical introduction. Prominently included in this miniature treatise on method are Asperger’s general thoughts on the proper categorization and diagnosis of abnormal child personalities. There are, he says, three already established approaches. The first is to employ a single, overarching dichotomy, a single axis as it were, and to position each person somewhere along either side of it. As examples he gives Kretschmer, whose schema of “schizoid” and “cycloid” types we examined in Chapter Two; Jung, with his famous “introverted” and “extroverted” personalities;

27. Paul Schröder, *Kindliche Charaktere und ihre Abartigkeiten* (Breslau: Ferdinand Hirt, 1931), 29. This sense of *Gemüt* is also the one present in Hugo Friedrich’s characterization of Romantic poetry as “die Sprache des Gemüts”—in contrast to the modern lyric, one of whose greatest practitioners, Gottfried Benn, is known to have remarked: “Gemüt? Gemüt habe ich keines.” Benn’s personal indecision notwithstanding, modern poetry was no more welcome than autism in the respectable society of the Third Reich—and apparently for some of the same reasons. See Hugo Friedrich, *Die Struktur der modernen Lyrik* (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1967), 16–17.

28. See Edith Sheffer, “No Soul”: *Hans Asperger and the Nazi Origins of Autism* (book manuscript, forthcoming).

and the right-wing ideologue psychologist E.R. Jaensch, who classified persons according to their degree of “integration” or “disintegration.”²⁹ Each of these dichotomies happens to feature one term that could be seen as analogous to autism: Kretschmer’s schizoid, Jung’s introvert, Jaensch’s “disintegrate.” But Asperger dismisses them all as theoretical heuristics at best, useless in the day-to-day practice of the Heilpädagoge. Asperger’s core belief is in the infinite variety of human personalities and the absolute singularity of each; therefore he requires a typology whose terms are not drawn up in advance but which arise spontaneously from the observation of actual persons in real situations. The system must fit the subjects, not the other way around.

As a further step toward such an ideal classification, Asperger next considers what he calls “die eigentlichen *Typenlehren*”: systems which distribute personalities according to the salient trait of each—in the case of pathological personalities, whichever aspect of the psyche is seen as hypertrophied and out of proportion to the others. But the problem is that the list of possible leading traits is still finite and drawn up in advance. Asperger’s example here, Kurt Schneider, divides the psychopathic personalities into the following types: “die hyperthymischen, depressiven, selbstunsicheren, fanatischen, geltungsbedürftigen, stimmungslabilen, explosiblen, gemütlosen, willenlosen, asthenischen”—and Schneider’s is, in Asperger’s view, the *most* practicable of the many such systems available!³⁰ We note the presence of “gemütlos” on this list: a further hint that Asperger will *not* consider this a legitimate description of his autistic type. For it amounts to “eine ganz unerlaubte Verarmung, Persönlichkeiten nur nach einem einzigen Wesenszug zu charakterisieren und alle anderen, die ihnen ebenso das Gepräge gäben, außer acht zu lassen.”³¹ This is a criticism that Asperger in fact

29. Asperger, “Die ‘Autistischen Psychopathen,’” 76.

30. *Ibid.*, 77.

31. *Ibid.*

borrowed from Schröder, his mentor in Leipzig; and he furthermore ascribes to Schröder the fundamental innovation in typological method that consists in abandoning entirely the “one-dimensional” systems and departing instead from the premise of multidimensionality of character.

Schröder’s multidimensional typology, then, rests on the following belief:

Gelingt es, bei einem Menschen alle wesentlichen Seiten seines Seelenlebens zu beschreiben, die bei jedem Individuum in unterschiedlicher *Mengenverteilung* zu einem Ganzen “legiert” sind, so muß sich daraus ein klares Bild dieses Menschen ergeben ... aus dem man auch das erzieherische Verhalten und nicht zuletzt auch die soziale Prognose ableiten kann.³²

To arrive at such an image of the person, Schröder assigns a different degree of development to each of several aspects of the individual psyche. Compared to a “one-dimensional” system such as Schneider’s, this has the advantage of acknowledging that in no human personality is a given aspect either completely dominant or completely missing: “Nicht *eine* Seite, sondern der Zusammenklang aller entscheidet das menschliche Schicksal,” writes Asperger, reflecting his own strong preference for a holistic worldview.³³ Yet despite this acknowledgment of Schröder’s contribution, Asperger will ask his audience to draw back for one further leap, a leap beyond even the most flexibly multidimensional of typologies into an entirely new realm. It is his regretful conclusion that even “die von der *Schröderschen* Schule beschriebenen Bilder von kindlichen Persönlichkeiten oft doch nicht bis ins letzte plastisch und lebendig wirken”³⁴—they do not fulfill Asperger’s deepest wish for a psychological method that does *full* justice to the singularity of the living personality.

Asperger’s critique of Schröder deserves quoting at length, since it simultaneously

32. Ibid., 78.

33. Ibid., emphasis in original.

34. Ibid., 79.

reveals much of the overall tone and quality of Asperger's thinking:

[A]llzu leicht kann, wer dieses System der Persönlichkeitsbetrachtung anwendet, der Meinung verfallen, die menschliche Persönlichkeit lasse sich als Summe von Teilen erklären, als Summe von in sich selbst konstanten Gegebenheiten, die, in den verschiedenen Fällen nur quantitativ verschieden, durch einfache Addition ein Ganzes ergeben. Nun ist aber ein Lebendiges, und gar das am höchsten organisierte Lebendige, der Mensch, eben nicht als eine Summe von Teilen zu sehen, wenn überhaupt man seinem Wesen gerecht werden will. Die menschliche Persönlichkeit ist ein *Organismus*, das will sagen: jeder seiner Wesenszüge ist auf den anderen bezogen, erhält von allen anderen seine bestimmte Färbung, und wirft selbst auf alle anderen ein bestimmtes Licht. Nicht die Gewichte einer Waage, die mit ihren verschiedenen Quantitäten eine bestimmte Endsumme, eine bestimmte "Resultante" ergeben, können als Gleichnis einer Persönlichkeit dienen, sondern ein Gewirk aus vielen lebendigen Fäden, deren jeder den anderen hält und bindet. Die einzelnen seelischen Seiten sind darum keine Konstanten, die, in sich immer gleich, nur in der Quantität verschieden, in Rechnung gesetzt werden können, sondern weisen selber zahlreiche qualitative Verschiedenheiten auf und sind daher nur mit Vorbehalt miteinander vergleichbar.³⁵

This is a statement of radical holist convictions. It has two immediate practical consequences for Asperger's diagnostic method, the method that will eventually lead him to his own conception of autism. The first is that the various aspects of an individual psyche will *not* be listed in advance—Schröder's list had included *Intellekt, Antrieb, Halt, Geltungsstreben, Phantasie*, and most importantly *Gemüt*—or treated like elementary substances. The second, and the more crucial for Asperger's reading of *Gemüt*, is that when such terms *are* used to describe observable qualities in a person, *what* precisely they mean will be allowed considerable, almost unlimited qualitative variation. How this works in practice is illustrated by Asperger's ensuing remarks on intelligence and *Gemüt*.

We are all familiar today with the general form of Asperger's critique of intelligence, because we have heard it elsewhere many times. Intelligence, it goes, is not something that can be measured and quantified by one figure on a single scale from low to high. There are instead—as we would say today—"multiple intelligences," all adapted to different tasks, all present to

35. Ibid.

some degree in any given person; the products of their total interaction will display “ungefähr so viele Möglichkeiten, wie es mögliche Persönlichkeiten gibt.”³⁶ Asperger took great pride in the alternative intelligence testing methods employed by the heilpädagogische Abteilung. Where conventional test results were useful only with regard to the particular kind of intelligence they were designed to measure, Asperger felt his clinic’s approach meant that from the results of the “intelligence” test—which would take into account not only “das Maß der Begabung, sondern auch ... die Arbeitsweise und ihre Störungen, die Interessenrichtungen ... die Spontaneität, die Stimmungslage, den Kontakt, die Phantasie, die Originalität”—one would learn about the whole person.³⁷

Less familiar to us is the same argument made with regard to the concept of empathy; and yet Asperger is adamant that everything he has just said about intelligence should apply equally to the category of Gemüt. Among Schröder’s categories, Gemüt held a place of special privilege, in keeping with the general sentiments expressed at the 1940 Vienna conference: it was the key to social integration, and in turn to “social utility,” which was the key to survival under the totalitarian system. And on this point Asperger devises a bit of rhetoric by which, while sincerely praising the elder Schröder, he turns the totalitarian argument on its head. Note in the following passage from Asperger’s 1944 paper how the praise of Gemüt with which it begins is quickly transformed into a *personal* encomium, and thereby neutralized, while what emerges at the end is an affirmation of the opposite theoretical position:

Gerade aus der Tatsache, daß die Bewertung des Gemütes bei *Schröder* eine so entscheidende Bedeutung hat, glauben wir die Größe von *Schröders* Werk zu erkennen, des Werkes eines Menschen, der ein großer Erzieher und ein großer Liebender war Aber auch bei der Betrachtung des Gemütes müssen wir die gleichen Vorbehalte machen, die wir soeben für die Intelligenz ausgeführt haben: auch das Gemüt ist keine Konstante,

36. Ibid., 80.

37. Ibid.

die bei verschiedenen Menschen einfach in verschiedener Quantität vorhanden ist, sondern es ist selbst eine ungemein komplexe Funktion, die bei den verschiedenen Persönlichkeiten große qualitative Verschiedenheiten aufweist. Auch aus dem Gemüt eines Menschen spricht seine ganze Persönlichkeit, auch es ist nur von der ganzen Persönlichkeit her richtig zu verstehen. Wie anders ist das, was wir Gemüt nennen, etwa bei einem Haltlosen, der ungemein leicht Gefühlsbeziehungen anknüpft mit Menschen, Tieren und Dingen ... und wie anders ist das Gemüt bei dem tiefgründigen, seelisch reich differenzierten Kind, das persönlich schwer zu gewinnen ist, das karg ist im Ausdruck seiner Zuneigung ... und wie anders ist wieder das “Gemüt” der Autistischen Psychopathen mit dem scheinbar undurchschaubaren Widersprüchen zwischen rührender Anhänglichkeit etwa an Tiere oder Dinge und krasser Lieblosigkeit und Grausamkeit Menschen, besonders den nächsten Menschen gegenüber! Wie große Widersprüche gibt es nicht überhaupt bei gewissen Menschen, wenn man ihr Gemüt beurteilen will, Widersprüche, die unmöglich einfach in die Begriffe “Gemütsarmut” oder “Gemütsreichtum” einzureihen oder quantitativ zu messen sind.³⁸

So from an initial position of welcoming the centrality of Gemüt to Schröder’s work, Asperger manages to end up flatly refusing the specific way in which Schröder—and the psychiatric establishment generally—make use of that concept. Gemüt is a personal virtue in the pedagogue, but it is emphatically not a quantity of emotional “stuff” in the patient that can be measured and used diagnostically. In theory, at least, the master switch of the totalitarian selection machine for atypical children has been disabled.

In his clinical description of the autistic type, Asperger puts his skeptical stance vis-à-vis the Gemüt criterion to the test. He concedes that certain autistic traits “sprechen deutlich im Sinn der Gemütsarmut”: traits associated with the autist’s “Isolierung ... unter den übrigen Menschen”; their apparent indifference to signs either of affection or of anger in others; their lack of tact, respect, and social niceties.³⁹ It is hard, on the first meeting, to resist the impression “eines ausgesprochenen Gefühlsdefektes” and the temptation to see this as “die letzte Ursache der

38. Ibid., 80–81.

39. Ibid., 125.

Störung.”⁴⁰

But this is a matter of first impressions. In fact, “[d]as Bild dieser Kinder wäre jedoch falsch, wenn man nur diese eben gezeichneten Züge sähe und beurteilte. Man kann bei den Kindern Beobachtungen machen, die einen die Gefühlsseite keineswegs so eindeutig negativ beurteilen läßt.”⁴¹ On this side of the ledger Asperger records a surprising, yet highly characteristic reaction among autistic children to being left at the clinic for observation, away from home and family:

Tagelang weinen sie in haltloser Verzweiflung, besonders abends bricht der Schmerz immer wieder neu hervor, berichten von den Eltern, die sie daheim so sehr gequält haben, und von ihrem Heim mit zärtlichsten Worten—mit der reifen Sprache, die wir bei diesen Kindern schon kennengelernt haben, aber auch mit erstaunlich differenziertem Gefühl, das Kinder dieses Alters sonst gar nicht ausdrücken können⁴²

What should draw our attention here is not simply the fact that such apparently “cold” children are, in fact, capable of showing emotional attachment to particular people and things or in certain situations—although this is certainly the case. Of greater weight—because it changes the nature of the question entirely—is the rich, “mature” linguistic expression and the depth of feeling, so adult in its “differentiated” quality, of which Asperger takes note. This is a glimpse of the real fabric of Asperger’s concept of autism, the style he considers definitive for autistic thinking. And here we see how this essence “throws its light,” in Asperger’s formulation, on the particular expression of autistic Gemüt.

Asperger meanwhile reiterates his rejection of “lack of empathy” (*Gemütsarmut* or *Gefühlsarmut*) as a diagnostic criterion in no uncertain terms:

Angesichts dieser Tatsachen [i.e., the “positive” observations of autistic expressions of feeling supplied above—SHT] ist uns das Problem der Gefühlsseite dieser Kinder sehr

40. Ibid.

41. Ibid., 127.

42. Ibid.

kompliziert geworden. *Es ist jedenfalls nicht einfach nach dem Begriff "Gefühlsarmut" zu verstehen*, also nach quantitativen Gesichtspunkten, es ist vielmehr ein qualitatives Anderssein, eine Disharmonie an Gefühl, an Gemüt, oft voll überraschender Widersprüche, wodurch diese Kinder charakterisiert sind, wodurch ihre Anpassungsstörung verursacht wird.⁴³

With regard to the practically uniform views his colleagues and superiors had expressed at the 1940 Vienna conference, Asperger hereby differentiates himself in a robust way. Not content simply to make a factual correction (by pointing out that even apparently "cold" personalities *are* capable of having and expressing feelings), he challenges the very grounds on which a classification of personalities based on the presence or absence of conventional expressions of emotion would make sense.

What Asperger says about intellect—that it should not be narrowly defined as a region governing only rational or computative mental acts, but should be free to influence, and be influenced by, the whole person including the emotional side—could have been said by any scientist aligned with the official anti-rationalism of the period. But in Asperger's mouth, these words must take on a new kind of meaning in light of his subsequent comments on empathy or Gemüt, which counterbalance the preceding remarks on intellect with perfect symmetry: Gemüt is not to govern only the conventionally "emotive" realm, but must likewise be allowed to spread over the whole person, perhaps even taking on ostensibly rational or intellectualized forms. Taking the two paragraphs together reveals that the critique of conventional intelligence was not a one-way, ideological move in favor of the emotions, but simply the first part of a symmetrical double gesture, what in rhetoric is called a chiasmus. If one kind of holism straightforwardly asserts the primacy of affect over intellect, another—Asperger's more radical, because more capacious holism—denies the dualism of intellect and emotion in the name of a higher unity.

43. *Ibid.*, 128, emphasis added.

This higher-order holism is one from the perspective of which the lower holisms of Schröder and the like can be criticized as “nach logischen Gesichtspunkten aufgebaut,”⁴⁴ which on their own terms amounts to sharp dismissal.

With his insistence that such categories as intellect and *Gemüt* are “keine Konstante,” Asperger has something like a theory of the instability of linguistic reference. He replaces the reified categories of psychological substances or qualities with *concepts* whose meanings shift in relation to each other rather than affixing themselves to “real” things. The consequence of this position with respect to psychiatric diagnostics is that Asperger consistently refutes the reification of particular aspects of the psyche, no matter which ones—intellect, empathy, or any other. The aspects of the psyche are not to be taken as standing for actual—or even virtual—substances, capacities to be measured and compared. This spells the end of treating particular aspects of the psyche as if they represent clearly distinct natural kinds of psychological action. To describe those patients previously classified as *gemütlos*, then, Asperger will require a completely new structural model of the person.

This brings us to the second major problem of the chapter, and the central problem of Asperger: how, on the basis of what criteria, does Asperger’s autistic type become coherent and identifiable? On what grounds can someone of his convictions justify subsuming individuals into such a class or type? And how does the name “autistic” attach itself to this type? Given his suspicion of concepts like *Intellekt* and *Gemüt*, why does Asperger put his trust in the concept of autism? How does autism come to name a class of persons?

44. *Ibid.*, 83.

How Klages reveals to Asperger the essence of autism—and how he does not

We fortunately can follow the indications that Asperger himself gives regarding the intellectual “path” (*Weg*) that led him to an “image” (*Bild*) of the autistic type. These lead us unavoidably to a name that is almost as obscure now as it was ubiquitous in Asperger’s interwar milieu: that of Ludwig Klages.

Two particular occasions on which Asperger mentions Klages—one in the retrospective, autobiographical mode of the 1977 address, the other at the theoretical crux of the original autism paper of 1944—make it clear that without attending to this connection, we can never hope to reconstruct Asperger’s understanding of his own work. The 1977 text, as we have already seen, narrates Asperger’s emergence from the formative experience of the Youth Movement into the world of medicine and psychopathology. The interests awakened in his Youth Movement days still had to acquire a scientific vocabulary before they could issue, as he claims they did, in his description of the autistic type. They had to be placed on “biological foundations” (*biologischen Grundlagen*). But this would require entirely new sources of scientific inspiration; Asperger found all of the available approaches wanting. The study of the abnormal psychology of childhood was certainly in vogue—Asperger recalls Charlotte and Karl Bühler, Hildegard Hetzer, Jean Piaget—but the available methods for detecting and classifying “anomalies” were, in his estimation, too centered on the measurement of standard intelligence.⁴⁵ And even the most sophisticated intelligence testing “half bei diesen Kindern, die wir nun zu beschreiben haben, gar nichts!”—

Die Störung lag anderswo, man kam dabei auf Persönlichkeitsqualitäten, die von der gängigen Psychologie nicht beschrieben, nicht geklärt wurden. Die Störung lag nicht so sehr im Denken, sondern in den mitmenschlichen Beziehungen, im—Kontakt. Aber über Kontaktverhalten (und Synonyma) oder dessen Pathologie handelte die damalige

45. Asperger, *Probleme*, 2.

Psychologie nicht, das kam in ihrem Vokabular überhaupt nicht vor. Man war Arzt, dazu erzogen, Lebensvorgänge zu beobachten und einzuordnen. Wie sollte man aber die Eigenheiten dieser Kinder beschreiben?⁴⁶

How can one describe an abnormal personality in a child, not on the basis of defective intelligence but in a way that speaks to the problem of interpersonal “contact”? Based only on our knowledge of the prevailing climate among Asperger’s colleagues at the time, with which Asperger’s critique of intelligence seems to fit, we would expect the answer to be a call for Gemüt to take the place of intelligence as the main register of normality and pathology. One could then straightforwardly classify autistic children as lacking in Gemüt. We know, though, that Asperger does not go this way.

It is at this point in the autobiographical text that we encounter Klages as a solution. “Ein gutes Stück half weiter das Werk von *Ludwig Klages*”—whom Asperger had met personally in Leipzig in 1934, in the course of Asperger’s internship there under Paul Schröder.⁴⁷ Klages evidently gave Asperger something that Schröder, for all his personal Gemüt, was unable to provide, and that broke the theoretical impasse in which Asperger had found himself.

The way Asperger recalls Klages’s influence in 1977 is in perfect accord with what he writes in 1944, where we find Klages just where the autobiographical account places him: at the crux of Asperger’s theoretical argument. This comes immediately after the critique of available typological systems, which culminated in Schröder’s “multidimensional typology.” The characterological systems that Asperger reviews and dismisses, from Kretschmer’s all the way through to Schröder’s, are based on an increasing dimensionality, an increasing number of axes along which the personality can be measured, as if aggregating more and more measurements would eventually yield a sufficiently lifelike model of the person. But to Asperger’s mind what

46. Ibid., 3.

47. Ibid.

is needed is a qualitative leap. No longer will the aspects or dimensions of the personality be summed up in a matrix, no matter how extensive its parameters. There is another way—and here Klages comes in, as “[d]ie wissenschaftliche Begründung dieses Weges verdanken wir *Ludwig Klages*.”⁴⁸ What is behind this name? Before we unpack what intellectually is at stake here, a brief digression on Klages is in order.

Klages’s name is a red flag, having the potential for controversy, of different kinds, both in 1944 and in 1977. By the latter date, the philosopher had been dead more than twenty years, and his scientific advances in the area of graphology—the interpretation of handwriting for signs of a person’s character—had finally lost some of the remarkable allure they had carried for most of the author’s lifetime. Without the cover of prestige once afforded him by professional science, Klages looks like an unfortunate casualty of the early twentieth century’s dizzy enthusiasm for neo-Romantic—and all too often proto-Nazi—mythography.

Klages had been a Munich bohemian in the years of the Stefan George circle (of which he was first a member, then a rival), had romanced both the apostate countess Franziska Reventlow and the twelve-year-old daughter of his landlady, and had allied himself with the ravaging neo-pagan anti-Semite rhapsode Alfred Schuler (whose elaborately choreographed orgies featuring Roman garb and blood-drinking rituals were too much for the fastidious George).⁴⁹ Unlike Schuler, though, Klages would go on to be a prolific and revered author, his voluminous metaphysics a meticulous systematization of the mystical insight he had gleaned from Schuler: that the body is the repository of a vast and deep knowledge, of which the mind can construct only a bloodless abstraction.

48. Asperger, “Die ‘Autistischen Psychopathen,’” 82.

49. See Robert Norton, *Secret Germany: Stefan George and His Circle* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002), 301–303.

The body's knowledge, according to Klages, is of a kind that links past and present, myth and reality, on the basis of "images" that are timeless and that arrange themselves in affinities and antipathies based on their formal properties, the forms "communicating" their essences in a manner impenetrable to the language of the intellect, with its semiotic distance between object and representation. The title of Klages's 1500-page magnum opus, published between 1929 and 1932, contains its thesis: *The Intellect as Nemesis of the Soul* (Der Geist als Widersacher der Seele). "Soul" here should be read as part of the unity of the body; the master opposition is thus between the body-soul on one side and the intellect (*Geist*) on the other. "Denn nicht im Gehirn liegt die Seele," writes Klages, "sondern in der Form"⁵⁰—meaning that the soul is really identical with the *entire* body, in all its contours. Precisely this—the idea that every movement of the body is analogous to a movement of the soul—is what will give Asperger his crucial insight into the essence of autism.

