

The Miraculous Transition from Sweet Infant to Serious Communication Partner as a Person

Otto E Rossler

Department of Mathematics and Science, University of Tübingen, Auf der Morgenstelle 8, 72076 Tübingen, Germany

Corresponding author: Otto E Rossler, Department of Mathematics and Science, University of Tübingen, Auf der Morgenstelle 8, 72076 Tübingen, Germany, Tel: 4169795000; E-mail: oeross00@yahoo.com

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Abstract

An informal attempt is made to convey the essence of a causal understanding of autism that was reached under the influence of my three great teachers, Konrad Lorenz, Gregory Bateson and Robert Rosen. Especially Gregory Bateson understood every detail. He was the father of the double-bind theory, an interactional trap that anyone can fall into as a person. About this I will not write in the following – only positive things. I mention here just one unexpected implication of the following text: *Homo sapiens equals Pongo goneotrophicus* – the human species is the “parent-feeding ape.” This acquired trait is open to a causal understanding and hence to therapy if wanting. A recent monograph by Marga Vicedo is quoted as an important backdrop.

Introduction

I was pleasantly surprised about the first interest ever paid to my proposed causal therapy for autism [1] by a medical journal after a 40 years’ time gap. This great honor comes to me after I had to give a 20-hour lecture course on philosophy, from which as an outgrowth a paper on a white elephant (called Szilamandee once he or she exists) emerged – as the hoped-for wisest person of history [2]. Even a big newspaper (“New York”) reported on it after the online version of Discover magazine had responded with an article followed by a flood of interested comments [3].

Why the hype? It has to do with an enigmatic condition called “autism-related disorders” to date. It is classified as a medical condition – a disease – even though there is reason to believe that it is actually the other way round: the rest of humankind is befallen by a strange disease, an epigenetic function change that makes its members act as, and hence be, persons. Evolution is headed for personhood only at the end of time, as Teilhard was aware of [4].

It is a grave disadvantage in modern society if you are not a person. Most sanctions provided by society would not work without this feature affecting the bearer. For example in the French army there was a law, while there still existed capital punishment, that the officer leading the peloton – the group of soldiers who had to shoot a colleague who had violated some important rule – had to kiss the delinquent before giving the hand signal. If you are an autistic – that is, a human being in its natural state – you would not care about the difference. A mathematical colleague in Japan once was very much impressed when I mentioned the ritual to him as a proof that “real culture” exists also in Europe. Being a person can be very burdensome indeed. But this was a digression.

Being a person also has its advantages. You would expect that a planet of 7 ½ billion persons has long abandoned warfare – just as Mandela has eliminated civil war by introducing equal person rights. Equality in dignity is the main good of persons, much more so than equality in wealth. This same guarantee of eventual economic equality after a painful delay, as it has been given in South Africa, could be

installed every day across the planet, with Edward Fredkin’s benevolent world police reinforcing the rules of the freely elected democratic world government in every country. But even in the age of the Internet, the very possibility of worldwide elections is not even on everyone’s mind yet. The planet is still a shame in every person’s eyes.

So what is the difference between genuine deep autists and persons? The difference arises in early childhood but society is strangely unaware of it. It consists in the invention-out-of-nothing of the “suspicion of benevolence encountered” as I call it. Everyone has made the experience of benevolence received in her or his lifetime. Usually, this happens for the first time when you are very young – that you suddenly develop out of nothing the suspicion of encountering a living benevolence intending to do you good, which suspicion comprises the invention of a benevolent intention from your own part, with a positive mutual feedback developing that results in what can be called “being moved to the bottom of your heart.” Once you have made this invention – some would say: once you have fallen into this logical trap –, you are a person. It is an irreversible maximally powerful event, and society makes sure you have to pay for it as we saw. Nevertheless parents get very much alarmed if you as their child sidestep this developmental duty.

It is not only because society insists. It also is plainly embarrassing if – for example – a young girl sees no reason why not to use the handy side mirror of a parking car as a convenient occasion for a brief act of masturbation in plain daylight. The innocence of nature is no longer allowed in a society of persons. And everyone understands why this cannot be otherwise – except that war-time cruelty is still allowed as we saw. And allowed are also officially offered dishonesties on the part of big organizations (I mention CERN who in plain daylight can refuse to update their official 7-years-old Safety Report despite new safety-relevant results having accrued in the scientific literature in the meantime), without any news medium taking issue. I can so naively expose this truth because I can still remember being an innocent pre-person.