Klages was not so naive as to hate the intellect and its linguistic mode of communication outright—this would have obvious self-destructive consequences for his own career as an author and his attempts to convey his thinking in words, that is, to go beyond the unwritten inspiration of Schuler, to play the Plato to his Socrates—but the fact remains that he considered all conceptual knowledge to be of a fundamentally different kind than that contained in "forms" and "images," and the imagistic kind to pertain to a more fundamental reality. And he did certainly hate the kinds of people he associated with activity of the merely intellectual, discursive kind, those who ignored and—in his view—denigrated the "reality of images" in favor of sophistical reasoning whose essence was deception. These included "hysterics" (Klages's catch-all term for the left-leaning intelligentsia), empirical scientists, Christians, and—most of all—Jews.

50. Ludwig Klages, *Die Grundlagen der Charakterkunde* (Leipzig: Barth, 1928), 13.

But in spite of his reactionary bona fides, Klages was not necessarily persona grata to the Nazis. Like his former friend George, he was one of those fellow travelers who nonetheless antagonized the Hitler set by refusing to endorse the infallibility of the Führer, and was, like George, eventually driven into self-exile in Switzerland. To discuss Klages favorably in scientific circles, as Asperger did, was not taboo; but neither was it a position to be taken for granted or one likely in and of itself to advance a career. It is noteworthy, then, that Asperger's debt to Klages is given repeated and insistent expression, including in both the 1977 Fribourg speech and the 1944 autism paper. At neither time was it politically advantageous for Asperger to highlight Klages's influence; his doing so is hence likely a sign of genuine conviction.

It is Klages who gets the most credit of anyone for Asperger's ability to "see" and conceptualize autism. This raises an immediately suggestive possibility: in the cosmic antagonism of intellect and soul established by Klages, does not autism—on the one hand a dearth of human contact, on the other an almost unnatural brainpower—map neatly onto the position of the intellect? This would align autism with all the other forms of life Klages deems inferior, its pathology grounded in the exclusion of the intellectual from the community of blood. It is an even less encouraging prospect than the diagnosis of *Gemütsarmut* among the psychiatrists.

Asperger was acutely aware of this Klagesian possibility—and he makes a joke of it, or the closest thing to a joke to be found in his 1944 paper. It comes following a remark that many autistic children are only children—could it be that the lack of playmates in infancy causes them to withdraw? No, says Asperger—being an only child is more the *result* than the *cause* of autism. The implication is that these children are autistic because their parents are more or less autistic, too; and being the only child of an autistic marriage is a side effect. Autistic people,

Asperger proposes, are not interested in having children, nor are they easy to get along with in a marriage, if they marry at all. These remarks are of a piece with the caricatures of the absentminded professor or fussy eccentric sprinkled through the text. It is at this point that Asperger comments, as an aside: “Das Wort von Klages vom ‘Geist als Widersacher des Lebens’ fällt einem hier ein.”⁵¹ That is to say: the only time he mentions it, he not only gets the title of Klages’ book wrong (substituting *Leben* for *Seele*, a switch which happens to better fit the joke he is making)—he is drawing a caricature of the alleged marital and sexual shortcomings of the intellectually inclined.

Elsewhere, Asperger articulates himself more directly against Klages’s metaphysics, stating, for instance, that Klages is a useful author *in spite of them*—“so viel auch wir gegen seine philosophischen Grundansichten wie gegen sein System der Charakterologie ... einzuwenden haben.”⁵² The dualism of soul and intellect is as useless to Asperger’s purpose as any other binary, and Klages’s own system of characterology is even clumsier than those of Kretschmer, Schneider, Schröder, and the like: “noch mehr deduziert.”⁵³ What Asperger draws from Klages—what is left of Klages after sidelining these aspects—is instead what is called the “science” or “theory of expression” (*Wissenschaft vom Ausdruck, Ausdruckslehre*). (In both 1944 and 1977, the work of Klages that Asperger cites by name is *Grundlegung der Wissenschaft vom Ausdruck*, not *Der Geist als Widersacher*.) Klages’s theory of expression underlies the part of Asperger’s theory of autism that was in his own estimation the most crucial, but is for us today the hardest to assimilate: his resolutely *physiognomical* view, or the notion that the essence of autism is expressed *on the body* as much as in the mind—“daß bis in feine

51. Asperger, “Die ‘Autistischen Psychopathen,’” 131.

52. Hans Asperger, “Menschenkenntnis,” *Erziehung und Unterricht* (1946): 404.

53. Asperger, “Die ‘Autistischen Psychopathen,’” 81.

Einzelheiten körperliche und seelische Konstitutionen einander entsprechen.”⁵⁴ The physiognomical theories Asperger gleans from Klages are not, to be sure, of the kind that assert that a person’s character can be deduced from the shape and size of their facial features and that provides a “key” to deciphering these signs, a dictionary of physiognomical meanings. What Asperger takes from Klages is rather a view of the person as a unified expressive manifold in which all aspects—bodily structure, forms of movement, involuntary and voluntary gestures, the quality of gaze and voice, as well as the content of speech and manifest forms of thought—are equally expressive of an essence, which Asperger sees as the fundamental essence of autism.

The ancient science of physiognomy seeks the manifestation of character in the outward facts of a person’s appearance—the features of the face or the proportions of the body. Physiognomy of this kind is not unlike classical dream interpretation, in which the relations between manifest dream contents (or physiognomical features) and their “meanings” are both symbolic and—to a skeptical observer—arbitrary, and so are best represented in the form of a dictionary of symbol–meaning pairs. Klages put a great deal of credence in traditional symbolism; but nevertheless his science of expression is not a physiognomy of this kind.

Klages’s science of expression turns its attention from the static features of the body to the forms traced by the person in motion—“motion” here meaning anything from walking or picking up a glass to blushing, changes in facial expression, the movement of the eyes, the tracing of words with a pen. There is a close relation here between motion and *emotion*; Klages sees every movement of the body as the analogy of a movement of the soul. This is expressed in his *Grundgesetz des Ausdrucks*: “Jeder Seelenvorgang, soweit nicht Gegenkräfte ihn

54. Ibid., 77.

durchkreuzen, wird begleitet von der ihm analogen Bewegung.”⁵⁵ As Karl Bühler notes in his synthetic work *Ausdruckstheorie. Das System an der Geschichte aufgezeigt*, Klages’s Grundgesetz is the restatement of an Aristotelian theme, which had already been revived in the nineteenth century by Adolf Trendelenburg, namely the search for “einen gemeinsamen Oberbegriff für das sogenannte ‘innere’ Geschehen der Willensvorgänge und das ‘äußere’ Geschehen, das der Physiker untersucht. Das Gemeinsame wird ‘Bewegung’ genannt.”⁵⁶ But stated in this form, the analogy of movement is too general: the fact, say, that two people both raise a glass implies that in both of their souls is the same movement of the will; but this says nothing about their respective reasons for doing so, the emotions that move them in this particular case; nor does it allow us to differentiate between their characters on the basis of the observed movement of their arms. And these latter things are what Klages is after.

Klages begins to peel away from the gesture everything that represents a generic intention—in his vocabulary, an act of will. The act of will in our example is “drink,” as opposed to “slap” or “shake hands.” Abstracting from the willed intention to drink, however, begins to reveal what for Klages are the real carriers of expression: all the more or less intangible qualities of motion that together constitute the *manner* in which a particular drinker raises a particular glass. So Klages isolates “an der Bewegung eines Lebewesens ‘schlechthin *die* Züge ... in denen eine Regung der Seele erscheint,”⁵⁷ and the Aristotelian *Bewegung* becomes refined into Klages’s *Ausdrucksbewegung*. Its counterpart is the *Willenshandlung*, the willed intent, which is a manifestation not of soul but of its nemesis, the intellect. (We see how important Klages’s metaphysical postulate is to propping up his entire system.)

55. Cited in Bühler, *Ausdruckstheorie*, 152 (see chap. 2, n. 129).

56. *Ibid.*, 152n.

57. Cited in Thomas Röske, *Der Arzt als Künstler. Ästhetik und Psychotherapie bei Hans Prinzhorn* (Bielefeld: Aisthesis, 1995), 79.

Expressive movements (Ausdrucksbewegungen) take the form of images (Bilder) which in turn leave impressions (Eindrücke) on a perceiving self. The impression, as a form of perception, is just as un-willed as the corresponding expression. Everything that unfolds at the level of the image is to be understood in terms of forms communicating themselves without the mediation of concepts. This is what Asperger is driving at when he says: “die Ausdruckserscheinungen eines Menschen sind es, die uns sein Wesen erschliessen. Der Eindruck, den diese Erscheinungen auf uns machen, läßt uns ein Bild der uns gegenüberstehenden Persönlichkeit entstehen.”⁵⁸ The three elements of the Klagesian circuit—*Ausdruck, Eindruck, Bild*—are neatly present here. This is what Asperger claims his diagnostic method owes specifically to Klages—the inspiration to trust one’s impressions and to treat the phenomena that produced them as expressions, as images, of the patient’s *essence*. With this, we have reached a provisional understanding of what appear to be Asperger’s fervently held physiognomical beliefs. They are not the revival of antiquated characterological dogmas but allusions to the theory of expression Asperger derives from Klages.

But—though Asperger himself does not point it out—this is also the point from which Asperger’s use of the theory of expression begins to diverge sharply from anything Klages was capable of envisioning. The canonical examples of Klages’s science of expression in practice are found in his graphology, or the art of interpreting handwriting for signs of a person’s character.

In Bühler’s paraphrase:

Da liegen etwa Schriftproben von *Bismarck* und *Beethoven* nebeneinander und es dreht sich um den Charakter der “Regelmäßigkeit” der Schriftzüge. *Bismarcks* Schrift weist einen hohen Grad von Regelmäßigkeit, *Beethovens* von Unregelmäßigkeit auf. Was hat das zu bedeuten?⁵⁹

58. Asperger, “Die ‘Autistischen Psychopathen,’” 82.

59. Bühler, *Ausdruckstheorie*, 187–188.

Naturally, what it “means” is just what we already think we know about the respective characters of these two men. Regularity in the expressive manifestation of handwriting corresponds to regularity of the soul. (That Klages complicates the matter slightly by introducing his notion of the ratio of drive to inhibition—meaning, in this case, that Beethoven’s hand is irregular not because he lacked a strong will but because his irregular, expressive impulses were so overwhelming that even a relatively strong will could not contain them—changes nothing of consequence.) There is, in general terms, a self-evident continuity in the inner and outer natures of every soulful quality.

Klages’s graphology thus evinces its kinship with Paul Schröder’s typology of character, discussed above. In both, a defined set of inner psychical qualities (intelligence, Gemüt, will...) manifest themselves by way of a strictly *analogous* set of outward, expressive gestures. The discernment of character is then a matter of tallying the relative strength of the various manifestations and deducing, again by simple analogy, the relative distribution of qualities in the soul. This then may explain why Asperger considered Klages’s characterology even more reductive than Schröder’s, and why he took pains to isolate Klages’s pure theory of expression from the rest of his philosophy.

We have already seen how Asperger pivots away from Schröder: challenging the existence of such literal subregions of the soul as “intellect” or “Gemüt,” he proposes instead an approach that “geht von der *Intuition* aus, von dem Versuch, das *Aufbauprinzip* der Persönlichkeit zu erfassen; wir suchen, die Züge aufzuzeigen, von denen aus die zu beurteilende Persönlichkeit *durchorganisiert* ist.”⁶⁰ And immediately thereupon he invokes Klages as the inspiration for this approach and clarifies that it is a person’s *Ausdruckserscheinungen* that will

60. Asperger, “Die ‘Autistischen Psychopathen,’” 82.

point the way to their essence along these intuitive lines. But the invocation of Klages *Ausdruckstheoretiker* here notwithstanding, we can read this also as Asperger differentiating himself from Klages *Charakterologe*. In contrast to both Schröder and Klages, Asperger does not view expression as a simple analogy between a quality of the soul and a manifest quality of expression. He does not conceive of the soul as a set of predetermined qualities. Asperger's notion of a "through-organized" personality announces his belief that the inner nature or essence of a person can be conceived in an entirely different way: not as a mix of preselected qualities but as a "durchorganisierende Idee," an idea in its own right, a philosophical concept developed specifically for this person.

To provide a concrete example of his methods, Asperger comes up with his concept of autism as a "through-organizing idea." This is a kind of personal essence that neither Schröder nor Klages could have imagined. Rather than being defined by a dominant quality, "Der Autistische ist nur 'er selbst' (daher das Wort *αυτος*),"⁶¹ Asperger declares. This reduction to the self is the "Störung, welche alle Abartigkeiten erklärt" in the domain of observable signs and behavior.⁶² It is the inner essence that is to be put into a relation with the expressive exterior, "[e]ine einheitliche Grundstörung, die sich ganz typisch im Körperlichen, in den Ausdruckserscheinungen, im gesamten Verhalten äußert."⁶³ Notably, though, it is figured as a *negative* essence, whose positivity is found only in the expressive manifestations, "an denen das Seelische sich 'abspielt.'"⁶⁴

The expressive manifestations of the autistic type, for their part, range from involuntary movements to the very style of thinking conveyed in speech, but are all considered together as

61. *Ibid.*, 84.

62. *Ibid.*, 117.

63. *Ibid.*, 84.

64. *Ibid.*, 82.

equally expressive of the essence, and as sharing the same stylistic traits. Asperger announces them in advance as consisting in “motorischen ... besonders aber vegetativen Erscheinungen (Gefäßerscheinungen hauptsächlich im Gesicht, sekretorische Zeichen, etwa Augenglanz, Speichelfluß),”⁶⁵ in “Mimik, Gestik ... Sprachmodulation und Redeweise.”⁶⁶ As he puts it at his most bombastic:

Wie viel spricht zu uns aus dem Blick eines Menschen—Dinge, die wir nur zum kleineren Teil verstandesgemäß erklären können (etwa aus der Weite der Lidspalte, der Pupille, aus dem Glanz des Auges), von dem aber bezeichnenderweise die Dichter unendlich viel mehr wissen! Was liegt nicht alles im *Wort*: wie viel mehr als dessen verstandesmäßiger *Wortinhalt*, den man ebenso auch gedruckt lesen könnte! Was bedeuten aber darüber hinaus zur Beurteilung eines Menschen die Art und Weise seines Redens, die Ausdruckserscheinungen seiner Sprache, wie spielen sich alle Affekte auf ihr ab, wie viel sagen dem instinktsicheren und erfahrenen Beobachter Fluß der Rede und Wortmelodie, Tempo und Lautstärke—und viele andere Dinge, die man wieder nicht verstandesmäßig analysieren, sondern nur fühlen kann, die aber untrüglich das Wesen eines Menschen offenbaren! Jawohl, untrüglich!⁶⁷

The tone and the specifics of passages like these raise eyebrows as well as serious questions: how does Asperger seriously mean for such a litany of physical particulars to express an autistic essence? We will get as good an answer as can be gotten from looking into Asperger’s case presentations themselves; but a brief and provisional summary runs as follows:

The through-organizing idea of the autistic person is autism itself, which becomes, in Asperger’s interpretation, both “being oneself” and “being alone,” or as we put it in the chapter introduction, “being-oneself-alone.” In Asperger’s vocabulary, another name for being-oneself-alone is “thinking.” And the expressive manifestations of the autistic person are accordingly taken to signify autistic thinking. The nature of this signifying relationship between the inner idea and the outward expressions is also of a new kind, in sharp contrast to the “analogical”

65. Asperger, *Probleme*, 3.

66. Asperger, “Die ‘Autistischen Psychopathen,’” 82.

67. Asperger, “Menschenkenntnis,” 405.

relationship that was key to the older characterological systems. What we have with Asperger is closer to a properly semiotic relation. There is now a disparity in nature between the signifier and the signified, the formal expressive manifestations and the inner meaning. For how is *thinking itself* to be *signified* by the body, the face, the eyes, the voice; by action and behavior? Asperger's answer will be that *difference* and *distance*—specifically, *social* distance between a person and his surroundings, *social* apartness and otherness, *social* non-belonging and eccentricity—are the concrete signifiers of thinking. With this in mind it is finally time to examine Asperger's autistic type itself.

The image of the autistic

Read slowly, our first encounter with one of Asperger's autistic patients resembles the description of a painted portrait, although it takes in more than can be gathered from merely visual information:

Ein körperlich zarter Knabe, lang aufgeschossen (11 cm über der seinem Alter entsprechenden Durchschnittsgröße), mager, von grazilem Skelett, schwach ausgebildeter Muskulatur; die Hautfarbe ist graugelblich, die Haut ohne Frische und Turgor, an den Schläfen und an den oberen Thoraxpartien scheinen stark die Venen des Unterhautzellgewebes durch. Die Haltung ist sehr schlaff, die Schultern hängen, die Schulterblätter stehen ab.

Sonst zeigt der körperliche Befund keine Besonderheiten.

Das Gesicht zeigt feine, prinzenhafte, für das Alter schon sehr differenzierte Züge—das Kleinkinderhafte ist bereits vollständig abgestreift.

Auffallend ist der Blick: meist, wenn nicht gerade ein boshaftes Leuchten darin steht, geht er ins Leere, taucht nicht in den des ihm Gegenübertretenden, mit diesem die Einheit des Gesprächskontaktes herstellend; Menschen und Dinge scheint er nur mit kurzen, "peripheren" Blicken zu streifen. Es ist, "als wäre er nicht da." Den gleichen Eindruck hat man auch von seiner Stimme: sie ist fein und hoch, klingt wie von fern. Es fehlt die normale Wortmelodie, der natürliche Fluß der Rede. Meist spricht er sehr langsam, zieht einzelne Wörter besonders in die Länge; die Modulation ist gesteigert, seine Rede ist ein Singsang.

Auch der Inhalt seiner Rede ist ganz anders als man von einem normalen Kind erwarten müßte: nur selten ist das, was er sagt, eine Antwort auf die Frage. Oft muß man Fragen öfters wiederholen, bis sie zu ihm dringen. Gibt er einmal eine Antwort, so

geschieht das in knappster Form. Sehr oft aber hat man das Glück nicht, ihn einmal zum Reagieren zu bringen; er antwortet gar nicht, oder mit Ablehnung, rhythmischem Schlagen oder anderen Stereotypen, wie unten noch geschildert werden soll; oder er wiederholt die Frage, oder stereotyp immer wieder ein Wort aus der Frage, das ihn anscheinend beeindruckt hat; oder er singt: “Ich mag das nicht sagen, ich mag das nicht sagen— — —.”⁶⁸

This description is best read in full for the way it moves through each register of expressive phenomena in the sense Asperger has from Klages: the design of the body, the posture, the particular detailing of the face; then the eyes, leading to the movement of the gaze—whose specific qualities transfer, by analogy, to the voice as well; and finally both the content and the pragmatics of speech. A recurring note of *distance* from one’s surroundings announces itself, however lightly, in the body’s physical distance from average measurements, and becomes fully articulated in the segments dealing with gaze, voice, and speech: the “peripheral” gaze that avoids the other “as if he were not there”; the voice “from afar” that, like Fritz’s body itself, distorts our sense of proportionality with its exaggerated lengthenings and “singsong” oscillations. Fritz’s refusal to abide by the conventions of question-and-answer—his repeated “ich mag das nicht sagen” bringing to mind the infamous “I would prefer not to” of Melville’s “Bartleby, the Scrivener”—is just the culmination of his “being only himself.”

All of the domains of expression covered in this long passage recur throughout Asperger’s expansive and detailed case presentations. The details accumulate and form patterns. The qualities of Fritz’s body, its delicate, gothic drawnness and quasi-ornamental outcroppings, are reiterated in the case of another boy, Ernst K.—“ein großer ... aber sehr magerer und zarter Knabe” whose “Haltung ist Schlaff, die Schultern hängen. Das Gesicht ist hübsch und fein gegliedert, es wird nur durch die großen, etwas abstehenden, häßlich gebildeten Ohren

68. Asperger, “Die ‘Autistischen Psychopathen,’” 87–88.

entstellt.”⁶⁹ Ernst’s voice, too, is “hoch, etwas näselnd und gezogen,” his gaze “meist weit in die Ferne gerichtet.”⁷⁰ Other bodies of Asperger’s autistic type are quite differently constructed, if no less deviant from the norm. Harro L. “ist ein ziemlich kleiner (4 cm unter seinem Altersdurchschnitt), auffallend stämmig und gedrungen gebauter Knabe von kräftiger Muskulatur”; he too, in this opposite respect, “wirkt etwas verbaut, man hat den Eindruck, die Extremitäten seien etwas zu kurz geraten. ... er steht behäbig da, die Arme vom Körper abstehend wie ... bei einem Ringkämpfer.”⁷¹ His voice is likewise a mirror image of that of a Fritz or an Ernst: “sie ist ganz tief, kommt wie aus der Tiefe ohne lebendige Sprachmodulation.”⁷² Hellmuth L., the fourth and final case study and the other example of this body type, is even more extreme. “Immer war er in einer grotesken Weise dick” (in spite of the fact that “er hat auch selbst gar keinen großen Appetit”).⁷³ Like Harro again, Hellmuth “redet langsam, fast skandierend, voll Einsicht und Überlegenheit.”⁷⁴ (The last-mentioned trait, Hellmuth’s “insight and consideration,” manifests another aspect of the autistic, of which much more will soon be seen, and which is no less supposed to hang together with the theme of distance from others and “being only oneself.”) So Asperger’s cases display a global distortion that alternately stretches and compresses the body—and with it the voice—as in a fun house equipped with both convex and concave mirrors. One kind of distortion conjures the vertiginously elongated, otherworldly figures of El Greco; the other the inscrutable, shapeless village grotesques of Bruegel.

The effect of caricature produced by Asperger’s case descriptions is unavoidable, and is

69. Ibid., 105.

70. Ibid.

71. Ibid., 98.

72. Ibid.

73. Ibid., 110.

74. Ibid.

acknowledged in them; but it extends to a “caricatured” nobility as well, and lets definite traces of real nobility and dignity shine through. So Hellmuth, “ein unbeweglicher Koloß,” “wahrt ... seine unbewegliche Würde,” whether “beim Sprechen” or “[i]n der Spielgruppe,” though “einen ihm zugeworfenen Ball kann er unmöglich fangen ... seine Bewegungen dabei und wenn er selber zu werfen versucht, wirken ungemein komisch. Die unbewegte Würde des Gesichts, die er dabei trägt, ist besonders lächerlich.”⁷⁵ It is in the same manner that Harro L. “kommt ... wegen seiner Gestalt und der dazu passenden ‘Würde’ komisch vor.”⁷⁶ But the gothically slender autistics display no less of a simultaneously noble and ridiculous aspect. Indeed, all Asperger’s cases “haben ausgearbeitete, bestimmt geprägte Züge, oft prinzenhaft fein, oft freilich etwas degeneriert-aristokratisch.”⁷⁷ The voice of Ernst K. is “etwa so, wie der Witz den degenerierten Adelligen karikiert (etwa den unsterblichen Grafen Bobby)” — a stock character of Viennese humor.⁷⁸ Hence the “Eindruck des Komischen, Karikaturhaften” that he makes on the observer.⁷⁹

The impression of caricature made by Ernst K. “wird verstärkt durch seine Redeweise,” by the fact—very revealing of the source of this overall air of the comic—“daß die Diktion ganz die eines Erwachsenen ist.”⁸⁰ In other words, these are “little adults,” precocious sketches of a fully—or rather, an exceptionally—mature persona. Fritz V.’s parents report that from an unusually young age, he could express himself “wie ein Alter”—thereby already resembling his grandfather, “die Karikatur eines Gelehrten.”⁸¹ This precocity is a global trait and it begins, as ever, on the surface of the body, as “besonders rasch verlieren diese Kinder das Babyhafte, das

75. Ibid.

76. Ibid., 101.

77. Ibid., 112.

78. Ibid., 105.

79. Ibid.

80. Ibid.

81. Ibid., 86.

dicke, weiche, wenig differenzierte Kindergesicht.”⁸² If Harro L. “wirkt ... wie ein ‘Miniaturerwachsener,’” it is “vor allem durch die reifen Gesichtszüge.”⁸³ But by the same token, “er hat eine ganz ungewöhnlich reife, fertige, erwachsene Ausdrucksweise,”⁸⁴ in which he supplies “Antworten, die eine weit über das Alter hinausgehende Reife verrietten.”⁸⁵ “Man kann sich mit ihm wie mit einem Erwachsenen unterhalten, wirkliche Belehrung von ihm empfangen,”⁸⁶ writes Asperger of this boy of eight. Asperger expresses amusement at Harro’s interjections of grown-up idioms and asides into his conversation. While recounting an incident from his life, Harro interrupts himself with: “ich muß mich halbtot lachen (!), wenn ich dran denk”;⁸⁷ or he remarks of himself, “ich bin ein ganz fürchterlicher Linkser.”⁸⁸ (And here again we note that aspect of the autistic that will increasingly come into focus: a penetrating insight and self-observation.) Even Hellmuth “gebraucht öfters ungewöhnliche Wörter, manchmal aus der dichterischen Sprache, manchmal in ungewöhnlichen Zusammensetzungen (dazu stimmt, daß er sich nach Angaben der Mutter vor allem für Lyrik interessiert).”⁸⁹

In his gloss on his patients’ general characteristics of speech, Asperger goes out of his way to remark that their linguistic flourishes are “nicht als Geste, wie das auch bei manchen Kindern vorkommt, nicht als fertige, unerlebte Redensarten übernommen, sondern aus eigener, unkindlich-reifer Erfahrung kommend.”⁹⁰ Thus he broaches the theme that lies at the center of his descriptions of autistic phenomena: the spontaneity, originality, and what he terms the “differentiated” character of autistic experience. These qualities apply equally to the level of

82. Ibid., 112.

83. Ibid., 97.

84. Ibid., 98.

85. Ibid., 96.

86. Ibid., 98.

87. Ibid., 99; the interpolated exclamation is Asperger’s.

88. Ibid., 98.

89. Ibid., 110.

90. Ibid., 98.

experience proper (*Erlebnis*) and to the means by which this experience is brought to expression:

Hinter der Eigenständigkeit der sprachlichen Formulierung steht die Originalität des Erlebens. Die autistischen Kinder haben die Fähigkeit, die Dinge und Vorgänge der Umwelt von neuen Gesichtspunkten aus zu sehen. Diese Gesichtspunkte sind von einer ganz erstaunlichen Reife, die Probleme, die sie sich stellen, reichen weit über das hinaus, was anderen Kindern gleichen Alters Inhalt des Denkens ist.⁹¹

With that we have proceeded through all the major registers of what Asperger calls autistic expression. The same terms tend to carry through them all: just as the children's faces lose their babylike appearance early on and become adult, so the thinking that goes on behind the face. "Das frühe Denken hat das Gesicht geformt,"⁹² Asperger asserts in deadpan manner, taking us full circle from autistic thinking back to physiognomy. The autistic person is thus not just "through-organized" but through-formed, molded and shaped by his original, spontaneous thinking. His very body takes on the grimassing shapes of thought.

Distance, the prerequisite of thought

Passages such as those above, in which Asperger discusses the "fine," "mature," or "differentiated" qualities of autistic thought, tend to be lumped into popular accounts of how Asperger's patients displayed "remarkable intellectual abilities" within "narrowly restricted areas of interest" that allowed them in some measure to "compensate" for their lack of social rapport. It is true that Asperger himself makes these points in the course of his argument for the "social utility" of his autistic charges, a rough-hewn though forceful argument most likely calibrated to check, to whatever modest extent was possible, the haste and aggressivity of the euthanizing agenda demanded by the regime without actually putting in question its stated rationale. But to see things only in these terms is to overlook the densely interwoven texture of

91. *Ibid.*, 115.

92. *Ibid.*, 112.

Asperger's descriptions, a feature we can now see as indispensable. This is the very form of Asperger's deeply held holist beliefs: every trait must be seen in the light of every other, the whole through-organized by the idea.

“Originality of experience” is to begin with not the same thing as “remarkable intellectual abilities within narrowly restricted areas,” though the latter may be seen as one expression of the former. The restricted areas of autistic intelligence tend, for us today, to encompass forms of reasoning that are computational, technological, mathematical, or visual-spatial to the exclusion of ambiguity and interpretation. But three passages from Asperger demonstrate that *his* concept of autistic intelligence is not restricted to those areas with which we associate it—quite the opposite.

If there are any areas of intelligence from which we consider the autistic mind to be inherently excluded, they encompass the discernment of other people's thoughts and feelings, their characters and intentions. This is just what is meant by the paradigmatic theory of autism as “mind-blind”—a theory that arose in the wake of the popularization of “Asperger syndrome.”

And yet Asperger writes this:

Das ‘normale’ Kind weiß mit hoher Kunst nichts anzufangen—sein Geschmack ist das glatt gemalte, farbenbunte Bild mit viel Rosenrot und Himmelblau, ja oft der Kitsch Die autistischen Kinder überraschen aber oft durch ein ganz differenziertes Stilgefühl, können mit Sicherheit Kunst und Kitsch unterscheiden, ja sie wissen auch um den Sinn selbst sehr “schwerer” Kunstwerke, mit denen viele Erwachsene nichts anfangen können, etwa romanischer Plastiken oder Bilder von Rembrandt, urteilen treffsicher darüber, nicht nur welche Vorgänge auf einem Bild dargestellt sind, sondern auch *was dahinter steht, welche Charaktere die dargestellten Personen haben, welche Stimmung aus einem Bild spricht*. Man bedenke, daß viele Erwachsene niemals zu jener Reife und *Bewußtheit der Persönlichkeit* kommen, welche zu einem solchen Wissen gehört!⁹³

I have highlighted the phrases that state the precise opposite of what has become the conventional wisdom regarding autism and the perception of other minds. And lest we suppose

93. Ibid., 116, emphasis added.

the heightened “Bewußtheit der Persönlichkeit” Asperger attributes to his patients to be somehow limited to the interpretation of artworks, as opposed to real other human persons, Asperger extends his claim explicitly from the former to the latter. First he moves from the sense for art to an autistic sense of self, a self-knowledge and self-problematization on the same interpretive model:

Verwandt mit diesem Kunstverständnis ist eine Fähigkeit, die sich ebenfalls bei autistischen Kindern häufig findet: eine besondere Selbstbeschau und eine sichere Beurteilung anderer Menschen. Während das “normale” Kind dahinlebt, seiner selbst kaum bewußt, dabei aber ein richtig reagierender Teil der Welt, denken diese Kinder über sich nach, stehen sich selber beobachtend gegenüber, sind sich selbst zum Problem ...⁹⁴

Then, still in the same breath, he proceeds to the perception and judgment of other minds:

So wie diese Kinder sich selbst beschauen, so haben sie oft auch ein erstaunlich richtiges und reifes Urteil über die Menschen der Umgebung, spüren sehr gut, wer ihnen gewogen ist und wer nicht, auch wenn er sich ganz anders gebärdet, haben ein besonders feines Gefühl für die Abnormität anderer Kinder, ja sie sind, so abnorm sie selber sein mögen, geradezu überempfindlich dafür.⁹⁵

Such observations as these simply do not compute within the discursive field that has become established around autism, which defines it simultaneously as a deficit in empathy and interpersonal perception and as a surplus of targeted logical abilities. That is why Wing felt justified in “correcting” Asperger’s account of autistic originality in language, as if his observations had simply been mistaken, and why others have seriously raised the question “did Asperger’s cases have Asperger’s disorder?”⁹⁶ So outlandish is the idea that Asperger’s patients might have been exceptionally *good* at understanding and interpreting the thoughts, intentions, and states of mind “behind the face” of a painting or another person.

The question “did Asperger’s cases have Asperger’s disorder” implies that Asperger

94. Ibid.

95. Ibid., 117.

96. J. N. Miller and S. Ozonoff, “Did Asperger’s Cases Have Asperger’s Disorder?” *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry* 38, no. 2 (1997): 247–251.

himself may have been dealing with a distinct population of patients from those to whom his name is now attached. Were they, then, a group suffering from a disorder that made them identical to those with “real”—i.e., modern—Asperger syndrome in all respects except the ability to look at Rembrandt and judge human character? A likelier possibility is that, regardless of ever-shifting diagnostic boundaries, what is at stake are two notions of what it means to understand and make judgments about another person. This is not a question that the modern commentators on Asperger ask themselves; but it is one on which Asperger was clearly able to articulate two alternative possibilities.

One idea of what it means to understand other minds—the one implicit in the modern definition of autism—is to perform, “instinctively” as it were, the socially sanctioned reaction to the affective “cues” and “signals” transmitted by the other. This type of reaction is what Asperger terms “automatic” or “mechanized” behavior, and what he has in mind when he speaks of his autistic patients’ difficulties at home or in school, in contrast to the “gut mechanisierbaren und lebenspraktischen Kinder.”⁹⁷ It makes no difference, by the way, whether we are talking about social rituals or rote intellectual tasks: the autistic child according to Asperger is as bad at learning standard, “mechanized” methods of arithmetic as at copying emotional reactions. In both cases, mechanization stands opposed to originality. Anything that is taught and learned, or socially copied, is “bloß oberflächlich mechanisiert, ist ‘gestenhaft.’” And the autistic is anything but rote and mechanized: “Die umgekehrte Störung finden wir bei der autistischen Intelligenz. Diese Kinder können vor allem spontan produzieren, können nur originell sein, können aber nur in herabgesetztem Maße lernen, nur schwer mechanisiert werden”⁹⁸

Nowhere does Asperger deny that autism counts as a “disturbance” (Störung) (though he does

97. Asperger, “Die ‘Autistischen Psychopathen,’” 108.

98. *Ibid.*, 114.

imply that to be completely non-autistic, if it were possible, would be at least as severe a one!). In a context like this it is simply not a question of *evaluating* the abilities of the autistic child. Something larger is at stake—namely a general concept of thinking and its relation to the social in which a place is preserved for radically original thinking precisely *outside* the space of human social relations.

Asperger's autistics may be good judges of character, but this is not to say they judge character in the "normal" way. Their powers of recognition, even where they are abnormally good, remain abnormal—in what sense? They are conditioned by the *structure* of the autistic personality—by its distance, its apartness. The parents of Fritz V., Asperger's first case study, report of their son "daß er oft, wenn man es gar nicht erwartete, durch Bemerkungen überraschte, die eine ausgezeichnete Erfassung der Situation, eine gute Beurteilung von Menschen verrieten—erstaunlich, da er doch scheinbar kaum Kenntnis von der Umwelt nahm."⁹⁹ There is, in other words, an uncanny effect, generated by the apparent contradiction between the "empty" autistic gaze—"meist ... geht er ins Leere"¹⁰⁰—and the apparent fullness of comprehension.

"Hier ist ein scheinbarer Widerspruch zu lösen," Asperger comments—

der uns aber in einem wichtigen Punkt weiterbringen soll. Wir wollen zeigen, die wesentliche Abnormität der autistischen Psychopathen sei eine Störung der lebendigen Beziehungen zur Umwelt, eine Störung, welche alle Abartigkeiten erklärt. Wie verträgt sich aber eine Kontaktstörung mit jener besonderen Klarsichtigkeit, welche aus den eben geschilderten Wesenszügen spricht, wie kann ein Mensch mit gestörten Beziehungen so viel so bewußt erleben? Dieser Widerspruch ist nur ein scheinbarer. Das normale Kind, besonders das kleinere, welches richtig in der Umweltsituation steht, richtig darauf reagiert und mitschwingt, tut das aus seinen gesunden Instinkten, kommt aber meist nicht zu bewußter Beurteilung; dazu gehört ein Abstand von den konkreten Dingen. Der Abstand vom Einzelding ist die Voraussetzung [*sic*] zur Abstraktion, zur Bewußtwerdung, zur Begriffsbildung. Gerade die verstärkte persönliche Distanz, ja die Störung des instinkthaften, gefühlsmäßigen Reagierens, welche die Autistischen charakterisiert, ist also in gewissem Sinn eine Voraussetzung für ihre gute begriffliche

99. Ibid., 90.

100. Ibid., 87.

Erfassung der Welt. Wir sprechen daher von einer “psychopathischen Klarsichtigkeit” dieser Kinder, weil sie eben nur bei ihnen vorkommt.¹⁰¹

And in this light there appears the other possible understanding of what it means to make a judgment of character: not to do so tacitly, “instinctively” and in accord with an unspoken collective sensibility, but to formalize and formulate a judgment, to use concepts and words, even if—as is the case with many of Asperger’s patients—these concepts are so “original” as to be opaque. It is important to realize that the passage above is not limited in its scope to the autistic personality and its spontaneous excesses, but is an entirely general statement of a certain relation between “distance” and the ability to get a conceptual grip on the world, that is, to think and judge. The distance that Asperger calls the “precondition” of thinking is not a cognitive or epistemological distance, one that would be simply synonymous with “abstraction”; it is a “personal distance,” a removal from the *instinctive* or *affective* environment constituted by the social. And yet it is not even the case that the conceptual and the social stand here in a relationship of dualistic opposition: that would contradict Asperger’s radical holism. Instead the relation Asperger articulates here allows us to fully grasp the formal unity of all aspects of his notion of personhood: distance from the social is simultaneously distance from the norms of personal appearance and “expressive phenomena” like voice and gaze, and is also expressed in the distance between one’s thoughts and judgments and the collective mindset of the social. The patients labeled autistic are outliers in all these respects, but the relations hold true for everyone, in Asperger’s view.

We are about to see in the next and final chapter how Asperger’s research on autism was transmitted to America, where it played a crucial (but until very recently unacknowledged) role in enabling Leo Kanner to write his own description of an autistic type. The story of this journey

101. Ibid., 117–118.

is engaging and full of nuance. The features that constitute the profound originality of Asperger's thinking, however—both the elegant interrelations of the aesthetic, intellectual, and social aspects of his autistic type and the generality and force of his concept of autistic thinking—do not survive the trip. These aspects of Asperger's account are anomalies in the history of writing about autism, comparable only to Bleuler's ideas about autism in their philosophical-anthropological scope and superior to them in their potential implications. As we depart Europe for America, then, it is worth reflecting that perhaps the unlikeliest of circumstances—not just an institution and a profession wholly mobilized in service of a regime of terror and murder, but an unassuming personality within those structures, one who himself stood apart in small ways (Asperger was always said to resemble his patients slightly), but who appears not to have had exceptional ethical qualities—somehow combined to produce an account of the autistic person, and of the autism in us all, whose humanity is unsurpassed.

Chapter Four

Autism Comes to America: Georg Frankl between Asperger and Kanner

The story of the “double discovery” of modern autism is familiar to many because it is the bit of history most typically included in accounts of autism written for parents, social workers, and a general audience. Its premise is that the entity we now refer to as Autism Spectrum Disorder was first described on two separate occasions: by Leo Kanner, working in Baltimore, in 1943; and by Hans Asperger, in Vienna, in 1944. Both Kanner’s and Asperger’s can be regarded as “first descriptions” because, according to the story, neither had any knowledge of the other’s work. Nor could they: both papers were published in the midst of a war between their respective nations. Kanner and Asperger themselves always abided by this version of events.¹

This chapter will show, on the basis of new archival evidence, that in fact there *was* a channel of direct knowledge transmission between Vienna and Baltimore in the form of a third figure, Georg Frankl, who helped lay the foundations for Asperger’s autism research before moving to Kanner’s clinic and doing much the same there. (Yet another researcher, Anni Weiss, doubtless also played a large part in bringing the findings from Asperger’s clinic to Kanner’s. Because she never formally joined Kanner’s staff, however, and because her publications came later, her personal contributions are harder to document.) But first, a few more words about the current state of knowledge.²

1. See Leo Kanner, “The Birth of Infantile Autism,” *Journal of Autism and Childhood Schizophrenia* 3, no. 2 (1973): 93–95, and Hans Asperger, “Problems of Infantile Autism,” *Communication* 13 (1979): 45–52, at 47.

2. At the time of writing, I believed myself to be the only author with knowledge of Frankl’s role in the history of autism. Since then, the facts of his case have been published in Steve Silberman’s *NeuroTribes: The Legacy of Autism and the Future of Neurodiversity* (New York: Avery, 2015). This—unlike the discovery of autism itself—was a case of authentic dual discovery. My findings were made among Kanner’s papers in the Melvin Sabshin Archives of the American Psychiatric Association; Silberman found many identical documents, and some distinct

The double discovery story tells how Kanner, seeing one young patient after another exhibit the same pattern of “autistic aloneness”—that is, the failure to recognize or heed other people, the absence of communicative intent, an attitude of being content unto oneself—and an “insistence on sameness” manifesting itself in fits of anxiety or rage when an established routine was altered in even the smallest way, perceived in this the picture of a new syndrome, which he dubbed “early infantile autism.” And how meanwhile, back in Vienna, Hans Asperger, “unaware of Kanner’s work because of the war,” “pondered a group of four boys whom he described as having an ‘autistic psychopathy.’” Asperger’s description of *his* syndrome “closely mirrored Kanner’s, except that Asperger’s group . . . was less communicatively impaired and exhibited intensely developed special interests not noted in Kanner’s pioneering work.”³ Kanner published his first paper on autism, “Autistic Disturbances of Affective Contact,” in 1943; Asperger’s “Die ‘Autistischen Psychopathen’ im Kindesalter” followed in 1944—a remarkable coincidence!

But Kanner’s and Asperger’s syndromes were not seen as closely related to each other until the voice of a more recent generation of autism research, Lorna Wing, brought Asperger and his syndrome to wider notice with a 1981 publication, “Asperger’s Syndrome: A Clinical Account.”⁴ Here, Wing “drew upon Asperger’s observations to describe children and adults who exhibit normal intellects yet experience relatively severe impairments in their abilities to understand and relate to others.”⁵ At the same time, she “saw strong similarities between Asperger’s ‘autistic psychopathy’ and Kanner’s autism.”⁶ These similarities derived from the

ones, in the medical archives of Johns Hopkins University. I would like to acknowledge here Silberman’s fine work, while also confirming that I arrived at the same or very similar findings independently. This chapter has been only minimally altered in light of Silberman’s publication. The facts and interpretations presented here were arrived at without consulting Silberman.

3. Nadesan, *Constructing Autism*, 12 (see chap. 2, n. 16).

4. Wing, “Asperger’s Syndrome” (see chap. 3, n. 11).

5. Nadesan, *Constructing Autism*, 13.

6. *Ibid.*

nature of the perceived social deficit, independent of the level of intellect. To accommodate such wide disparities in intelligence—and in a concomitant estimation of “functioning,” or the ability to live independently among society—while still maintaining a notion of homogeneous impairment in interpersonal relations across the board, Wing fashioned the landmark of contemporary pathology we know as the “autism spectrum.” What she—for the first time—called Asperger’s Syndrome was positioned at the “high-functioning” or intelligent end of this spectrum; Kanner’s autism occupied the lower range of functioning and intelligence, and indeed was seen as often coinciding with mental retardation.

To us today, the autism spectrum is a largely self-evident fact. Why then did it take so long to realize that Kanner’s and Asperger’s cases were just fluid variants of one underlying condition? The most nuanced and also the simplest answer we have to this question so far is the sociological one offered by Gil Eyal and his coauthors in their 2010 volume *The Autism Matrix*.⁷

Eyal and his group explain the career of autism in the United States since Kanner’s publication primarily in terms of the shifting power balance between institutions, groups of expertise, and consumer groups and associations (usually composed of parents of autistic children). Most acutely, they show how the more recent “epidemic” upsurge in autism diagnoses can be meticulously accounted for in sociological terms, thus lifting the need to posit a drastic increase in the actual incidence of autism due to a biological factor. The key event in their account is “deinstitutionalization,” or the emptying of the American asylums in the 1960s and ’70s. This created a vast new pool of potential therapy clients; moreover, the law now mandated that the mentally handicapped be given every reasonable chance to live a life “as close to the normal as possible”; and parents, no longer encouraged to commit their atypical children to

7. Eyal et al., *The Autism Matrix* (see Introduction, n. 8).

institutions for the insane, wielded unprecedented influence via new networks of advocacy. In other words, several strong forces now aligned to demand new treatments tailored to specific kinds of disability, and thus newly specific diagnoses, of which autism became perhaps the most popular. The range of behavioral changes that proved possible under various experimental therapies then fed back into theories and definitions of autism and its subcategories on the “spectrum,” driving diagnosis rates ever higher even as diagnostic criteria shifted in sometimes startling ways (making possible the irony of a certain 1997 paper, “Did Asperger’s cases have Asperger’s disorder?”).⁸

As for the question why Asperger’s description could not be integrated with Kanner’s until 1981, Eyal proposes a twofold answer. Part of it is the settling of the effects of deinstitutionalization described above into a more stable state of affairs characterized by open diagnostic checklists. “A domain of developmental disabilities was constituted and within it the therapies operated to break autism down to a list of ‘items of autistic behavior,’ to array those on the same register as the behaviors exhibited by those diagnosed as mentally retarded, so that one no longer needed to choose between illness and retardation.”⁹ But the second, decisive factor is parents. “There was a constituency waiting to champion the diagnosis” of Asperger’s syndrome within the context of an autistic spectrum: parents with children whose autism was “near normal” or “high-functioning.” Labeling them high-functioning would assure that they received a tailored kind of treatment different from that given to more impaired autistics; but keeping them on the autism spectrum would ensure that they got treatment and services to begin with.