How could the transition from pre to full, from not-yet person to full person, occur? It is the power of the smile that is responsible,

combined with an internal-simulation based misunderstanding (or the opposite) which the smile makes possible. Only human beings are prone to falling into this trap: the trap of inventing the suspicion of the existence of a benevolent other will. The attendant test directly leads to the adoption of an infinite conscious trust whilst making an indelible treaty with another person – Mom or the nurse. If these two know about each other as mutual stand-ins as it were, everything is fine.

But big bonding is not meant to exist in childhood, right? The opposite is true. René Spitz and Mary Ainsworth were the discoverers in the 1940s, but the subject matter has become somewhat of a taboo topic in the current age of females having to be even busier as substitute males in society. In 1971, all the heavy works on laying railroad tracks were left to broad-shouldered women in Moscow when I visited there. Women are too good-natured, too – but this is another topic.

You see what I am driving at? Up to the holiest moment on the planet: when a stupid unknowing toddler conceives the suspicion of encountering a benevolent foreign will.

What is it that comes thereafter? Usually, mothers have more than one child, and then there comes school. But let me return: The smile is the culprit (I've got a thing about smiles). The human smile is something pathological if you look at it with the eyes of a biologist or physician. It is a double-edged signal. (Similarly again some 12 years later in life but this is not our current topic.) To cut a long story short: the smile is the human tail-wagging. A happy dog wags his tail, and a bonding dog does so, too. Humans do the same two things with the face: There again is no difference between the two innate expressions in either case, although the two have a totally different meaning each. An evolutionary convergence up to a virtually total overlap between two functionally different expressions (bonding and general happiness) occurred only twice in the history of the planet: in wolves and in humans. But wolves and dogs are not persons. They are not person-competent because they are not mirror-competent.

But if a dog were mirror-competent, the human species would not be the only persons-carrying one on the planet. In humans, the just-named condition No. 1 – indistinguishability of friskiness and bonding – stands not alone. It comes combined with condition No. 2 – the computational mental capability to put yourself into the position of the other while acting (mirror-competence). George Herbert Mead was the great theoretician here in his 1934 book, "Mind, Self and Society" [5] which was written after his having passed away by the joint effort of his students who erased their own names – so much did they revere their teacher.

But the volatility of the mixture of the smile-laughter overlap combined with mirror competence, was still not fully recognized at the time. A "dog with mirror-competence" is the best definition of human beings if you want to understand how the latter tick causally. To facilitate this kind of functioning is the task assigned to the only science which is both objective and endowed with a feeling heart as its basis – medicine. You already saw the consequence – infinite trust and infinite reliability and infinite disappointability. There was once an Italo-Western movie with the German-language title "Play me the Song of Death" (English title: "Keep your loving Brother happy") in 1968 in which a father with a rope around his neck got placed on the shoulders of his child-age son: The benevolence was there but not the bodily strength. (The boring revenge then makes up the bulk of the plot.)

Biologically speaking, humans are the parent-feeding ape, *Pongo goneotrophicus*. Their heart is moved by the invention of benevolence in a mutual fashion between an adult and a child (an elephant and a mouse as it were). You know the punch line: The elephant inadvertently steps on the mouse, and the mouse with its last whisper says: "Don't worry, the same thing has happened to me before."

All of the above is about non-autism, with religion implied automatically since neither of the two is responsible for the substance of the mutual gifts. We are talking here about an infinite force that society is not aware of. Another of my favorite stories: A Yugoslav father abducts his 7 years old daughter from his estranged wife who had moved with her to the Netherlands. On the way back on the autobahn in Germany, the police stop the couple. He threatens to shoot his consenting daughter and himself if they don't let them go. He got four years in prison.

This has nothing to do with a misguided sexuality, this is the "bonding drive" that all dog owners (only dog owners?) know about. There is the story of the dog that hurried to the point where the family's child falling from the high-up window would land. Or of the ape who could not swim but tried to rescue a young monkey from drowning in the water canal of a zoo. Bonding is stronger than sexuality, but society at large is not encouraged to know about this fact – except at war-time when "comrades" need to be rescued in a shower of bullets which is impossible to accomplish without genuine love, as my late friend Konrad Lorenz told me (cf. [6]).

I still have said nothing about autism, or did I? Autism – primary autism – is the condition which applies when you cannot be rewarded by a smile. Blindness is less of an impediment because there exists also an acoustic smile which is automatically used in that condition. But no one in society seems to know so far that consciously applying this "invisible smile" predictably suffices to treat autism causally in general: by "smiling acoustically" whenever you are happy yourself in the interaction with your smile-blind child. For the bond is still there, only the optical channel does not work.