The authors of *The Autism Matrix* also address, albeit in less depth than their sociological topics, what they call “the riddle of simultaneous discovery,” or the question of why both

8. Miller and Ozonoff, “Did Asperger’s Cases” (see chap. 3, n. 96).

9. Eyal et al., *The Autism Matrix*, 223.

Asperger and Kanner, if they could not have known of each other's work, each applied the label "autism" at nearly the same time to such closely corresponding sets of clinical observations. With their usual equanimity, they set out to "dissolve" or demystify the riddle of simultaneous discovery. To this end they emphasize two basic states of affairs: that Kanner and Asperger shared a broad intellectual background and set of references, and that their "institutional location[s]" within the public health systems of Baltimore and Vienna, respectively, were akin. Hence there was no need for actual information to be shared between them: each was already located at the precise institutional coordinates where their discoveries were simply bound to be made by someone.

That Kanner and Asperger shared an intellectual background means they were both originally from Austria-Hungary, trained in European medicine and psychiatry, and influenced by the same older generation of psychopathologists, including both Eugen Bleuler (discussed in Chapter One) and Ernst Kretschmer (Chapter Two). From Bleuler, of course, each derived the concept of autism that eventually came to stand for their co-discovery.

Eyal's second point, regarding Kanner and Asperger's shared institutional location, concerns "their similarly interstitial position between disciplines,"¹⁰ which put both of them in the service of a new model of child surveillance and therapy provision, developing along similar lines on both sides of the Atlantic, for which autism would eventually become the paradigmatic diagnosis. This particular interstice combined the expertise of pediatrics, psychiatry, and special education. It was designed to address complaints stemming from the difficulties certain atypical children had in making their entrance into school and society; the complaints were often not registered as severe enough to demand psychiatric consultation until the children entered school,

10. *Ibid.*, 214.

and therapy was intended to make them ready to reenter the educational milieu. Diagnostics incorporated physical examinations, psychiatric evaluation, and milieu-based observational techniques supposed to identify the peculiarities of a child within the whole context of life in the real world. Furthermore, the new diagnoses, autism in particular, split the difference between the categories of “mental illness” on the one hand and constitutional abnormality (retardation or “feble-mindedness”) on the other; in Eyal’s words, autism “served as the hinge connecting the two ... unifying them into a single field of observation and treatment.”¹¹ And finally, this regime of care linked various sites of intervention—the home, the school, the therapist’s office—into a comprehensive network of orthopsychiatric normalization. Only at the intersection of these lines was a doctor likely both to come across the right case material and to have the requisite habits of observing and classifying to arrive at a picture of a modern autistic syndrome. But given these conditions, it was overwhelmingly likely that just such a picture would emerge.

In sum, the most sophisticated account available—that of Eyal et al.—explains the “double discovery of autism” as a *motivated coincidence*, conditioned by the two discoverers’ common intellectual background and institutional location, but otherwise a matter of chance. Such an account is designed to render the supposition of any direct transmission of ideas and research between Asperger’s and Kanner’s respective clinics during the relevant window of time superfluous. It does an excellent job of this. Nonetheless, direct transmission *did* take place between Asperger and Kanner, as we are about to see.

The foundational descriptions of autism appeared during wartime, when the sending of scientific journal articles between the United States and Austria was all but unthinkable. We also have

11. Ibid.

Kanner's word that the cases described in his autism paper had only begun to arrive under his observation as of 1938. Any communication between his research and that transpiring in Vienna prior to this date would thus be too early to have an impact on his discovery of autism; and in any case, evidence of such earlier communication is nonexistent. Between the reported start of Kanner's interest in cases of autism and the outbreak of war in Europe, there is really only a narrow window centering on the years 1938–1939.

As it happens, a new staff doctor arrived at Kanner's clinic in the summer of 1938. His name was Georg Frankl, he was a Jewish citizen of Austria, and he had entered the United States in November of the previous year. His letter of introduction, written by Dr. Ernest Spiegel of Philadelphia, announced "Dr. Georg Frankl (formerly of Vienna) who was for many years connected with the Child Guidance Clinic of the University."¹² In reply, Kanner wrote Spiegel that the Phipps Clinic "shall be happy to profit from Dr. Frankl's experiences at the late Dr. Lazar's clinic."¹³ By automatically connecting the phrase "child guidance clinic" with the name Lazar, Kanner evinced his knowledge that the facility in question was the *heilpädagogische Abteilung* of the Vienna University hospital, a special division founded in 1911 by Erwin Lazar. What Kanner may not have known yet, but was sure to find out in short order from Frankl himself, was that Frankl's colleague in the *heilpädagogische Abteilung*, and furthermore its director since 1935, was a certain Hans Asperger. Frankl and Asperger, in short, had been working together for ten years before Frankl fled the continent and landed at Kanner's door. During that time, Frankl had himself laid many of the foundations for Asperger's study of autism. He was soon to do the same for Kanner's.

12. Spiegel to Kanner, May 4, 1938. Melvin Sabshin Archives, American Psychiatric Association, box 100696, folder 47. All material from the Sabshin Archives cited in this chapter is under the copyright of the American Psychiatric Association and is cited by permission.

13. Kanner to Spiegel, May 10, 1938. Ibid.

Frankl's impact on Kanner is twofold. First, he provides Kanner with clinical observations already made in Vienna, and generates similar observations of Kanner's patients in Baltimore. Second, on a theoretical level, he introduces Kanner to the concept of *affective contact*, a concept he apparently developed himself, denoting the ability to form relations to others, on the level not of discursive understanding but of emotional attunement. Before this, Kanner had had no framework in which to perceive the thing he would later call autism. Affective contact serves him as the background against which a figure of autism can appear. Kanner's debt to Frankl is manifest, both in letters and in the title of his 1943 paper, "Autistic Disturbances of Affective Contact."

Frankl is moreover on the record as stating that *disturbances of affective contact*, as a general phenomenon, encompass a wide range (he does not use the word "spectrum," but rather calls it a "series") of variant types commonly observed in atypical children. In their particulars, the types described by Frankl share some of their traits with Asperger's autistic psychopaths, and others with Kanner's cases of autism; on both sides the resemblances are too strong to ignore. Frankl thus both provides a theoretical framework general enough to encompass both regions of the spectrum, and anticipates particular features of each type. He specifies that the subjects in question vary in their intelligence—from the apparently retarded all the way to "a certain type of child prodigy"—but that all share the innate inability to form affective contact, and on this basis cohere into a larger type. In all essential respects, then, he describes what is now the autism spectrum, an idea that would not emerge onto the public stage until Lorna Wing introduced it almost forty years later.

Georg Frankl was to end in near-total obscurity, leaving no trace beyond a handful of short publications, which have received no attention whatsoever. What is reported of his career

in this chapter has been reconstructed from documents left amongst the papers of Leo Kanner, which are now housed at the Melvin Sabshin Archives of the American Psychiatric Association in Arlington, Virginia.¹⁴

Clearly the fact of Georg Frankl necessitates some adjustment of our view of the emergence of modern autism. The fact that neither Kanner nor Asperger refers to the other—when both were embarked, especially in retrospect, on such similar programs—has until now been explained by the assumption that they knew nothing of each other. This assumption in turn required the great similarity in their results to be explained by a theory of motivated coincidence: their intellectual backgrounds and institutional positions must have been sufficiently alike to lead each of them to make the same discovery at nearly the same time. But the fundamental assumption is now tenable only in one direction: Asperger knew effectively nothing of Kanner, but Kanner was informed through Frankl of the work being done at Asperger's heilpädagogische Abteilung.

It is within a reasonable range of possibilities that Frankl was the instigator of *both* research programs leading ultimately to clinical descriptions of an autistic type. Frankl functioned as an observer of children at the ground level in both clinics. He used similar terms to describe them at both sites, terms that are central to both Asperger's and Kanner's autistic types. Frankl's publications, which predate Kanner's and Asperger's epochal autism papers by as much as nine years, contain case studies manifesting ample similarity to both types. Frankl supplied Kanner with much of the descriptive material for his exemplary cases of autism. Kanner, in effect, borrowed Frankl's notes and wrote up his report on their basis; he knew perfectly well, furthermore, that Frankl himself had written about very similar cases in his own prior

14. I thank here the American Psychiatric Association, and archivist Gary McMillan in particular, for giving me access to and helping me navigate the Kanner papers.

publications. It must be assumed that Frankl, when he shared with Kanner his concept of affective contact and its potential for use in interpreting the behavior of abnormal children, referred to his patients from the heilpädagogische Abteilung. To us, it is almost unthinkable that their similarity to the patients he and Kanner subsequently began to study together escaped his notice. And this raises the question of why none of this became known earlier.

The question of why we have remained ignorant of Georg Frankl for so long cannot be definitively settled on the available evidence, but it is important to sketch out, and to distinguish between, two types of hypothesis. The first are the personal, psychological hypotheses. One speculation of this type is that Kanner, consciously or not, wanted to claim all credit for discovering autism himself, and did his best—quite successfully, for decades—to suppress the role of others, who, for their part, did not speak up for themselves.¹⁵ Another, which I find *prima facie* more plausible and believe also has some support in the archive, is that Frankl, for reasons of his own, had effectively decided to abandon his research program and was more or less happy to have Kanner take it over from him. (I present the evidence for this suggestion in a later segment of the chapter.) But these are both ultimately speculations.

Another kind of hypothesis that can explain part of the silence around Frankl is impersonal and epistemological. We must recall that the “discovery of autism” only looks like a discovery in hindsight, thanks to all that has subsequently rendered autism both a highly differentiated and a highly visible scientific object. It is doubtful that, when the first of what would become Kanner’s autistic patients entered the examination room, anyone had occasion to shout *eureka*. One thing this chapter will show is that autism simply was not discovered all at once. In fact, nearly all of the symptoms most associated with it had long been observed and

15. Something like this view is defended by Silberman in *NeuroTribes*, pp. 141ff.

described, in different arrangements, on the occasion of patients diagnosed with other previously established conditions. The emergence of autism takes the form of a new grouping or constellation of already known symptoms. Its coalescence into a syndromal type was gradual—we will see much of it transpire in the course of Frankl’s and Anni Weiss’s writings. And we know that Kanner chose to view *his* version of autism as a highly specific and rare disorder—not, in other words, quite the momentous discovery that we attribute to him.

Lastly, we can also ask the question: if Kanner had wanted to give Frankl the credit he was due, *what* exactly would he have given credit for? Kanner’s 1943 paper is called “Autistic Disturbances of Affective Contact.” The “autistic disturbances” in question encompass the highly specific clinical picture that Kanner sincerely believed himself to have observed for the first time—related, yes, to the conditions described by Frankl or Asperger, but distinct in a way that mattered to Kanner. In Kanner’s estimation—we will see the evidence for this as well—Frankl’s real contribution was *the theory of affective contact*, the background against which Kanner’s autistic disturbances appeared. To the extent we must ask why Frankl was denied his recognition, we should be asking this not with regard to the phenomenon of Kanner’s autism but rather to the concept of affective contact that constituted the heart of Frankl’s original research program. So we will follow the thread of this concept through the chapter, from its origins in the Viennese encephalitis epidemic to its use in Kanner’s seminal autism paper of 1943.

Background: Austrian *Heilpädagogik* and American “child guidance”

The department overseen by Asperger in Vienna, located within the larger pediatric clinic, was called the *heilpädagogische Abteilung*, derived from *Heilpädagogik*, which is variously translated as “curative,” “therapeutic,” or “remedial pedagogy.” This is a field within which

pediatric, psychiatric, and pedagogical expertise are blended to address difficulties of social and scholastic integration falling in the range of what in English are called “personality disorders” (the equivalent of the German sense of *Psychopathie*, as in Asperger’s “autistic psychopaths.”) In his historical account of the clinic, Erwin Lazar, its founder and director until 1932, makes the intriguing claim that Clemens von Pirquet, head of pediatrics at the University of Vienna at the time of the clinic’s founding (1911), had become versed in the care of “verwahrloster und mißhandelter Kinder” during a sojourn in America.¹⁶ This would mean that something of the views transmitted by Georg Frankl to the American scene may, at least distantly, have originated there. In any case, according to Lazar, the purpose of the heilpädagogische Abteilung was—in memorable phrasing—to provide “ein gesichtetes, gründlich durchuntersuchtes Kindermaterial,” first to the homes for delinquents, but soon also for “die Schulen ... die Polizei, die Gerichte und die privaten Vereine, die sich mit verwahrlosten, kriminellen und psychisch abnormen Kindern befaßten.”¹⁷ Later, as we saw in Chapter Three, the Nazi party apparatus would have its own interest in the children coming through this system. In other words, all the institutions that together were responsible for the norming of the population found themselves in need of a central site of expertise, a scientific expertise to monitor the flow of “material” into the various institutions, screening, sorting, and classifying it in advance. Hence the conception of the clinic as “Beobachtungsstation.”¹⁸ There was possibly no other single institution in the world that brought more ideally together every dimension of surveillance and disciplining in the service of social norms.

The American equivalent of Heilpädagogik, and the field in which Kanner worked, was

16. Erwin Lazar, “Die heilpädagogische Abteilung der Kinderklinik in Wien,” *Zeitschrift für Kinderforschung* 28 (1923): 161.

17. *Ibid.*

18. *Ibid.*

referred to as “child guidance.” It reflected many of the ideas of Kanner’s mentor, Adolf Meyer, “the most important American psychiatrist of the early twentieth century.”¹⁹ Meyer was born in Switzerland in 1866 (making him about a decade younger than Freud and Bleuler) and, after training with European luminaries such as Forel and Charcot, emigrated to the United States in 1892. He held various positions in Chicago; Kankakee, Illinois; and New York before he was invited to become the first head of the Henry Phipps Psychiatric Clinic of Johns Hopkins University, a position he held until retiring in 1941 (he died in 1950).²⁰

Meyer termed his general approach “psychobiology”; it was in essence a psychodynamic (but not Freudian) way of putting mental health in the context of the whole personality, the whole life of a patient. It thus has broad affinities with the European “holism” discussed in Chapters Two and Three. Psychobiological child guidance clinics, such as the one Kanner would found as a subsection of the Phipps Clinic in 1930, also shared with European Heilpädagogik their core function as institutions of social discipline. Their focus was on “the behavior problems of the mostly normal middle-class child” insofar as these “threatened the functioning and stability of the family.” But if the family was under threat from the difficulties of the child, it was also to blame: Kanner “did his own fair share of advising, ‘defending,’ and blaming middle-class mothers” for their children’s problems.²¹

In words of Kanner’s, psychobiology

offers no ready-made formula that could be immediately applied to all cases. It does not read anything *into* the patient that cannot be read *from* the patient and the facts at hand. ... It adapts its methods to the needs of the individual patient instead of adapting the patient

19. Ruth Leys, “Types of One: Adolf Meyer’s Life Chart and the Representation of Individuality,” *Representations* 34 (1991): 1.

20. The Phipps Clinic opened its doors in 1913; at the ribbon-cutting ceremony, the keynote speech was by Eugen Bleuler, on a visit from Zurich. Bleuler’s topic was “Autistic Thinking.” (Eugen Bleuler, “Autistic Thinking,” *American Journal of Insanity* [1913]: 873–886, at 873n.) Thirty years later, Kanner’s “Autistic Disturbances of Affective Contact” would come out of his work at the same clinic.

21. Eyal et al., *The Autism Matrix*, 86.

to the rigid postulates of a theory.²²

The passage could practically be lifted from the holist methodology segment of Asperger's autism paper, or indeed from any of the authors covered in Chapter Two. In America as in Europe, a holistically inflected methodology tended to favor autism as its prime object of study. And with Kanner, as with the European holists before (but not including) Asperger, this is because autism appears as precisely the opposite of holist ideals, as an injury to the wholeness of the person in the form of the deprivation of affect. But this comes later.

Leo (born Chaskel Leib) Kanner, before arriving at the Phipps Clinic, had led a colorful existence, moving from his Eastern Galician birthplace (then, before the First World War, part of Austria-Hungary) to Berlin for medical training, serving in the Austrian army during the war, and returning to postwar Berlin to finish his degree, before departing for the United States in 1924 (aged thirty), where his first position was at the State Hospital "for insane Indians" in Yankton, South Dakota. His notable publication before the 1943 autism paper was a textbook of child psychiatry (1935). After that, his most noted publications, including a monograph, centered on the history of folklore and superstition relating to the mouth and teeth.²³ Perhaps something of this is referred to in an early letter to Kanner from Meyer, his future employer, who writes:

The only scruple I have about your own candidacy is that you are more inclined toward literary work than towards concrete occupation with specific facts and you may very readily become disappointed when having to meet the very concrete and objective work with neurology and psychobiology because you will find it hard to content yourself with

22. Leo Kanner, "Work with Psychobiological Children's Personality Difficulties," *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 4 (1934): 406–407. Kanner's words are strikingly similar to those with which Asperger articulates his methodological commitments in the introduction to his 1944 autism paper: "Dieser Weg ... verzichtet bewußt auf ein von vornherein gegebenes System. Er geht bewußt vom Individuum aus, sucht seine Persönlichkeit in ihrer Einmaligkeit zu begreifen" (Asperger, "Die 'Autistischen Psychopathen,'" 82 [see Introduction, n. 30]).

23. Kanner's paper "Historical Notes on Rumination in Man" is not about exercises in mental contemplation, but rather "nothing else but the bringing back of food into the mouth; or more clearly expressed ... a local movement of food whereby it is brought back upward through the esophagus into the mouth, eaten and made small, and then swallowed again" (in the words of his first historical source, the learned Hieronymus Fabricius ab Aquapendente [1537–1619]). It includes sections on "Rumination and Smoking," "Rumination for a Living," and "Ruminating Families." Leo Kanner, "Historical Notes on Rumination in Man," *Medical Life* 43 (1935): 27–28.

the training towards objective investigation.²⁴

Kanner adapted himself well enough, in the end, to the methods of investigation practiced at Johns Hopkins. But his assumptions were to be unsettled again with the arrival of Frankl at the Phipps Clinic, bringing a dose of real, up-to-date European affect theory. This would set in motion the chain of events leading to Kanner's subsequent fame.

The last characters to be introduced in this chapter, but perhaps the most important, are Anni Weiss and Georg Frankl. (Both used various alternate spellings of their first and last names; Weiss furthermore added Frankl's name to her own when the two were married.) Frankl, born in 1897, trained in medicine in Vienna and came to the *heilpädagogische Abteilung* in 1927, when Erwin Lazar was still head. He worked there for ten years, "first as interne [*sic*], later as consultant, since the death of prof. Lazar [in 1932—SHT] as senior member of the staff."²⁵ In November 1937, some short months before the Anschluss, Frankl fled Vienna for the United States, where Weiss was waiting for him. They were married soon thereafter. In the summer of 1938, Frankl arrived at the Phipps Clinic to work under Kanner. He spent only one year there, however, before beginning a period of itinerancy in constant search of stable employment that took him to Chicago, Nebraska, upstate New York, and finally to Kansas City. As we will see, much transpired—and much, also, changed for Georg Frankl—during that year 1938–1939. All of Frankl's important research was completed before he left Vienna. The results comprise four papers published between 1934 and 1943 (the last in English translation). We will review these in detail below.

Anni Weiss had been in the United States since 1934, affiliated with Teachers College of Columbia University. She had studied psychology in Frankfurt am Main, Hamburg, and Vienna,

24. Meyer to Kanner, September 22, 1928. Sabshin Archives, box 100695, folder 22.

25. Sabshin Archives, box 100696, folder 47.

and began working at the heilpädagogische Abteilung in 1925. Her curriculum vitae provides a brief depiction of the work:

This work included observation, interviewing, mental testing, psychological diagnosis, psychotherapy and remedial work with children referred for study; guidance of parents and teachers; follow-up work; training of students in child guidance; collaboration in research done by the department.²⁶

All in all, a thorough occupation. It is highly likely that Weiss had a large hand in generating the observations that we can observe flowing through Frankl's papers and later into Kanner's. Weiss herself did not publish any papers, however, until after emigrating. When they appeared (in English), these dealt partly with research done in Vienna and partly with general concepts of Heilpädagogik—including testing methods and diagnostics—under the American rubric of child guidance, providing an invaluable look into how the Viennese techniques translated to the American context.

Too little is known—and, judging from the paucity of archival material, too little is probably knowable—about Anni Weiss and Georg Frankl.²⁷ But the published and archival material is sufficient to construct an intriguing conjecture of the process behind what appears in retrospect as the discovery of autism in its current form.

Both Asperger's and Kanner's accounts of modern autism—if that is what we take their papers of 1944 and 1943, respectively, to be—are built up out of a plethora of observed behavioral traits in certain groups of children. We leave aside for now the question of the theorization of autism—the gathering and ordering of those traits into a coherent type and the ascription to this type of certain psychological laws, such as “autistic aloneness” or the “desire

26. Sabshin Archives, box 100696, folder 48.

27. I thank Paul Belloni, bibliographer for psychology and psychiatry at the University of Chicago libraries, for his invaluable help in tracing Georg and Anni from Baltimore to—eventually—the University of Missouri, Kansas City, where they taught for the better part of the 1950s. After that, apart from a few unconfirmed leads, the trail is lost.

for the maintenance of sameness.” For now we are merely talking about the observation and recording of a set of first-order traits or behaviors, as yet untheorized: for instance, a fascination with spinning objects; the tendency to “reverse pronouns,” referring to oneself as “you” and to one’s interlocutor as “I”; or a particular style of naughtiness consisting in unmotivated and lightning-quick acts of aggression emerging apparently from nowhere and vanishing just as suddenly. These are but some of many examples. These first-order traits are highly significant because, despite their striking particularity, they recur with remarkable consistency in case after case—some more so in Asperger’s, some in Kanner’s descriptions, some more or less evenly distributed throughout each. The great majority of first-order “autistic” traits, however—regardless of whether they are eventually more associated with one or the other autistic type—appear in case descriptions written either by Weiss or by Frankl years before either Asperger or Kanner published anything about autism. There, they are of course not associated with anything formally designated an autistic type; they appear instead in a variety of other contexts, sometimes under other diagnostic headings, sometimes uncategorized. Some of the cases presented by Weiss and Frankl, to be sure, seem as though they could belong among Asperger’s or Kanner’s autistic groups. Others, though, clearly belong to other psychopathological domains—even as they display what we think of as autistic traits with sometimes startling accuracy.

The model we can construct on the basis of this evidence is one in which traits—or more accurately, first-order linguistic formulations of observed traits: we could call them “pieces of description”—take on validity in individual cases and then migrate, more or less unmodified, into new and variable groupings, among which are the eventual Asperger and Kanner types. And it is no surprise that these pieces of description originate not with the directors of clinics but with

their underlings. This is not to say that Asperger and Kanner were not highly involved in day-to-day affairs and themselves perceptive observers of children. But workers like Frankl and Weiss—and a certain Sister Viktorine Zak who served as a nurse in the Vienna clinic for many years and is credited by Frankl in turn with supplying some of the observations *he* uses—were likely logging by far the most hours face to face with patients, and were writing up the first, raw reports of their conduct. The Vienna clinic saw perhaps 1500 patients each year²⁸—a number impossible for one head doctor, also charged with supervising the other staff and engaged in research, to survey. It would have fallen to the subordinate doctors and nurses to record the crucial first impressions of patients. It would be up to them to decide what words to use to catalog a particular behavior—to decide, say, that a gesture was “stereotyped” or that the “pronominal reversal” described above represented a “rigid” attitude to language rather than some other kind of phenomenon. And thereby the first layer of interpretation is already laid down. We will see this process at work as characters painstakingly described by Weiss and Frankl rearranged themselves out of an initial matrix of traits into the distinct yet still related types described by Kanner and Asperger as autistic.

An early hybrid of Asperger and Kanner types: “Gottfried K.”

Let us take, as first exhibit, Weiss’s paper “Qualitative Intelligence Testing as a Means of Diagnosis in the Examination of Psychopathic Children,” published in 1935.²⁹ More than any other single source, this makes visible the whole nexus between the work going on at the Lazar-Asperger clinic and what would soon be done with Kanner in Baltimore (once Frankl arrived

28. According to Frankl’s curriculum vitae. Sabshin Archives, box 100696, folder 47.

29. Anni Weiss, “Qualitative Intelligence Testing as a Means of Diagnosis in the Examination of Psychopathic Children,” *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 5, no. 2 (1935): 154–179.

there, that is). The patented method of intelligence testing devised by Lazar for use at the heilpädagogische Abteilung is the ostensible subject of Weiss's paper. This reflects the fundamental conviction not only that standard intelligence tests produce results of limited value, but that the form of "intelligence" they are capable of measuring is in need of wholesale replacement. The root of the problem is twofold: an "artificial" testing situation that abstracts from the way real intelligence interacts with real-world problems, and a one-dimensional, plus-or-minus scale of measurement. The solution Lazar devised is a matrix of individual tests of diverse kinds, designed to measure capacities over a broad swath of intelligence types before integrating the results into an overall graph of the child's intelligence profile.³⁰ Throughout, more attention is paid to the *way* in which the child solves a given problem than to her eventual success or failure in solving it. Lazar likened the method to a "Lösung von mehreren Gleichungen mit vielen Unbekannten."³¹ It was this method of intelligence testing, in an even more radicalized form, that provided the framework for Asperger's study of the autistic psychopath: the description of this new type was explicitly presented not as a discovery in itself but as a demonstration of the effectiveness of the testing methods (see Chapter Three).

Weiss structures her paper on "Qualitative Intelligence Testing" in the same terms as Asperger with his 1944 autism paper (remember, though, that Weiss's paper was published nine years before Asperger's!): Lazar's testing methods are described, and then an example is given of their use. The example in this case is one that could very well stand alongside Asperger's autistic case studies. The Weiss paper is thus a prototype of Asperger's in both form and substance. It is also a pivot point from Asperger to Kanner: where it deviates in particulars from

30. It is instructive, again with regard to parallels between European and American scientific methods in psychiatry, to compare this to Adolf Meyer's original mechanism of diagnostic representation, the "life chart." See Leys, "Types of One," 15 and *passim*.

31. Lazar, "Die heilpädagogische Abteilung," 172.

Asperger's autistic type, it displays features that anticipate Kanner's.

Weiss's single case study is of a boy, "Gottfried K.," whom Weiss observed at the heilpädagogische Abteilung in Vienna before her emigration. Gottfried's initial homesickness at the clinic is a perfect example of a pattern that Asperger will later discern in the autistic type and describe as a "schweres Heimweh" that "zunächst gar nicht zu den sonstigen Zeichen von Gefühlsarmut, die nicht übersehen werden konnten, pass[t]."³² Weiss's Gottfried "gave reasons why it was necessary for him to go home again"³³ in the same manner as Asperger's autistics "bringen Gründe um Gründe, warum sie nicht hier bleiben können";³⁴ and just as Asperger remarks of these reasonings that they show "eine merkwürdige Mischung von Naivität und Raffinement,"³⁵ Weiss registers in Gottfried's complaints "a great contrast between the small value of his reasons and the intensity of feeling he put into them."³⁶

Weiss also notes Gottfried's tendency to "become even too familiar" in his interactions with adults, to address them in a "careless and somewhat disrespectful way,"³⁷ just as Asperger's Ernst K. is oblivious of respect and authority, "ist ganz distanzlos, redet auch Fremde unbekümmert an ... steht mit jedem Menschen auf 'Du und Du.'"³⁸ Gottfried, again, "was perfectly free in what he said, not keeping anything back ... would speak of whatever came into his mind ... without thought as to whether they were suitable to the occasion."³⁹ Both Weiss and Asperger then explain this characteristic as not expressing "real" disrespect but in terms of the child's failure, in Weiss's words, at "'reading between the lines' of happenings," the fact that

32. Asperger, "Die 'Autistischen Psychopathen,'" 127.

33. Weiss, "Qualitative," 155.

34. Asperger, "Die 'Autistischen Psychopathen,'" 127.

35. Ibid.

36. Weiss, "Qualitative," 155.

37. Ibid., 156.

38. Asperger, "Die 'Autistischen Psychopathen,'" 86.

39. Weiss, "Qualitative," 158–159.

“social forces have no effect on him.”⁴⁰ Asperger’s corresponding verdict is “daß das nicht eine bewußte oder gewollte Frechheit ist, sondern einfach ein Defekt im Verständnis für die andere Person.”⁴¹

Further marks of the affinity between Gottfried and Asperger’s case studies are readily forthcoming. Gottfried’s “clumsiness and slowness at games” is singled out, as is his tendency to attract negative attention from other children, who “soon found out how easy it was to tease him.”⁴² These are motifs repeated multiple times, in more or less word-for-word equivalent formulations, in Asperger’s 1944 paper. The same goes for remarks about the extreme difficulty of getting such children to adhere to daily hygienic rituals, the need to guide them each time through the processes of dressing, washing, brushing the teeth, etc. Then there are the highly characteristic formulations that evoke these children’s resemblance to “little adults.” Gottfried “impressed the observer as childish and at the same time—even though in burlesque distortion—as learned.”⁴³ The echoes of this are everywhere in Asperger: one boy “wirkt ... wie ein Miniaturerwachsener,”⁴⁴ another is “die Karikatur eines Gelehrten.”⁴⁵ This trait appears in Kanner, too, especially in one patient who, “had it not been for his juvenile voice ... might have given the impression of a worried and preoccupied old man.”⁴⁶

Nowhere in Weiss’s account, though, is the replication and migration of first-order traits more striking than in the depiction of the patient’s body. In the table below, the left column presents Weiss’s physical description of Gottfried; the right column is a composite put together from Asperger’s accounts of three of his original autistics. Where Weiss’s and Asperger’s

40. Ibid., 161.

41. Asperger, “Die ‘Autistischen Psychopathen,’” 125.

42. Weiss, “Qualitative,” 156.

43. Ibid., 169.

44. Asperger, “Die ‘Autistischen Psychopathen,’” 97.

45. Ibid., 86.

46. Kanner, “Autistic Disturbances,” 235 (see Introduction, n. 31).

accounts diverge, the relevant segments have been highlighted in italics.

Table 3. Comparison of patients' body types as recorded by Weiss and Asperger

<u>Weiss:</u>	<u>Asperger:</u>
<p>He was as tall as a tall boy of twelve,</p> <p>slim and spare. His skeleton was extremely frail, the muscular system weak. He held himself badly, his arms dangling and his head generally hanging forward.</p> <p>His movements were awkward and without vigor.</p> <p>His face, with its beautiful dark eyes, would have been called well-formed and pretty if its aesthetic value were not spoiled by its <i>extreme laxity</i></p> <p>and want of <i>expression</i>. ...</p> <p>he would give the observer an impression of <i>stupidity</i>. ...</p> <p>One must add, moreover, his over-emphatic and monotonous way of speaking,</p> <p>his sing-song tone,</p> <p>and his diffuse muscular motions⁴⁷</p>	<p>[Er] ist ein großer (12 cm über dem Altersdurchschnitt),</p> <p>aber sehr magerer und zarter Knabe; die Haltung ist schlaff, die Schultern hängen.⁴⁸</p> <p>Er kann niemals körperlich gelöst sein⁴⁹ weil er rein motorisch besonders ungeschickt ist</p> <p>Das gesicht ist hübsch und fein gegliedert,</p> <p>es wird nur</p> <p>durch die ... <i>häßlich gebildeten Ohren</i> entstellt.⁵⁰</p> <p>Er ist sehr arm an <i>Mimik und Gestik</i>; der <i>würdevolle Ernst</i> wird nur selten durchbrochen⁵¹</p> <p>Es fehlt die normale Wortmelodie ... [er] zieht einzelne Wörter besonders in die Länge ...</p> <p>seine Rede ist ein Singsang.⁵²</p> <p>[Er] beherrscht seinen Körper nicht.⁵³</p>

47. Weiss, "Qualitative," 158.

48. Asperger, "Die 'Autistischen Psychopathen,'" 105.

49. Ibid., 89.

50. Ibid., 105.

51. Ibid., 97.

52. Ibid., 87.

53. Asperger, "Die 'Autistischen Psychopathen,'" 89.

The correspondence is near-exact. (And most of the passages taken from one of Asperger's cases have their equivalents in the others as well.)

Where the accounts diverge—consistent with our hypothesis about the migration of first-order traits—is on points of second-order interpretation, as it were: when it comes to imagining the mind that lies behind the body and is reflected in it. This begins with Weiss's impression of the "laxity" of Gottfried's features as contrasted with Asperger's insistence on fine differentiation. It continues as Weiss asserts that the face lacks *expression*, whereas Asperger sees it only as poor in *mimic behavior*, which is not the same—which is, for Asperger, somewhat the opposite—as expressivity. And it culminates in Weiss receiving an "impression of stupidity" where Asperger invariably sees faces of extreme, even grotesque thoughtfulness, prematurely aged and melancholic: "Das frühe Denken hat das Gesicht geformt."⁵⁴ (Kanner, it must be said, also commented on his patients' "strikingly intelligent physiognomies."⁵⁵)

Asperger, then, tended to see richness where others, including Weiss in this instance, saw poverty of mind. The mind-poor line of thinking extends in most ways to Kanner. We find a number of traits migrating from Gottfried into Kanner's patients. The most important of these is probably the view that Gottfried is a slave to routine; "he must cling to a kind of ritual in life"⁵⁶ which "calms and supports him."⁵⁷ This is all the more necessary given Weiss's view that "he had no feelings or considerations save those of helplessness and fear in unusual situations,"⁵⁸ an observation that would have no place in the world of Asperger's rich "autistic intelligence" and inner life, but which squares fairly easily with Kanner's picture. Kanner writes:

All the children's activities and utterances are governed rigidly and consistently by the

54. Ibid., 112.

55. Kanner, "Autistic Disturbances," 247.

56. Weiss, "Qualitative," 161.

57. Ibid., 157.

58. Ibid., 159.

powerful desire for aloneness and sameness. Their world must seem to them to be made up of elements that, once they have been experienced in a certain setting or sequence, cannot be tolerated in any other setting or sequence⁵⁹

He speaks elsewhere of autistics' "obsessive desire for the maintenance of sameness"⁶⁰ and of "limitation in the variety of spontaneous activity,"⁶¹ in stark contrast to Asperger's insistence that the "autistic psychopath" is *fully and entirely* "original" and "spontaneous," indeed is not capable of acting in any other way!⁶² Where Asperger emphasizes his patients' strong, independently motivated intellectual interests, Weiss—again pointing the way to Kanner—finds that Gottfried "has learned what he knows passively; for there is absolutely no evidence of anything having been acquired because of his special interest for it and by his own initiative and self-experience."⁶³ For the time being, though, this is just one trait among others; it is not yet the dividing line between "Asperger's syndrome" and "Kanner's autism," and it would be impossible to assign Gottfried unambiguously to either type.

It is possible, of course, that Gottfried really had a lax and stupid countenance and a rigid, unoriginal mind, unlike Asperger's patients. In general, the difference between Asperger's patients and Kanner's when it comes to the contents of their thinking—which is the difference between richness and originality in Asperger's case, poverty and repetitiousness in Kanner's—has been explained as an accurate reflection of real differences in the respective populations they studied. Kanner's children "were brought to him *from* institutions, or because their parents challenged the recommendation to institutionalize them. Not a few ended up in institutions"; whereas "Asperger's referral pattern, to and from the school," meant that "[t]he children he saw were not likely to have been deemed 'socially incapable,' and he provided them with short-term

59. Kanner, "Autistic Disturbances," 249.

60. *Ibid.*, 245.

61. *Ibid.*, 246.

62. Asperger, "Die 'Autistischen Psychopathen,'" 100–101.

63. Weiss, "Qualitative," 168.

milieu therapy meant to return them to school and family.” In the end, even Eyal concludes that Asperger’s children were simply “higher-functioning” than Kanner’s.⁶⁴

Is this the only possible conclusion? Recall (from Chapter Three) first of all the political circumstances in which Asperger worked. The system of which he was a part equated “socially incapable” with “unfit to live.” And he himself, although complicit in that system, seems to have sought at least to decrease the sheer number of atypical children assigned to this category. To this end, he included in his 1944 paper a robust defense of the “soziale Wertigkeit der Autistischen Psychopathen,”⁶⁵ which emphasizes *some* autistics’ ability to excel at specialized intellectual work. If we read his political stance correctly, he had every incentive to overstate the case for social integrability, meaning that his actual patient population may have been “lower functioning” than it appears. Add to this the fact that he does, in the paper, concede that a large number of autistics are indeed intellectually and socially deficient—namely those “bei denen zu den autistischen Wesenszügen noch eine ausgesprochene intellektuelle Minderwertigkeit kommt.”⁶⁶ Eyal is wrong, then, that the “socially incapable” were not represented among Asperger’s patients.

Kanner’s group, meanwhile, are by no means universally worse off than Asperger’s. Our conviction that Kanner’s autistics were uniformly low in intelligence and functioning is unsettled by his statement, in the original 1943 paper, that “they are all unquestionably endowed with good *cognitive potentialities*.”⁶⁷ Richard M. “seems quite intelligent,”⁶⁸ giving off “the impression of silent wisdom.”⁶⁹ Paul G. was referred for “what was thought to be a severe intellectual defect,”

64. Eyal et al., *The Autism Matrix*, 222.

65. Asperger, “Die ‘Autistischen Psychopathen,’” 132.

66. Ibid.

67. Kanner, “Autistic Disturbances,” 247, emphasis in original.

68. Ibid., 225.

69. Ibid., 226.

and at first “created the impression of feeble-mindedness”;⁷⁰ on further study, however, “he certainly could not be regarded as feeble-minded in the ordinary sense.”⁷¹ “Without a doubt,” Virginia’s “intelligence is superior to” the 94 (already a near-average score) she achieved on an IQ test.⁷² Alfred L., meanwhile, measures 140 on the IQ scale.⁷³ Elaine “speaks well on almost any subject Her range of information is really quite wide, and her memory almost infallible.”⁷⁴ These five cases in which positive intelligence is singled out account for almost half of Kanner’s cases. As for the broader notion of social capacity, it is interesting that Kanner, much more than Asperger, stresses the improvements he observes over time in his autistic patients. His assessment of their development just within the period from 1938 to 1943, when the initial paper is published, is remarkably positive:

Except for Vivian S., who has been dumped in a school for the feeble-minded, they show a very interesting course. . . . there has been a varying degree of emergence from solitude, an acceptance of at least some people as being within the child’s sphere of consideration, and a sufficient increase in the number of experienced patterns to refute the earlier impression of extreme limitation of the child’s ideational content. . . . Language becomes more communicative the children begin to play in a group All of this makes the family feel that, in spite of recognized “difference” from other children, there is progress and improvement.⁷⁵

Asperger, for his part, is by no means universally optimistic as to his charges’ prospects in society: while some will achieve remarkable feats, others—especially those in whom autism is juxtaposed with low intelligence, something Asperger fully acknowledges—face a bleak prognosis.⁷⁶

In all, the textual basis for considering the Asperger and Kanner groups to be

70. Ibid.

71. Ibid., 228.

72. Ibid., 230.

73. Ibid., 234.

74. Ibid., 241.

75. Ibid., 249.

76. Asperger, “Die ‘Autistischen Psychopathen,’” 132.

categorically disparate either in intelligence or in social functioning is thin. High and low intelligence, high and low social functioning are found among both groups. Where a distinction is made is on the level of what I call “richness” versus “poverty” of mind. Asperger considers all his autistic patients, regardless of intelligence or capability, to have the “rich” qualities of autistic originality and spontaneity: these latter qualities constitute what could be called the *form* of autistic intelligence. For Kanner and his followers, the form of autistic intelligence is impoverished, copied, “rote”—and this applies equally to those of high capacities.

We find this point in fact more or less overtly made for us by the real modern inventor of the autism spectrum, Lorna Wing. Wing presents herself as a mouthpiece for Asperger and advocate of his description of a “high-functioning autistic” type. But she brings the spectrum together by assimilating the Asperger to the Kanner type rather than vice versa; so in the very cause of popularizing “Asperger’s” syndrome, she overrules one of Asperger’s strongest convictions. Wing writes that she must “disagree with Asperger’s observations” as to the Asperger patient’s “especially intimate relationship with language,” finding instead that “the content of speech is impoverished and much of it is copied inappropriately from other people or books.”⁷⁷ Likewise, whereas “Asperger described people with his syndrome as capable of originality and creativity in their chosen field,” Wing finds it “more true to say that their thought processes are confined to a narrow, pedantic, but logical, chain of reasoning.”⁷⁸ The peculiarity of the autistic mind, she goes on, “arises from the tendency to select, as the starting point for the logical chain, some aspect of a subject that would be unlikely to occur to a normal person who has absorbed the attitudes current in his culture.” But this is precisely what Asperger thought grounded the ability to be insightful! The question then becomes: is standing apart from social

77. Wing, “Asperger’s Syndrome,” 117.

78. *Ibid.*, 118.

idées fixes a sign of intelligence or of stupidity? (Wing also criticizes Asperger for “not quot[ing] the results of standardized intelligence tests to support” his claims about autistic intelligence,⁷⁹ showing that she either did not read or did not grasp the pages Asperger devotes to explaining why his holistic concept of intelligence cannot be measured—and also that his patients fared miserably on the standard tests he *did* perform on them.⁸⁰) Nowhere does Wing make the claim to be studying a different, less intelligent population than Asperger; on the contrary, she takes herself to be transmitting Asperger’s work! Yet she is more than comfortable overturning Asperger’s interpretation of the data. Her interpretation in turn is derived from Kanner’s: autistic intelligence is rote, rigid, and repetitious—at best the semblance of real insight. This probably reflects the fact that Wing’s basic conception of what autism is was formed when Kanner’s was the only version available, before her discovery of Asperger.

If Wing has no trouble reading Asperger’s cases as if they belonged to Kanner’s group, then the case for the distinction between high- and low-functioning autism being largely a matter of interpretation is very strong indeed. We can imagine a first-order data set open to either view: one that sees, in the autistic “distance,” aloneness, and idiosyncrasy, a bottomless reserve of the self, original and unruly (Asperger had asserted that the autistic “kann wohl originell sein, aber nicht lernen!”⁸¹); the other seeing, in exactly the same visage, poverty: a wholly unoriginal, unwieldy, frozen copy of a few fragments of knowledge. Perhaps these two attitudes could be correlated with different readings of the art and literature that, arising in roughly the same period as autism, goes under the label of modern or modernist and is, like autism, characterized by a retreat from the viewer’s or reader’s empathy and by an idiosyncratic surface that is variously

79. Ibid.

80. See Asperger, “Die ‘Autistischen Psychopathen,’” 98–99 and *passim*.

81. Asperger, “Die ‘Autistischen Psychopathen,’” 118.

read as expressive of deep meaning or as inexpressive, facile, dumb. There is not the room to do it here. It would also not be quite as simple as differentiating Asperger's Vienna from Kanner's United States, because others coming from the European milieu, specifically Weiss and Frankl, do tend more toward Kanner's impoverished view of autism. But it is something to keep in mind as we return to them and see how the first-order data collected in Vienna, principally (according to my hypothesis) by Frankl and Weiss, sort themselves into Asperger's picture on the one hand and Kanner's on the other.

Georg Frankl, phase one: the conceptualization of affective contact

Weiss's Gottfried is not an isolated case of Asperger's autistic type being prefigured in publications by Asperger's subordinates at the heilpädagogische Abteilung. Georg Frankl also contributed a wealth of descriptive motifs to the stock on which Asperger would eventually draw. Physical descriptions are prominent among them, including the elements already mentioned: excessive height and slenderness, a loose or hanging posture, lack of muscular definition, etc.—and are found to be strangely consistent from one case to the next. “Der Bub ist für sein Alter um ein Beträchtliches zu groß, sieht aber auch viel älter aus Er ist von asthenischem Körperbau. Dieser Eindruck ... wird durch seine schlaffe Körperhaltung noch verstärkt ... mit schlaff herabschlenkernden Armen auch in dem leeren, schlaffen, ausdrucksarmen Gesicht.”⁸² In sum: “Besonders häufig scheinen Hochwuchsformen mit extremer Magerkeit zu sein,”⁸³ although other body types—all of them in some way disproportionate: too small, weak, notably fat, etc.—are remarked. (This panoply of divergent bodily shapes is also well represented in

82. Georg Frankl, “Befehlen und Gehorchen,” *Zeitschrift für Kinderforschung* 42 (1934): 463–479 and 43 (1934): 1–21, at 6.

83. Georg Frankl, “Triebhandlungen bei Dissozialität nach Encephalitis epidemica und anderen Störungen des Kindesalters,” *Zeitschrift für Kinderforschung* 46 (1937): 423.

Asperger, where it is interpreted as an outward correlate of internal, psychological deviation from the norm. See Chapter Three.)

Out of these first-order observations, something strongly reminiscent of an autistic type will eventually coalesce in the work of Georg Frankl. “In allen diesen Fällen,” Frankl writes at one point, “besteht die Störung unverändert seit der Geburt oder seit allerfrühester Kindheit. Es ist dies eines der wesentlichsten Unterscheidungsmerkmale”⁸⁴ for the differential diagnosis of the condition Frankl is writing about—which, again, he does *not* designate as “autistic”—just as it is again the most important differential diagnostic criterion for both Asperger’s and Kanner’s autistic types. Early onset differentiates autism, as a “psychopathy” (Asperger) or “inborn disturbance” (Kanner), from the process psychoses to which it is said to bear a strong superficial resemblance—childhood schizophrenia, De Sanctis’s dementia praecocissima, Heller’s dementia infantilis.

Further characteristic features of autism meanwhile appear with increasing frequency in Frankl. Asperger will write of his patient Fritz V. in 1944 that “plötzlich begann er ... im Saal herumzuhüpfen ganz spontan”;⁸⁵ a decade earlier, Frankl had reported of another boy: “Oft kann er stundenlang dasitzen und vor sich hinstarren. Plötzlich fängt er dann an, *herumzuhüpfen* und zu Toben.”⁸⁶ (Hopping or skipping behavior is still often mentioned in connection with autism today.) Of the same boy we read: “Oft sitzt er leer da, verschaut sich oder redet und gestikuliert lebhaft für sich allein,”⁸⁷ just as Asperger’s cases display a marked “abwesende[n] Blick,”⁸⁸ “rede[n] unentwegt,”⁸⁹ or engage in all manner of “stereotypes Hantieren.”⁹⁰ “Am

84. Ibid.

85. Asperger, “Die ‘Autistischen Psychopathen,’” 88.

86. Frankl, “Befehlen und Gehorchen,” 6, emphasis added.

87. Ibid., 7.

88. Asperger, “Die ‘Autistischen Psychopathen,’” 88.

89. Ibid., 105.

liebsten hat er monotone technische Spielereien,”⁹¹ writes Frankl—of which we have a possible example in one of Asperger’s patient’s “stundenlanges, einförmiges Spielen mit einem Schuhband.”⁹² Shifting the scene from Vienna to Baltimore, we will also see Kanner’s most famous patient, Donald T., arrive in the observation room “making stereotyped movements with his fingers, crossing them about in the air.”⁹³ The author of the last sentence just quoted—Kanner credits him with it in the paper—was Georg Frankl.

Many other specific pieces of description could be cited as they move from Frankl’s into Asperger’s and Kanner’s texts. How many of Asperger’s or Kanner’s sentences were actually composed, as in the last example above, by Frankl or another lower-level clinic worker is of course not precisely knowable. As mentioned earlier, Frankl himself credits a nurse at the heilpädagogische Abteilung, Sister Viktorine Zak, with the *Benehmensberichte* (behavioral reports) that he uses to support his ideas in one paper.⁹⁴ And Kanner, in turn, mentions explicitly in two of his initial eleven autistic cases—the first and last in order of presentation—that the patient was observed and studied by Frankl; the first of these, Donald T., was the first autistic patient Kanner saw, and became something of the leading representative of the diagnosis. What is clear is that many if not most of those pieces of description which later become ubiquitous in one or both of the classic accounts of modern autism—Asperger’s or Kanner’s—appear in only slightly differing formulations in papers by Frankl or Weiss beginning several years earlier. In these earlier texts, they are furthermore grouped together into recognizable approximations of the autistic type, becoming ever more so with each iteration.

At the same time, Frankl’s proto-autistic types are still embedded in a classificatory and

90. *Ibid.*, 122.

91. Frankl, “Befehlen und Gehorchen,” 7.

92. Asperger, “Die ‘Autistischen Psychopathen,’” 122.

93. Kanner, “Autistic Disturbances,” 219.

94. Frankl, “Befehlen und Gehorchen,” 471.

theoretical framework that is *not* that of the autistic syndrome. Their theoretical grounding is instead Frankl's idea of "affective language" or "affective contact." These concepts, not autism or any other specific condition, are the central preoccupation of Frankl's research. Kanner's initial autism paper—the one published in 1943 as "Autistic Disturbances of *Affective Contact*" (emphasis added)—was conceived within the same framework, which Kanner took wholesale from Frankl. We will now see how Frankl develops the concept of affective contact alongside the proto-autistic type.

During his Viennese career Georg Frankl published three original scientific papers between 1934 and 1937, from which the above passages were selected. The latter two of these papers, both from 1937 and published in German, take as their respective subjects "parkinsonism after epidemic encephalitis and related disturbances in children"⁹⁵ and "impulsive acts after epidemic encephalitis and in other nervous disturbances of childhood."⁹⁶ (The translations given here are Frankl's own.)⁹⁷ Both manifest Frankl's interest in the psychological aftereffects of the epidemic of encephalitis lethargica that lasted from approximately 1917 until 1927 and affected much of Europe as well as America, though its epicenter was in Vienna. These papers will be discussed later.

The first of Frankl's original papers, published in 1934, is called "Befehlen und Gehorchen" (Command and Obedience).⁹⁸ On the face of it, this rather forbidding topic is quite distinct from that of the encephalitis papers—one deals in abstractions, while the other is a highly peculiar disease. Despite the apparent lack of a thematic connection, however, a single

95. Georg Frankl, "Über postenzephalitischen Parkinsonismus und verwandte Störungen im Kindesalter," *Zeitschrift für Kinderforschung* 46 (1937): 199-249.

96. Frankl, "Triebhandlungen" (see note 83).

97. Georg Frankl, curriculum vitae. Sabshin Archives, box 100696, folder 47.

98. See note 82.

problematic runs through and sustains all three papers. This theme, opened up in “Befehlen und Gehorchen,” further developed in both encephalitis papers, and subsequently taken up once more in Frankl’s exchanges with Kanner in Baltimore, culminates in his final research publication, which is titled “Language and Affective Contact.” As Frankl develops the ideas of affective language and contact, his thoughts on atypical children coalesce around what will become the autistic type. The type, however, never outweighs in importance for him the workings of affective contact itself and its role in human relations generally.

“Befehlen und Gehorchen” takes on the problem of how verbal imperatives acquire the power to compel obedience. The paper situates this problem in the context of Heilpädagogik, that is, pedagogical work with abnormal children. It thereby serves the overall objective of Heilpädagogik, namely, “Erziehungsschwierigkeiten diagnostisch von einer nicht üblichen Seite zu betrachten, nämlich nicht als ärztliches oder psychiatrisches, sondern als pädagogisches Problem.”⁹⁹ “Befehlen und Gehorchen” could be described as a kind of pragmatics of the Heilpädagoge—an account of how one is to comport oneself in order to achieve one’s ends, which are in this case the guidance (Führung) of the child. One can become a better Heilpädagoge, Frankl proposes, by learning something about the nature of command and suggestion.

The anecdote with which “Befehlen und Gehorchen” opens is a kind of primal scene of “affective contact”—the prologue, that is, to Frankl’s entire research program. It is set in a tavern, where Frankl observes two humans and their respective canine companions:

In einem Gasthause beim Mittagessen konnte ich einmal an zwei Hunden besonders deutlich demonstriert sehen, wie ein Befehl in richtiger und wie er in falscher Form gegeben werden kann. Beide Hunde sollten während der Mahlzeit ihren Herren Gesellschaft leisten. Der eine der beiden, ein lebhafter und nervöser Fox, bettelte seine Herrin fortwährend winselnd und heulend an. Diese aber redete ihm sanft und liebevoll zu, doch Ruhe zu geben und sich niederzulegen. Sie versicherte ihm, er werde sein Essen

99. Frankl, “Befehlen und Gehorchen,” 1.

nachher schon bekommen, forderte ihn auf sich zu benehmen, wie es sich für einen braven Hund gehört. Doch sagte sie das alles mit so ruhiger, liebenswürdiger und wenig eindrucksvoller Stimme, daß es auf ihn keinen Eindruck machen konnte. Denn ein solches eintöniges Reden kann ein Hund sicher nur sehr mangelhaft verstehen. Sie war daher auch gezwungen, ihm hie und da einen Brocken zuzuwerfen und ermutigte ihn dadurch noch zu weiterem Betteln.

Der andere Hund, ein deutscher Boxer von beträchtlicher Größe, wurde ebenso wie der erste von seinem Herrn sehr beliebt und gut behandelt. Doch ein einfaches “Leg Dich!” genügte, ihn für die ganze Mahlzeit in einer Ecke zur Ruhe zu bringen. Allerdings hatte diese Kommando die nötige suggestive Kraft, es war im richtigen, energisch-befehlenden—nicht unfreundlichen—Tone vorgebracht und von entsprechender Geste begleitet. Wille und Kraft, das befohlene durchzusetzen, mußten zweifellos auch für den Hund zu spüren sein. Gewiß war gute Dressur Voraussetzung seines Gehorsams, trotzdem hätte er bestimmt nicht folgen können, hätte die Dame ihm in ihrer guten, aber ausdruckslosen Art zugesprochen.¹⁰⁰

A curious aspect of this scene, or of Frankl’s reporting of it, is that the *woman’s* way of addressing her dog is described as “ausdruckslos”—lacking in expression—even though her speech is “sanft und liebevoll” and clearly laden with emotional appeal. The man’s tone, by contrast, though simpler and apparently less full of emotion, contains its effect—“Wille und Kraft, das befohlene durchzusetzen”—within itself. The key is that the man’s expression cuts out, or cuts to a minimum, the signifying role of words in the overall message. The woman’s conscious intent is carried in the linguistic content of her utterance, for which her friendly tone of voice is meant as a persuasive conveyance—but only if the words themselves are understood. The man’s utterance, on the other hand, is not only accompanied “von entsprechender Geste”—it is practically all gesture: the voice, the body, and—by far least important—the phonemes are all aspects of one message.

In spite of received ideas of gender, then, it is the man in this situation who speaks what Frankl calls “the emotional language,” the woman who, to her disadvantage, is beholden to “the logical language” to convey her meaning. The emotional language conveys messages directly,

100. Ibid., 463.

cutting out the layer of signification; the messages, therefore, do not even have to be fully conscious. The dogs in Frankl's anecdote will shortly be replaced with children, and the discussion will be of how the substance of an order—like, in this case, the wish for the dog to be still during the meal—can be delivered with more or less effect to a child. This is the beginning of an unfolding of two sides of language—the affective and the logical—that spans Frankl's entire career. As he summarizes in “Language and Affective Contact” (1943):

The following rule is valid in general: one communicates thoughts that are raised to clear consciousness by means of spoken words. One expresses feelings, moods, affects, and sentiments more or less unintentionally by other specific symbols—by mimic gestures, body gestures, and the modulation of the voice.¹⁰¹

The steadfastness of Frankl's interest is evident in the way he returns in this, his last scientific paper, to the world of “Befehlen und Gehorchen,” his first, published almost a decade earlier. Dogs recur, as if belatedly to elucidate the opening scene in the tavern, as an example of the now fully developed concept of affective language: “the language of dogs” by which the canine is “well able to recognize his master's moods, intentions, and friendly and unfriendly sentiments, and to act accordingly.”¹⁰²

Another example of “emotional language in isolation”¹⁰³ is “emotional contact between mother and baby ... established many months before the baby begins to talk ... achieved by the numerous characteristic sounds and gestural symbols of the exclusively emotional baby language.”¹⁰⁴ These words appear in English in 1943—long after Frankl had fled Vienna—but their earliest versions are clearly recognizable in 1934's “Befehlen und Gehorchen.” In any case, it was not until 1944 that Asperger published his famous autism paper, which includes a

101. Georg Frankl, “Language and Affective Contact,” *The Nervous Child* 2, no. 3 (1943): 253.

102. *Ibid.*, 255.

103. *Ibid.*, 254.

104. *Ibid.*, 255.

discussion that follows Frankl in detailed contour:

Lange bevor das Kind die Worte des Erziehers versteht, schon im Säuglingsalter, lernt es *gehören* [emphasis SHT]—nicht den abstrakten Worten, sondern dem Blick der Mutter, dem Ton ihrer Stimme, ihrer Miene und ihren Gesten, kurz dem unbeschreiblich reichen Spiel ihrer *Ausdruckserscheinungen*. All das versteht das kleine Kind nicht bewußt, sondern es wird *beeindruckt* [SHT] was ein Kind zum *Gehören* [SHT] zwingt, ist keineswegs in erster Linie der *Inhalt* der Worte, den es verstandesmäßig erfäßt und verstandesmäßig verarbeitet, sondern vor allem der *Affekt* [SHT] des Erziehers, der aus den Worten spricht. ... Das Affektive, das aus den Worten spricht, versteht auch der Säugling, auch der Fremdsprachige, ja auch das *Tier* [SHT], die alle den Wortsinn nicht oder noch nicht begreifen können.¹⁰⁵

The desideratum of *obedience*; the *affective* communication of this desire; the dyad of *expression* and *impression* as the poles of the communication; the *animal* as one case in point, the infant as another: all are repeated in Asperger, a decade after Frankl first expounded them. In Asperger they come in the midst of an explicit clinical portrait of the autistic type, which stands out against their backdrop by its lack of fluency in affective communication. After positing “*ungestörte Beziehungen zur Umwelt*” as “*die wesentliche Voraussetzung*” for the affective obedience just described, Asperger continues: “*In unserem Fall wie überhaupt in allen diesen Fällen ist aber das Affektleben weitgehend gestört.*”¹⁰⁶ And in Kanner the autistic is even more starkly and prominently set in direct opposition to Frankl’s conception of affective contact.

It thus comes as no surprise that Frankl, in the same “*Befehlen und Gehören*” of 1934, sketches his own first portrayal of a type of child “*überhaupt für seine Umgebung abgesperrt*,” yet “[a]llem, was sie irgendwie reizt ... ausgeliefert”; which “*wirkt ... unangepaßt und als störender Fremdkörper innerhalb der Kinderschar*”¹⁰⁷; who either “*verträumt und verloren sehen ... gedankenlos in irgendeine Tändelei vertieft*,”¹⁰⁸ or who “*geben ... durch heftiges Hüpfen und*

105. Asperger, “Die ‘Autistischen Psychopathen,’” 91, emphasis added where noted, otherwise in original.

106. Ibid.

107. Frankl, “Befehlen und Gehören,” 9–10.

108. Ibid., 9.

Springen ... ihrem Bewegungsdrange nach.”¹⁰⁹ Compare once more Asperger, writing ten years later, on all five counts: (1) “Sehr oft, wenn ihn eine Anforderung nicht interessiert, war er ganz *abgesperrt*”;¹¹⁰ “Er ... nimmt scheinbar von seiner *Umgebung* keine Notiz”;¹¹¹ (2) “sie nehmen keine Anregung von außen an, sind schwer *gereizt*, wenn man sie stört”;¹¹² “er [war] ganz seinen spontanen Impulsen ... *hingegen*”;¹¹³ (3) “Er bleibt die ganze Zeit seines Aufenthaltes an der Abteilung ein *Fremdkörper*”;¹¹⁴ (4) “Wieder ist der Blick sehr charakteristisch, der ganz *verloren* wirkt”;¹¹⁵ (5) “Man bedenke nur ... seine ungehemmten *Bewegungsimpulse!*”¹¹⁶ Frankl writes, in another place: “Es ist so, als ob er seine eigenen Gesetze hätte, an seine Abläufe gebunden wäre und nur gelegentlich mit der Situation mitschwingt, wenn diese gerade seiner eigenen Phase entspricht.”¹¹⁷ Asperger, meanwhile: “Man ... weiß oft nicht, was ihn freudig lachen oder hüpfen macht, was ihn zornig gegen andere losgehen läßt, weiß nicht, welche Gefühle die Grundlage seiner Stereotypen sind, was ihn auf einmal zärtlich stimmt. So vieles was aus ihm kommt, wirkt eben abrupt, in der Situation gar nicht begründet.”¹¹⁸ But the authors’ names and the substance of the passages could be freely substituted one for the other.

The thoughts formulated by Frankl in the 1930s find yet a further, truly startling echo in a statement made by Asperger *four decades* later. Frankl had written in 1937 that beside the basic triad of “Gestik, Mimik, Sprachmodulation,” the emotional language uses one other medium as “Indikator für den jeweiligen Affektzustand des Individuums.” This comprises “seine

109. Ibid., 8.

110. Asperger, “Die ‘Autistischen Psychopathen,’” 99, emphasis added.

111. Ibid., 88, emphasis added.

112. Ibid., 122, emphasis added.

113. Ibid., 88, emphasis added.

114. Ibid., 101, emphasis added.

115. Ibid., 105, emphasis added.

116. Ibid., 94, emphasis added.

117. Frankl, “Befehlen und Gehorchen,” 6–7.

118. Asperger, “Die ‘Autistischen Psychopathen,’” 91–92.

vegetativen Reaktionen (Erröten, Erblassen, Weite der Lidspalte, Pupillarreaktion, Glanz des Auges usw.).¹¹⁹ And Asperger, speaking retrospectively in 1977 about his discovery of autism, remarks:

[G]anz gesetzmäßig drücken sich Vorgänge in zentralen Persönlichkeitsgebieten, im *emotionalen* Bereich, im körperlichen Geschehen aus, offenbaren sich in “Ausdruckserscheinungen”—motorischen ... besonders aber *vegetativen* Erscheinungen (Gefäßerscheinungen hauptsächlich im *Gesicht*, sekretorische Zeichen, etwa *Augenglanz*, Speichelfluß); diese Ausdrucksqualitäten werden unbewußt und unwillkürlich hervorgerufen, werden vom Beobachter als zunächst unbewußter “Eindruck” aufgenommen (können aber ins Bewußtsein gehoben werden).¹²⁰

Here, so far removed in time, Asperger reproduces the exact structure of Frankl’s “emotional language”: the emotional as the central region of the personality; the unconscious or unintended expression of elements of the region in bodily, specifically *vegetative* phenomena; the listing of the blood vessels of the face, the eyes, and the tear ducts as particular “vegetative” signs. (There is a corresponding passage stating the same connection between somatic signs and the autistic personality in Asperger’s 1944 paper.) But furthermore, Asperger affirms in 1977 that had his attention not been drawn to these particular bodily signs of affective states, he would not have been able to discern the autistic type of personality at all! The psychology of his time was not attuned to the registers of affective contact: “über Kontaktverhalten (und Synonyma) oder dessen Pathologie handelte die damalige Psychologie nicht, das kam in ihrem Vokabular überhaupt nicht vor.” But with the revelation of “expressive phenomena” such as the above-named vegetative reactions, “begann sich ein Bild faszinierender verhaltensgestörter Kinder zu klären—eben zu einem ‘Typus’ von eindrucksvoller Geschlossenheit.”¹²¹ Although our ultimate objective here is to show Frankl’s influence on Kanner, there is clearly a parallel story to be told about

119. Frankl, “Über postenzephalitischen Parkinsonismus,” 209.

120. Asperger, *Probleme*, 3 (see Introduction, n. 36).

121. *Ibid.*

Asperger's debt to Frankl. It would be more difficult, because as little evidence as there is of Frankl's activities in America, there is even less trace of him left in Vienna. The exception consists in his published papers, which show how the development of ideas about affective contact—and premonitions of the autistic type—continued in his work throughout the 1930s. We will now pick up the thread once more.

Frankl, phase two: “autistic” symptoms in postencephalitic Parkinsonism

The next iterations of Frankl's proto-autistic type appear in his next two papers, both from 1937 and both dealing ostensibly with the psychiatric aspects of what is called “postencephalitic Parkinsonism.” The name refers to a type of Parkinsonism that develops in survivors of the “sleepy sickness,” encephalitis lethargica, that affected Europe and much of the world in epidemic form between 1917 and 1927. The epidemic began in Vienna, and the first cases were described by Constantin von Economo in 1917 at the Neurological Clinic of Vienna University Hospital¹²²—a neighboring department in the same hospital as the heilpädagogische Abteilung. By the time of Frankl's papers “Über postenzephalitischen Parkinsonismus und verwandte Störungen im Kindesalter” and “Triebhandlungen bei Dissozialität nach Enzephalitis epidemica und anderen psychopathischen Störungen des Kindesalters” (both 1937), the epidemic was long over and new cases of encephalitis lethargica were, as Frankl acknowledges, no longer common. His contribution to the literature on this disease is therefore not intended to clarify the pathologies particular to it or relevant to its treatment. Rather, Frankl uses the Parkinsonian phenomena to extend the concepts introduced in “Befehlen und Gehorchen” and thus to develop

122. Joel A. Vilensky and Sid Gilman, “Encephalitis Lethargica during the Epidemic Period,” in *Encephalitis Lethargica: During and After the Epidemic*, ed. Joel A. Vilensky (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011): 16.

a sharper picture of the affective and logical languages as he finds them embodied in particular subjective states. Many of these phenomena also lend themselves to the description of autism, which, especially in Asperger's version, appears to emerge almost as an offshoot of the postencephalitic condition.

The epidemic of 1917–1927 made encephalitis lethargica a worldwide medical concern, on which approximately 9,000 publications appeared over a period of about fifteen years.¹²³ It may have struck a million people worldwide and killed up to 40 percent of them¹²⁴—in any case, enough to prompt one of the most prominent doctors studying it at the time to write:

Its dramatic advent on a war-torn world, its rapid diffusion to all continents and the islands of the seas, its striking and characteristic pathological picture, its astonishing masquerade in the guise of a myriad of other diseases, its remarkable shifts of group types in succeeding years of its recurrence, and its almost unforecastable course in any individual case has no parallel in the entire field of medicine. And it is doubtful if any plague has ever been visited upon humanity that has claimed so many victims, has so completely covered the earth, and left so many maimed and crippled wrecks in its wake.¹²⁵

The subject of this hyperbole is *not* the Spanish influenza, but epidemic encephalitis lethargica.

The last sentence, though an exaggeration of the facts, reflects the hold this strange new syndrome had on the medical imagination of the day. This in turn had less to do with the deadliness of the acute encephalitic phase—which was very considerable—than with the psychiatric effects that came upon the survivors during the chronic, Parkinsonian phase of their illness. These infamously turned previously docile, normally developing children into so-called “Apaches” who “lacked inhibitions,” “became troublesome and antisocial,” “begged, lied, stole, even killed.”¹²⁶ “At the highest level,” writes Oliver Sacks—whose first book to achieve fame,

123. *Ibid.*, 9.

124. Dana Marlowe et al., “Epidemiology of Encephalitis Lethargica,” in Vilensky (ed.), *Encephalitis Lethargica*: 40.

125. L. M. Crafts, quoted in Vilensky and Gilman, “Encephalitis Lethargica,” 8.

126. Vilensky and Gilman, “Encephalitis Lethargica,” 34.

Awakenings, is about this disease—“the *encephalitis lethargica* presented itself as neurotic and psychotic disorders of every kind, and a great many patients affected in this way were originally believed to have ‘functional’ obsessional and hysterical neurosis.”¹²⁷ The sense of normally developing children suddenly “lost” to a mysterious affliction is just one thing postencephalitic Parkinsonism has in common with autism today.

The “Parkinsonism” at issue here, while by no means a misnomer, is different from Parkinson’s disease in the narrower sense, and not only insofar as the former principally affected children and adolescents rather than the aged. The symptoms most associated with senile Parkinsonism—tremor and rigidity of the hands and other body parts—are much less central and less pronounced in these juvenile patients. In place of them, postencephalitic Parkinsonism manifests in greater intensity and also greater breadth what Sacks sees as “the essential features” of the Parkinsonian syndrome and terms “disorders of movement and ‘push.’”¹²⁸ These have two opposing tendencies: a “hurrying” or abbreviating one and a retarding, resisting, or “blocking” one. They also manifest themselves in the mind of the patient in the form of “force against counter-force, will against counter-will, command against countermand”¹²⁹ (the last a reminder of Frankl’s earliest subject matter, the vicissitudes of “command and obedience”). From the outside, the result is often a strange oscillation: periods of apparent torpor, interrupted unforeseeably by movements of a swift and startling character (“kinesia paradoxa”).¹³⁰ These pulsions and resistances also affect the realm of speech, often leading to a sharp disjoint between what the person can experience internally— “the ‘higher faculties’” of intelligence and judgment

127. Oliver Sacks, *Awakenings* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1983), 17.

128. *Ibid.*, 9.

129. *Ibid.*, 10.

130. *Ibid.*, 12.

being “exempted” from impairment¹³¹—and what she is capable of expressing or communicating. Thus “when they can speak,” as Sacks emphasizes, postencephalitic patients “are able to provide us with uniquely detailed and accurate descriptions of states of catatonic ‘entrancement,’ ‘fascination,’ ‘block,’ ‘negativism,’ etc.”¹³² In less severe cases, “either the voice becomes nasal and monotonous, or speech is initially hesitant, but once started is rapid, but then relapses into slow, hesitating speech.”¹³³

In Frankl’s descriptions of postencephalitic patients, two expressive phenomena are salient, which he calls “modulationsarme Sprache” and “Maskengesicht.”¹³⁴ Without the tonal modulations of speech, without facial gestures accompanying utterances, the realm of communication is deprived of the entire properly “expressive” register, as Frankl conceives it: of gesture, mimesis, and “emotional language.” What is left is Frankl’s “logical language” in complete isolation: these children can convey their thoughts in words, but cannot communicate any hint of their affective state except by converting it too into verbal formulations. “Wir sehen im Parkinsonismus das klassische Beispiel des Fehlens der affektiven Sprache bei erhaltener logischer Sprache. Man sieht da, wie arm und nackt das bloße Wort ist, wenn es allein, ohne Affektausdruck gesprochen wird.”¹³⁵ The same thing might well appear word for word in an account of autism.

There is one exception to the Parkinsonian incapacity for affective expression: those “vegetative reactions”—the flow of blood to the face, the quality of light in the eye—can betray the inner, affective state of the postencephalitic sufferer. This leads to one of those particular clinical descriptions that later reappears, practically unaltered, in Asperger’s portrayal of his

131. *Ibid.*, 19.

132. *Ibid.*, 16.

133. Vilensky and Gilman, “Encephalitis Lethargica,” 23–24.

134. Frankl, “Über postenzephalitischen Parkinsonismus,” 208.

135. *Ibid.*, 209–210.

“autistic psychopaths.” Frankl’s observation of a postencephalitic patient reads:

Man hörte die einförmig dahergeleirten Sätze, aber das Gesicht zeigte nichts von den Gefühlen und Affekten, die ihn während des Sprechens beherrschten. Nur die Augen im Gesichte lebten, bewegten sich lebhaft hin und her, konnten, wenn ihn etwas interessierte, einen lebhaften Glanz bekommen oder, wenn er etwas anstellen wollte, boshaft funkeln.¹³⁶

The quality of the “boshaft” or of *Bosheit*—naughtiness, wickedness, mischief—will be the fulcrum of the pivot from Frankl to Asperger. But Asperger also adopts the background established by Frankl, the basic contrast—and hierarchy—of the affective and the logical: “Nicht nur die Dichter wissen, daß des Menschen Seele in seinem Blick liegt. ... Wie trinkt nicht das kleine Kind mit seinen Augen die Welt in sich hinein, erfaßt die Dinge, spricht seine Gefühle mit ihnen aus....”¹³⁷ And likewise the voice: “wie die miteinander redenden Menschen zueinander stehen, in Über- oder Unterordnung, in Sympathie oder Antipathie—das spricht untrüglich aus dem Ton ihrer Worte—selbst wenn der Inhalt der Worte trägt.”¹³⁸ But in both respects “[sind] bei kontaktgestörten auch jene kontaktschaffenden Ausdruckserscheinungen gestört”:¹³⁹ the speech “monoton ... ohne Hebung und Senkung,” or else “ein *leiernder* Singsang.”¹⁴⁰ (Note the repetition from Frankl of the distinctive word *leiernd*.) Hence the heightened contrast between this general picture and the one exception that Asperger, imitating Frankl, now highlights: “Bei einer Gelegenheit aber wird der Blick dieser Kinder Träger eines starken Ausdrucks: wenn sie eine Bosheit vorhaben—da blitzt dann das Auge auf, und schon haben sie etwas angestellt.”¹⁴¹

This is the general summation of a trait that is also repeated in Asperger’s individual case studies, and carries considerable weight in his portrait of the autistic. We find it just as

136. Ibid., 208.

137. Asperger, “Die ‘Autistischen Psychopathen,’” 112.

138. Ibid., 113.

139. Ibid., 114.

140. Ibid., emphasis added.

141. Ibid., 113.

characteristic of Frankl's Parkinsonian children, reported in detail seven years before Asperger's publication!

Nor is the mischievous flashing of the eyes the only piece of description that migrates in this way from Frankl's postencephalitic to Asperger's autistic psychopaths. "Ungeschicklichkeit beim Turnen" and "Schwierigkeiten bei der Morgentoilette"¹⁴² are both conspicuous, if banal; but what stands out above all is the emphatic *contrast* between the children's usual motoric impairment—"steif, grotesk ungeschickt und hilflos" in Frankl;¹⁴³ in Asperger likewise "grotesk,"¹⁴⁴ "lächerlich ungeschickt,"¹⁴⁵ "eckig und unschön"¹⁴⁶—and the preternatural fluency of certain highly specific actions, once again what Asperger calls "die für solche Kinder so bezeichnenden Bosheitshandlungen."¹⁴⁷ Frankl raises this contrast to the level of a "starke phänomenologische Gegensätzlichkeit,"¹⁴⁸ and makes it both the subject of his next paper and the occasion for his next description of a proto-autistic syndrome.

This next paper, "Triebhandlungen bei Dissozialität nach Enzephalitis epidemica und anderen psychopathischen Störungen des Kindesalters," introduces the *Triebhandlung* or "impulsive action" as the last of Frankl's major concepts. It is auxiliary to the fundamental idea of affective contact and the dichotomy of logical and affective language, namely insofar as the *Triebhandlung* is the counterpart, in the sphere of action, to a pure affective mode in that of language. Both are immediate in the sense of not being mediated by concepts or thinking: just as expressive manifestations are direct expressions of affective states, so impulsive actions circumvent reason and put the drives or impulses directly into external effect. The curious point

142. Frankl, "Über postenzephalitischen Parkinsonismus," 215.

143. *Ibid.*, 218.

144. Asperger, "Die 'Autistischen Psychopathen,'" 110.

145. *Ibid.*, 105.

146. *Ibid.*, 102.

147. *Ibid.*, 88.

148. Frankl, "Triebhandlungen," 426.

is that just those patients in whom affective *language* is suppressed can show the opposite symptom in their actions—a propensity for affectively driven, impulsive, and usually illicit acts.

This time we begin with the later passage, from Asperger’s 1944 autism paper, which reiterates in concentrated form several of Frankl’s earlier pieces of description. This, then, refers to one of Asperger’s autistic cases:

der Bub, der da eben schlaff, mit abwesendem Blick dasaß, ist auf einmal aufleuchtenden Blicks aufgesprungen und hat schon blitzschnell etwas angestellt: die Sachen vom Tisch gewischt, schnell einem Kind eins versetzt Diese Impulshandlungen kommen ohne jede Vorbereitung, melden sich nicht an ... und weiters ist für sie bezeichnend, daß gewöhnlich das geschieht, was in einer gegebenen Situation am allerunangenehmsten, peinlichsten, gefährlichsten ist, daß der Knabe also gerade dafür ein Gespür haben muß—während er doch sonst so wenig von der Umwelt Kenntnis nimmt!—durch diese Treffsicherheit aber wirken die Bosheiten dieser Kinder so “raffiniert.”¹⁴⁹

The themes here—“aufleuchtenden Blicks,” “blitzschnell,” “am allerunangenehmsten,” “raffiniert”—are all repeated multiple times in Asperger’s account; and they are all derived from Frankl’s descriptions of postencephalitic Parkinsonism. Or rather, they are part of a movement begun in Frankl’s 1937 paper, an extension of the qualities originally discovered in Parkinsonism to a wider range of cases. “Solche Fälle,” Frankl writes, “die parkinsonähnlich sind, sich aber doch ihrem ganzen Verlaufe und ihrer Symptomatologie nach deutlich von den Zuständen nach Enzephalitis epidemica unterscheiden, sind im Kindesalter nicht so selten.” Among them are some that could clearly be joined to the cases presented by Asperger or by Kanner as autistic.

This movement—an emigration or diaspora of traits—forms a nexus between the postencephalitic conditions strictly speaking and the first tentative descriptions of autism by Asperger and Kanner. What would not yet become an “epidemic” of autism for another several decades thus emerges, halo-like, from the now forgotten epidemic of the 1920s.

149. Asperger, “Die ‘Autistischen Psychopathen,’” 88.

One of the first expansions of the postencephalitic *Formenkreis*¹⁵⁰ into other etiological spaces is also a marked advance, typologically speaking, toward what both Asperger and Kanner will discern (with respective variations) as the autistic. This type, which Frankl dubs “Zustand nach frühzerebraler Störung” because of his assumption that only an early traumatic brain injury could be the cause of it, is also the only occasion on which Frankl uses the concept of autism. The themes from the Asperger passage quoted above are highlighted below in Frankl’s description of the type (again, in a text that anticipates Asperger by seven years), which I reproduce with only a couple of repetitive sentences removed (note that the passage is framed as a differentiation of the type in question from the true postencephalitic states that Frankl had been discussing just before):

Es verhält sich ja hier nicht so wie beim postenzephalitischen Dissozialen, daß die Triebhandlung die einzige oder nahezu die einzige Handlungsform ist, die dem Kranken zur Verfügung steht, daß also in ununterbrochener Folge Triebhandlung auf Triebhandlung folgt. Vielmehr ist der Charakter des gewöhnlichen Tuns und Verhaltens bei diesen Kindern stets ein ganz anderer, wenn auch gleichfalls sehr abnormer. Die Grundhaltung eines solchen Kindes kann z. B. eine leere “erethische” Handlungsunruhe oder torpides Nichtstun oder katatonos Perseverieren in einer stereotypen Bewegung oder auch einigermaßen geordnetes Handeln sein; es können auch beim gleichen Individuum verschiedene dieser Handlungsformen wechseln. Wenn dann bei entsprechendem Anlaß plötzlich eine einzelne Triebhandlung *aufschießt*, wirkt sie, gemessen an der Folie der ganz anders gearteten Handlungsweise um so krasser und ganz anders als beim Enzephalitiker, bei dem die Triebhandlung selbst die habituelle Grundform des Handelns ist.

Wenn sich die Triebhandlung an ein solches indifferentes Tun anschließt, wird dadurch der “unvermittelte Intentionswechsel” besonders auffallend. So ein schwachsinniges Kind sitzt z. B. an einem Tisch und hantiert ruhig mit Bausteinen, die in größerer Menge vor ihm aufgehäuft sind. Plötzlich, dem Mitspielenden völlig unerwartet, *wischt* es mit einer einzigen, *blitzschnellen* Bewegung sämtliche Steine *hinunter*, daß sie weithin durch das Zimmer fliegen. — Oder ein Kind, das bisher untätig und leer dasaß, schießt plötzlich, ohne irgendeine Vorbereitung zur Tür hinaus ins Freie, oder bemächtigt sich eines Gegenstandes und wirft ihn zum Fenster hinaus oder zerreißt ihn oder stellt sonst irgend etwas an, wovon es weiß, daß es *dem Erwachsenen recht unangenehm* ist. — Oder ein Kind irrt in erethischer Unruhe und vollkommen *autistisch* abgesperrt

150. Frankl, “Über postenzephalitischen Parkinsonismus,” 215.

zwischen einer Menge spielender Kinder umher, sie nicht beachtend und von ihnen nicht beachtet. Bis es, an einem kleinen Mädchen vorbeigehend, mit der Hand ausfährt, in dessen Haare greift und mit aller Macht daran zieht; oder mit Zielsicherheit mit dem Fuß an ein von den Kindern errichtetes Bauwerk anstößt, so daß es unter Gepolter zusammenstürzt. Fast immer erkennt man nach einer solchen gelungenen Tat an dem *autistischen*, selig-boshaften Lächeln und dem krampfhaft-ekstatischen Bewegungsentladungen den Genuß, den die Tat bereitet hat.

Auch das, was bei der Besprechung der postenzephalitischen Dissozialität die “pathologisch guten Motorik” in der Triebhandlung genannt wurde, ist in diesen Fällen besonders deutlich zu sehen, und es ist hier auch einwandfrei festzustellen, daß es wirklich nur eine Besonderheit der Triebhandlung ist. Fast alle dieser Kinder sind ja abnorm ungeschickt oder versteift oder sonst in ihrer motorischer Leistungsfähigkeit sehr beeinträchtigt. Dies gilt aber nur außerhalb der Triebhandlungen; in ihnen dagegen werden die Bewegungen auch des unbeholfensten dieser Kinder plötzlich *blitzschnell und zielsicher*. Oft kann man gar nicht verfolgen, wie die betreffende Leistung zustande kam, da es sich kaum je um längere Handlungsabläufe, sondern gewöhnlich um ein im Augenblick erledigtes Geschehen, eine mit ungewöhnlicher Schnelligkeit ausgeführte Einzelbewegung handelt. Sie ist vollendet, bevor der Erwachsene nur darauf aufmerksam wird, so daß er nur ihren Erfolg sieht. ...

Auch das bekannte “*Raffinement*” vieler Schwachsinniger, das die Eltern immer wieder täuscht und ihnen Hoffnungen bezüglich des Verstandes des Kindes gibt, ist in Wahrheit sehr oft nur ein Raffinement innerhalb der Triebhandlung; mit Intellekt und Willen hat es nichts zu tun. ... Gewöhnlich handelt es sich um primitive Akte der *Bosheit*, der Aggression, des Zerstörungsdranges, des Entwischens aus der Bewachung, des Aneignens von Eßbarem, von verbotenen Gegenständen u. dgl. Die Sicherheit, mit der z. B. im Bosheitsakte dasjenige getroffen wird, was *dem Erwachsenen so recht unangenehm* sein muß, ist bei diesen sonst so blöden Kindern wirklich erstaunlich.¹⁵¹

On the term “raffiniert”—mentioned, along with “Raffinement,” a further five times in Asperger’s autism paper, always with the same deliberate placement in quotation marks, and all the more conspicuous for its foreignness to German—Frankl’s and Asperger’s accounts neatly converge. Asperger mentions such “Bosheitsakte” in all four of his case presentations, and notes in sum that “[d]ie Lust an der Bosheit—fast die einzige Gelegenheit, die den meist so verlorenen Blick dieser Kinder aufleuchten läßt—fehlt ... selten.”¹⁵² Here we note also the contrast that so obsessed Frankl, that between the ordinary absence of the autistic from his environment and the

151. Frankl, “Triebhandlungen,” 424–426, emphasis added.

152. Asperger, “Die ‘Autistischen Psychopathen,’” 121. It is all the more interesting in light of this that the researchers who introduced Asperger’s work to an Anglo-American audience already familiar with Kanner’s autism chose to omit all mention of “evil” or deviant actions from their accounts.

appearance—which both authors characterize in terms of a flash of light, an “aufleuchten” or “aufschießen”—of impulsive actions marked by preternatural surety of hand and a demonic sense (Asperger’s “Gespür”) for the delicacies of a situation and the means of upsetting them. In both authors, this is associated with *Lust* or *Genuß*—the latter term, incidentally, is one of very few to which, in Frankl’s account, the adjective *autistisch* is connected—via the “autistische[s], selig-boshafte[s] Lächeln” that is the sign of malicious pleasure.¹⁵³

More broadly speaking, the interweaving of Frankl’s “brain damaged” type and Asperger’s autistic affords us the textual basis for an alternative model of the emergence of modern autism, one that was already touched on above. According to this model, modern autism was not so much *discovered* as assembled out of many small “pieces of description,” as we have been calling them, which for the most part were first used to describe other types. These types then appear to anticipate the autistic, but not because they are genetically related entities. We might instead think of them as *phenomenologically* related. Specifically, such a phenomenological relation would reside, here, in such formulations as we have highlighted above, or in Frankl’s “pathologisch guten Motorik” and its later Aspergian cousin, “psychopathische Klarsichtigkeit.” Both of these latter situate small oases of instinctive or impulsive behavior within vast deserts of stiff logic; the ideological preparation of Frankl’s emotional/logical dichotomy is thus essential to the effect of the descriptions. It is this primal layer of interpretation, built in to the everyday practice of clinical description on the most minute level, that conditions the emergence of the autistic type from the Parkinsonian.

We know that Frankl was heavily engaged in this everyday observational and descriptive

153. Although by this point the influence of Eugen Bleuler, the first to use the concept “autism” and the subject of Chapter One, is distant, it is all the more remarkable to find, in Frankl and Asperger, the concept of autism so tied to pleasure of a distinctly “refined” character, given that Bleuler had originally extracted the concept of autism from Freud’s “autoerotism,” a mode of pleasure likewise associated, now in Freud’s words, with the “exquisite.” See Chapter One.

labor up to 1937 at Asperger's clinic and also, as of 1938, at Kanner's. To give an example of a piece of description migrating from Frankl's earlier work into Kanner's autistic type, we might simply reach for those "krampfhaft ekstatischen Bewegungsentladungen" which are paired, in the passage from Frankl above, with the "autistischen, selig-boshaften Lächeln" as signs of the pleasure derived from autistic Triebhandlungen. The "boshaft" portion, in other words, finds its place in Asperger's order of symptoms, while the "ecstatic" migrates to Kanner: in the "ecstatic fervor" with which "Frederick 'jumped up and down in great glee' when he bowled and saw the pins go down."¹⁵⁴ The sense of a release of tension, Frankl's "Bewegungsentladungen," is not just captured but heightened in Kanner's insistence that "[t]hese actions and the accompanying ecstatic fervor strongly indicate the presence of *masturbatory orgastic gratification*"¹⁵⁵ (a wording of his that has been politely and studiously ignored ever since). Here, too, what may appear to be neutral clinical description can be seen in fact to contain a kernel of built-in interpretation—the casting of the movement in question as a *release* or *discharge* (Entladung)—which additionally ties the description found in an autistic context back to the context of Parkinsonism, its seemingly endless blockages suddenly yielding to bursts of flowing energy.

From Frankl's conception of the Triebhandlung in the motor realm it is an easy step to a corresponding notion in the realm of thought, which forms the base of Asperger's "autistic intelligence." This is the idea of a mental ability that is (1) of preternatural fluency and speed, but (2) highly selective in its attention, standing in stark contrast to the remainder of the individual's mental life, and (3) fundamentally driven by instinct. The last of these qualities underlies Asperger's assertion that autistic intelligence, far from being rote or rigid, is in fact *purely* spontaneous and original, *incapable* of "mechanization" or learning by the methods of

154. Kanner, "Autistic Disturbances," 246.

155. *Ibid.*, emphasis in original.

others. But it is also possible, from the same starting point in Frankl's depiction, to reiterate the factually non-communicative aspects of this type—the autistic symptomatology proper, as it were—and thus to arrive at something much more resembling Kanner's "low functioning" type. So Frankl provides a flexible matrix for the developments leading to both Asperger and Kanner. No surprise, then (though it has not been previously remarked) that both Asperger and Kanner devote extensive space in their autism papers to differentiating the autistic condition from the postencephalitic, a differentiation they find far from clear.¹⁵⁶

But for the moment, Frankl himself seems focused on the connection between the lack of affective contact and a deficit in overall intelligence, a combination of traits specifically "colored," in the passage below, by the cardinal symptom of autism:

Es handelt sich, wie gesagt, in all diesen Fällen um tiefstehend schwachsinnige, imbezille oder idiotische Kinder, bei denen neben der Intelligenzanomalie regelmäßig eine Reihe anderer psychiatrischer Symptome zu finden ist. Hierher ist vor allem die Kontaktstörung zu rechnen; in den meisten Fällen ist ... eine ganz weitgehende Unterbrechung des affektiven Kontaktes bis zum vollkommenen Fehlen jeglicher Beziehung zwischen dem Kind und den Personen seiner Umgebung. Durch einen solchen extremen *Autismus* erhält das Gesamtbild des betreffenden Falles eine ganz besondere Färbung¹⁵⁷

The way from Asperger to Kanner—the way that Frankl would now physically traverse—was clear.

Frankl, phase three: the first autism spectrum

This was the precise state of Frankl's research at the time of his move from Asperger's Vienna clinic to Kanner's in Baltimore. Finances did not permit him to remain at the Phipps Clinic for long; as of 1939 he was a journeyman in his new country, spending time in Nebraska and New

156. Asperger, "Die 'Autistischen Psychopathen,'" 96; Kanner, "Autistic Disturbances," 239.

157. Frankl, "Triebhandlungen," 423, emphasis in original.

York before settling in Kansas City for much of the '40s and '50s. But in the short time he spent at the Phipps, a strong collaboration was established between Frankl and Kanner. Its visible fruit would be a special issue of *The Nervous Child* devoted to “affective contact disturbances in children” and containing Kanner’s “Autistic Disturbances of Affective Contact,” the paper that would make him famous. It also included Frankl’s final major research publication, “Language and Affective Contact.” We have already quoted several passages from this paper, because it gives Frankl’s final formulations of the concepts of affective language and contact. It also gives us the furthest developed of his “autistic” case studies, one that for all practical purposes could have been inserted into the paper of Kanner’s that appeared alongside it. Finally, it yields Frankl’s vision of the “series” of disturbances of affective contact, whereby he sketches the earliest version of what is now the autism spectrum.

“Karl K.” had almost certainly been observed by Frankl at the heilpädagogische Abteilung in Vienna. In “Language and Affective Contact,” Karl’s case is adapted, along with Frankl’s ideas generally, for an American audience. As with the autistic type of the 1937 “Dissozialität” paper, Karl is diagnosed with an organic disease that is not primarily a mental disorder, in his case tuberous sclerosis, a genetic condition marked by abnormal tissue growth on a variety of organs as well as neurological symptoms, primarily seizures and mental retardation.¹⁵⁸ But as with those “brain damaged” patients of 1937, however, Frankl’s interest in Karl has nothing to do with his organic condition and everything to do with the peculiarities of his behavior. Considered as a case of tuberous sclerosis with “its characteristic symptoms of adenoma sebaceum, symptomatic epilepsy, idiocy, and organic drivenness,” Karl’s “is simple and not very interesting. The reason for describing it in this connection,” Frankl underlines, “is

158. Susan L. Smalley, “Autism and Tuberous Sclerosis,” *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders* 28, no. 5 (1998): 407.

that the phenomenon of *lack of contact with persons* is represented in it in rare clarity.”¹⁵⁹ And this side of Karl is once again, as in 1937, described using a set of traits shared both with Asperger’s autistic patients and with Kanner’s. (It is now thought that between 25 and 40 percent of people with tuberous sclerosis also have autism.)¹⁶⁰

Karl “did not speak” and might at first have been taken for deaf. He “did not look into the calling person’s face,” indeed “never had shown the least interest in persons.”¹⁶¹ His outward monotony was, in Frankl’s view, “paradoxically combined with constant pseudo-activity. He jumped around, rocked to and fro in sitting or standing position, or performed some other rhythmic movements.”¹⁶² What Frankl would call his *Triebhaftigkeit*, or Asperger his *autistische Bosheit*, is noted in the way he “came to a girl’s bed and, without changing his expression or saying a word, grasped her hair, let it go again, and had left before the dumbfounded girl even realized what had happened.”¹⁶³ Among a crowd of other children, Karl

moved around incessantly, touching and handling all objects that happened to come into his field of perception. The children were among these objects: he touched them, stared at them, took toys away from them. He did that just as he touched and stared at the blocks that were lying on the floor. He took a doll out of a girl’s hand, just as he would have taken it from the table. While doing it he did not look into her face, did not smile, did not threaten, did not attack the girl or defend himself.¹⁶⁴

He is among others “like a strange being . . . without interest,” his attitude toward people “similar to the attitude healthy persons assume toward the objects of their environment one uses them if they are useful, removes them if they are harmful. But one does not communicate with

159. Frankl, “Language and Affective Contact,” 259, emphasis in original.

160. Smalley, “Autism and Tuberous Sclerosis,” 407; Ann Hunt and Charles Shepherd, “A Prevalence Study of Autism in Tuberous Sclerosis,” *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders* 23, no. 2 (1993): 323.

161. Frankl, “Language and Affective Contact,” 258.

162. Ibid.

163. Ibid.

164. Ibid., 259–260.

them.”¹⁶⁵

Karl is, among all of Frankl’s cases, the one who most smoothly blends those autistic traits most characteristic of Asperger’s first autism paper with those of greatest interest to Kanner. His naughtiness, of the extreme “triebhaft” kind, lightning quick and sure of hand, relates him to the world of encephalitis lethargica and Asperger’s autistic “psychopaths”; while the themes of “having no interest in people” and “treating persons as objects” take on a major importance in Kanner’s autism that they do not have in Asperger’s. Their presence here is consistent with a pivot on Frankl’s part from the traits most closely associated with Asperger’s clinic to those that particularly interest Kanner. Had he had access to the theories of autism in vogue between the 1980s and today, Frankl would have stated that Karl K. lacked a “theory of mind” or was “mindblind”; for “[o]ne addresses words and the symbols of the emotional language only to beings whom one considers able to think and to experience just as one does oneself,” implying that for Karl, this class of beings includes no actual others. He does not conceive of people as subjects of experience, and “could not experience them as persons.”¹⁶⁶ Hence, though Karl comes from the world of Asperger, he points the way to the dominant image of a “mind-poor” autism stemming from the early popularity of Kanner’s diagnosis, an autism closely correlated with organic intellectual disability.

Beyond Asperger and Kanner, however, the most intriguing aspect of “Frankl’s autism,” if we can call it that, comes at the very end of his discussion of Karl in “Language and Affective Contact.” We saw that Frankl selected Karl for presentation here not because his organic or intellectual defects were intrinsically interesting but solely because they allowed his lack of affective contact to come fully to the fore. Frankl now highlights the distinction between

165. *Ibid.*, 260, original emphasis removed.

166. *Ibid.*

intellectual performance and affective contact and admits that, were disturbances of contact to be given the full investigation they deserve, we would have to expand our view of them to include a full range of intelligence:

[P]redominance of the disruption of the affective contact over the intellectual disorder is characteristic for all cases of this type, and the contact disorder should by no means be interpreted as a mere consequence of the intelligence defect. The case described is a rather poor example in this respect. The boy's intelligence was on an exceedingly low level, too. He ranked at the lowest end of a series of cases that have in common the disruption of the affective contact, but vary in intelligence from idiocy to the astonishing and peculiar performances of a certain type of child prodigy.¹⁶⁷

It is easy to imagine the type of child prodigy Frankl has in mind, one capable of “astonishing and peculiar performances” and principally marked by a deficit of affective contact, which is to say, the ability to form social relations: it is the image of the “Asperger type,” the “high-functioning autistic,” or the “autistic savant.”

In the passage above, Frankl speaks of “all cases of this type,” a type with pure disturbance of affective contact at its core; and of “a series of cases,” all similarly deficient in affective contact, but displaying highly varied intellectual capabilities. Provided we also allow for variation in the degree of contact disturbance, this amounts to a sketch, in all its essentials, of what is now called the autism spectrum. Frankl delineated an idea that would take hold decades later, against resistance from both Asperger and Kanner, as the truth of autism: that there is a broad spectrum, on which disparate cases may have little to no resemblance in their specific symptoms, held together by the overarching idea of a deficit of “social ability,” “empathy,” or—in Frankl’s rather more acute phrasing—“affective contact.” Frankl had the idea of the “autism spectrum”; but rather than a spectrum of autism, it was the “series” of “disturbances of affective contact.”

167. *Ibid.*, 261.

Epilogue: the short afterlife of affective contact

Shortly after meeting Frankl, Kanner wrote in a letter to the neurologist Bernard Sachs (of Tay-Sachs disease):

I have become very much interested in a special and, I can say, original piece of work that Dr. Frankl is engaged in. I have gone over with him his formulation of the topic and was struck by its newness as well as soundness. The plan is concerned with a practical and concrete study of what Dr. Frankl calls the affective contact of children. . . . [I]t seems to me that Dr. Frankl's project is highly meritorious, in that it opens a new, objective and practically useful avenue of approach to the observation and understanding of the mental life of the child.¹⁶⁸

Another letter of recommendation from the same period states that Frankl “is now working on a monograph which has great merit and which, when ready, will make a real contribution to the field of child psychiatry.”¹⁶⁹ We can assume that this monograph, which never appeared, would have laid down a definitive and systematic account of affective contact on the basis of Frankl's division of language into logical and emotional aspects. We cannot know whether it would also have brought Frankl's case studies together into the “series” he briefly outlines in his paper on Karl K.

In the fall of 1941, Kanner was invited by Ernst Harms, the editor of the recently founded journal *The Nervous Child*, to serve as guest editor of an issue. This was where Kanner's own “Autistic Disturbances of Affective Contact” would appear alongside Frankl's “Language and Affective Contact.” There was some delay in preparing the issue. (Harms first asked Kanner to coedit Volume One, number four; Kanner demurred because of pending obligations, and the issue eventually appeared in April 1943 as Volume Two, number three—the seventh number in

168. Kanner to Sachs, October 26, 1938. Sabshin Archives, box 100696, folder 47.

169. Kanner to Ernest Wolff, February 27, 1939. Sabshin Archives, box 100696, folder 47.

all.)¹⁷⁰ In any case, Frankl's paper was clearly written first. As of July 21, 1941, Harms was in receipt of some version of "Language and Affective Contact," which Frankl had apparently sent him directly.¹⁷¹ Harms suggests that this be included in the issue to be edited by Kanner.

Kanner's autism paper had not been written yet; the first mention of it, still as a mere suggestion or idea for a paper under the provisional title "Autistic Disturbances of Affective Contact in Small Children," comes in January 1942.¹⁷²

On September 21, 1941, Frankl, unaware of all these plans, writes Kanner to ask him a "favor":

I have sent my paper to Dr. Harms and he has accepted it for publication in "The Nervous Child." However, he wrote me that the first, second and third issue of the journal are already filled and that he "hopes" that the paper will be included in the fourth issue, planned for May or June 1942. In a second letter he announced the edition of the same fourth issue for August 1942. Pessimistic as I am, the vagueness of his promises has made me suspicious that they mean but a postponement ad Kalendas Graecas.

Do you think an intervention on your part may help? Dr. Harms would make me very happy if he could place the paper in an earlier issue or at least give me assurance that it really will come out not later than early in Summer 1942. Otherwise I much prefer a definite refusal to an indefinite postponement.¹⁷³

The "planned" fourth issue to which Frankl refers is of course the one Harms had already asked Kanner to edit, though it would not appear until almost a year after Frankl wished. Exactly why Frankl was so anxious for his paper to appear sooner is not clear; most likely it would have helped him in his constant search for steady employment throughout this period.

Uncharacteristically, Kanner waited more than a year, until January of 1943, to post the following in response:

You probably know that I am to coedit the spring issue of the *Nervous Child*. I have selected as a topic the discussion of affective contact in children. I am going to have three

170. Letters between Kanner and Harms. Sabshin Archives, box 100695, folders 24–25.

171. Harms to Kanner, July 22, 1941. Sabshin Archives, box 100695, folder 24.

172. Kanner to Harms, January 19, 1942. Sabshin Archives, box 100695, folder 24.

173. Frankl to Kanner, September 21, 1941. Sabshin Archives, box 100696, folder 47.

papers: One of my own dealing with Donald Triplett et al, one by Agnes Greig dealing mostly with graphic expressions of affective contact, and, with your permission, your paper on “Language and Affective Contact.”¹⁷⁴

Donald Triplett was famously “case number one” of Kanner’s autism, so the paper referred to here is certainly “Autistic Disturbances” in roughly the form in which it did appear in the issue. It is noteworthy that at this point, Kanner does not acknowledge—as he did in his letter to Sachs—that “affective contact,” the very theme he has selected for the journal number, was a concept introduced to him by none other than Frankl. Perhaps this would have been superfluous between these two already old friends and colleagues; nevertheless one has the sense that ownership of the concept has somehow been transferred to Kanner.

As if to make up for his delayed response, however, Kanner promptly adds that “[i]n trying to edit [your paper], I was even more struck than I was before by the excellence of your observation and formulation.” After a couple of negligible editorial suggestions, he then writes: “I plan to have your paper precede mine because I may have occasion to refer to both its general contents and its specific passages.”¹⁷⁵ In the end, no such references, general or specific, appear in Kanner’s autism paper, which moreover precedes Frankl’s “Language and Affective Contact” in the published issue.

But Frankl’s paper almost did not appear at all: Frankl would not acknowledge Kanner’s edits or return a final, approved copy of the paper. Kanner’s next letter strikes a most unusual emotional note:

Dear Dr. Frankl:

In writing to you it almost seems as if I am addressing a vacuum, receiving not even an echo. I am really very anxious to get your manuscript back as soon as possible so that I can proceed with the edition of the issue of “The Nervous Child.” I hope that this repeated plea will produce some action and that you save me the expense of bombarding

174. Kanner to Frankl, January 5, 1943. Sabshin Archives, box 100696, folder 47.

175. Ibid.

you with telegrams. If, for any reason unknown to me, you have any feeling about writing to me personally, you might send me the manuscript in my capacity as the coeditor of “The Nervous Child,” or you might ask your Secretary to mail it to my Secretary.¹⁷⁶

Here is the first hint of any aggression or resentment between these two, in Kanner’s request not to be burdened with the *expense* of “bombarding” Frankl with telegrams; here also the inkling of some resentment of Kanner on Frankl’s part, the existence of which Kanner posits even as he affects complete ignorance of its nature: “If, for any reason unknown to me, you have any feeling about writing to me personally”

Five days later, Frankl did reply. His remarkable letter attempts to dispell Kanner’s fears; but it also announces another, wholly unexpected reason underlying Frankl’s hesistance to return the paper to Kanner. “Dear Dr. Kanner,” it reads,

your letter was a shock, but a wholesome one. I assure you it was merely a bad case of postponing and I wish you would not take it as directed personally against you. You know what you mean to me. However, to tell the truth, I have become loath of this paper. Most of it was written in Europe five years ago, the first desperate attempts in English language were made translating it, then I rewrote it time and again, obstinately thinking that its publication was imminent. I had my fun with it five years ago, but now I have become negatively conditioned to it. It is old history but has not the pleasant patina of ancient history yet. ... All that does not mean that I am not looking forward to seeing the stuff and my name printed. That may seem childish, especially to a man who is as used to seeing his thoughts printed as you are. But this publication will, after all, be an official termination of a peculiar and rather difficult period of my life.¹⁷⁷

First, as to the dating of the paper: Frankl’s “five years ago,” counting from the date of the letter, would be 1938; but he had already left Europe by then, so the best guess is 1937, just after the two studies of postencephalitic disturbances were completed. This confirms that his fully developed theory of language and affective contact was in place before his emigration—and relatively unaltered by his subsequent experience in Kanner’s employ. This would also date the

176. Kanner to Frankl, February 11, 1943. Sabshin Archives, box 100696, folder 47.

177. Frankl to Kanner, February 16, 1943. Sabshin Archives, box 100696, folder 48.

original composition of the paper to the time of crisis precipitating the “peculiar and rather difficult period” that presumably refers to Frankl’s forced emigration and adjustment to life in a foreign land, with the knowledge of what his native continent was suffering still fresh in his mind.

To the obvious peculiarities and difficulties Frankl refers to during this period of his life, we might speculatively add another, more intensely tragic one. It seems that a woman named Franziska Adler, a 73-year-old resident of the Franz-Josefs-Kai in Vienna, was placed on a train that left Vienna on August 13, 1942 and arrived the following day at Terezín (Theresienstadt), from where she was then taken to Treblinka and murdered in September.¹⁷⁸ Georg Frankl, himself 45 at the time and formerly resident in Vienna, listed on his resume the name of his mother as Franziska Adler-Frankl. If the deported Franziska Adler of Vienna was indeed Frankl’s mother—and their respective ages make this plausible—then we can conclude that he had been forced to leave her behind as he fled, still only vaguely aware of what might await her after the Nazi takeover. He could of course not have been informed, at the time, of her deportation and destination. But the coincidence of this death coinciding exactly with the painful birth of his final statement as a scientist would be uncanny.

Such a use of biography, on admittedly insufficient evidentiary grounds, is a last resort here; but in the absence of any more solid basis it may help to make sense of a lingering difficulty in the collaboration between Frankl and Kanner. This is the question of why Frankl was never publicly credited with introducing the concept of affective contact. This, more than “autism,” was the weight-bearing concept in Kanner’s own 1943 paper. Furthermore, Kanner’s

178. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, “Holocaust Survivors and Victims Database,” entry for Franziska Adler. http://www.ushmm.org/online/hsv/person_view.php?PersonId=5216329. Accessed October 12, 2015.

letters of 1939 had consistently singled out this concept as both an important and an original contribution of Frankl's. Now Kanner edits a special journal number devoted to the theme of affective contact, publishing in it both his own and Frankl's papers; and yet nowhere is Frankl acknowledged as the originator of the research program. What are we to make of this?

It is possible, though inconsistent with what is generally reported of his nature, that Kanner was sufficiently ambitious and narcissistic to want to claim this credit for himself. But in light of the generous and cordial tone of the relations between Kanner and Frankl, not to mention the glowing terms in which Kanner had already spoken of Frankl personally and of his research on affective contact in letters to other psychiatrists, this hypothesis may raise more problems than it solves. We must also consider that Frankl was serious—more serious perhaps than he consciously realized—when he wrote to Kanner that he had “become loath” of his Viennese researches and was looking forward to the “official termination” of this chapter in his life. Could he have simply—without the process ever rising to a fully conscious level—relinquished his discoveries to another? It seems, on the affective level that he himself was so invested in, plausible. Under the pressure of growing professional and public interest, Kanner soon decided to rename his syndrome “early infantile autism.” The concept that Kanner had earlier thought would launch a new direction in child psychiatry—“disturbances of affective contact”—instead fell away, along with its instigator, into obscurity.

After they left Kansas City, we lose all trace of Georg Frankl and Anni Weiss. The difficulties of their initial adjustment to American life and the American psychiatric scene seem to have given way to a workaday life somewhat low in the edifice of child psychiatry and child guidance—seeing many patients while pursuing little to no original research. After 1943, Frankl was to publish only a couple of trivial articles for non-specialists; the research program he had

built on two continents, and which indirectly bore such considerable fruit in the form of new theories of autism, vanished.

There is a chance, however, that Frankl's abandoned ideas about affective contact may yet find a new resonance. One feature of Frankl's work that we have yet to call attention to is its sustained and explicit concern with *language*. "Affective language," after all, is the theoretical basis for Frankl's notion of affective contact and the term he prefers in order to make clear what he is really driving at: a theory of language in which a structural distinction is drawn between the affective face of language (or what he calls in his less precise English "the emotional language") and "the logical language," between the communicative function of facial expressions, gestures, or tones of voice and the semiotic function of words. Feeling himself part of the twentieth century's general rebellion against the perceived dominance of the logical language of the later nineteenth, Frankl shapes his rhetoric to promote the importance of the affective language in establishing and sustaining relations between people. This attitude is a simplistic reflection of a worldview that identifies verbal language with "mediacy"—as opposed to the "immediacy" of the non-verbal—and suspects words of being inherently untrue or deceptive. But how Frankl himself chooses to parse language into affective and logical slopes is far less important than his resoluteness in conceiving of the conditions now known as autism as fundamentally linguistic in nature. This allows him to avoid the far bigger ideological danger that is the assumption of an inherent affective or empathic faculty in the mind, a psychical substance responsible for tying a person to the larger community by way of unspoken and unspeakable affective harmonies. This is the reification of affective *language* into an affective *substance* or "inborn capacity for empathy" that we saw (in Chapter Three) so easily equated by the Nazis with "social utility" or fitness for communal life itself. But Kanner, too, leans in this direction with his judgment "that

these children have come into the world with innate inability to form the usual, biologically provided affective contact with people.”¹⁷⁹ Following Kanner in our sensibilities, we still consider autism in terms of psychical or biological rather than linguistic capacities; and if we do not, like Nazis, propose to eliminate the autistic person herself, we dream of eliminating autism and with it, its language.

Some strands of newer autism research, however, strive to reestablish language as the central locus of autism theory. These also tend to stand for the reasonable accommodation of the phenomena of autism within society, rather than for their genetic elimination. If autism is a question of language—of speaking different languages, be they “logical” and “affective” as in Frankl or conceived along more complex lines—then interaction between autistic and non-autistic subjects is a question of *translation* rather than one of empathy and associated bio-psychological reifications.

The work of a leading psychologist of autism and linguistics, Morton Ann Gernsbacher, gives strong empirical credence to the view that centering autism research on questions of language is itself sufficient to dispel fundamental myths, propagated through decades of careless clinical studies, about “autistic deficits” in “core modules” of the brain such as figurative language processing, empathy, and “theory of mind.” Her arguments can be very broadly summarized as follows: (1) Performance on empirical “theory of mind” tests depends on the subject having acquired a particular linguistic feature called “sentential complement structures.” (2) Many people diagnosed with autism have not acquired the linguistic structures in question, and thus fail the theory of mind tests. But (3) some non-autistic people also lack these linguistic structures, and they perform no better than those diagnosed with autism on the theory of mind

179. Kanner, “Autistic Disturbances,” 250.

tests. Finally (4), some autistic people *do* have command of sentential complement structures, and they perform as well as non-autistics on the tests. Performance on theory of mind tests can thus be shown to depend on a highly specific linguistic competency that varies independently of autism,¹⁸⁰ and a serious blow is dealt to the widespread assumption—never convincingly proved on its own terms—that a biologically constituted “mindblindness” is essential to autism.

One of the more attention-getting moments in the incipient “neurodiversity” movement—whose political aim is to have autism recognized as an identity, and its disability status removed—supplies a more graphic and perhaps more compelling view of the impact that linguistic perspectives like Frankl’s can have on the modern understanding of autism. In a video posted to the internet in 2007 called “In My Language,” Amanda Baggs, a person diagnosed with autism, is shown performing an everyday routine at home, which appears to consist of a series of compulsive gesticulations, as Baggs waggles fingers in the air, manipulates various objects in repetitive ways, plays with the stream of water from an open faucet, and so forth. The second part of the video is introduced with the title “A Translation.” It continues to show the same activities, now with subtitles by Baggs. Though Baggs does not speak in everyday life, the subtitles are composed in utterly clear and comprehensible English with no mannerisms or eccentricities. “Many people assume that when I talk about this being my language, that means that each part of the video must have a particular symbolic message within it designed for the human mind to interpret,” they read. “But my language is not about designing words or even visual symbols for people to interpret. It is about being in a constant conversation with every aspect of my environment.”¹⁸¹ This is a conversation carried on in a bodily, gestural language

180. See Gernsbacher and Frymiare, “Does the Autistic Brain,” 3–16 (see Introduction, n. 9).

181. Amanda Baggs, “In My Language.” URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JnylM1hI2jc>. Accessed October 12, 2015.

that has much more in common with Frankl’s “affective language” than with his “logical language,” even as the subtitles reveal that Baggs has a flawless command of the logical language, too—and moreover understands perfectly the distinction between them, as this is what the *content* of the subtitles explains!

Even as it complicates the neat opposition between logical and affective language, Baggs’s video vindicates the structural-linguistic view of autism that Frankl inaugurated. Perhaps even more appropriate as a complement to the Baggs video are some words of Asperger’s that we will recall from Chapter Three. Observing a patient engaged in a similar kind of “pointless,” gestural play with the bubbles of fat floating in his soup, the doctor succinctly remarks: “sichtlich wurden ihm die wechselnden Formen lebendig und bedeutsam”¹⁸²—“clearly the changing forms took on life and meaning for him.”

182. Asperger, “Die ‘Autistischen Psychopathen,’” 122.

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