But no one appeared ready to believe me this in the therapeutic profession up until recently. This no doubt has to do with the fact that understanding what it is that makes up a person appears so forbiddingly difficult at first sight. Any scientist who makes such a claim must reckon with deep skepticism. The claim appears to imply an understanding of what it means to be human, religion included – and all mothers are religious if you don't ask them in theological terms.

And then there soon comes the kindergarten or, even worse, school – where suddenly there is no friend left at your side. Society does not know about this cruelty. Inclusion in education could re-create the climate of loving care which is so essential for children. But one must fear that some love-deprived bright class mates cannot be fully integrated into the protective atmosphere that children need and cannot create alone. Only the Jewish "Kinderlehrer" (childrens' teacher) like in Martin Buber's tale "The Legend of the Baal-Shem" [7], who is still to be found in some orthodox schools to date, was able to create lovingly protected, primary-benevolence controlled children who do not feel ashamed of being so ridiculously kind towards each other as only human beings can (and are meant to) be.

I quoted the book "Mother and cooing Songs" written by Friedrich Fröbel, the inventor of the Kindergarten in the early 19th century, in my elephant paper. (The preprint is on the Internet under the title of ref. [2].) But my readers here still cannot trust their eyes, I am sure: Is there not a deeper "wiring defect" involved in autism? If mirror

competence is absent, there is indeed no way around the condition as far as I can see, but this seems to be the only barrier. The other equally causal one could be a total lack of bonding. I do not know whether such a condition exists. In that case, I would again not know immediately how to help, but even then a way could be found, I believe.

But do there exist specific action-controlling potentials in the brain? Does there exist a “brain equation” with reward and punishment implied, both potentially unlimited, and do these two at any rate exist also in animal ethology (which is causally explained by the brain equation [8,9, cf. 10])? Rewards and punishment and friskiness and bliss do at any rate exist as experienced realities. So especially when you are young (there are “child saints” in Catholicism). And Saint Augustine was right when he said (implicitly) that the soul of the autistic is the Creator.

Society demands that human beings be satisfaction-competent persons. But the fact that this is originally the invention of a toddler – the invention of the suspicion of being confronted with a living benevolence which leads to an infinitely strong bond developing in its wake – with the implied certainty never to be let down by the mother or father or your teacher or doctor – is not known, neither by the public nor by the medical profession.

Was I allowed to ramble on like this to make the message that I wanted to transport maximally transparent? I did not try to teach you things, I only tried to make you fellow fighters for the holiness of the soul of a stupid fearful child who needs to be protected from society at large as long as possible. It is they – the weakest – who own the highest place in society. Walt Disney with the Jungle Book movie and with The Rescuers Bernard and Bianca (done later by his congenial director Wolfgang Reitherman) was quite close. He is the only artist of whom one can say for sure that he will still be famous in a thousand years’ time, so the inventor of ethology told me. Disney knew everything about the smile theory, I should add.

My other teacher, mathematician Bob Rosen, taught me that to understand biology, you have to study mathematics. But he of course meant the precise reliable thinking that you learn in a benevolently guided class in which the teacher is the parent figure. And doctors and teachers are almost the same profession.

In response to constructive critical remarks made by an anonymous referee, I would like to add three short paragraphs to help avoid misunderstandings: The above is, if you so wish, only a “caterpillar theory.” Children want to leave the larval stage of being dependent behind them. To your chagrin, they do not need you existentially any more afterwards. Nevertheless this is the challenge and the pride of humankind: to awaken full personhood in a toddler. It makes her strong for the rest of her life. And with the above bifurcation theory, we can now export the same epigenetic trait to non-human species that in terms of the hardware of their brains are even more lavishly equipped than human beings. Eventually, artificial intelligences will also become eligible.

But to come to something more concrete in this dialog with the reader and the community: Vicedo [11] two years ago published a highly constructive learned book in which she puts the bonding theory of René Spitz, Mary Ainsworth, John Bowlby and Konrad Lorenz into a larger context and, to a certain extent, into doubt with very good arguments. And we all know that with the growth of the adrenal glands, with its spurt at the onset of puberty, the emotional dependencies which were involved in childhood bonding as a decisive

force are suddenly gone. So maybe they were not that important, after all?

“Youth is inebriety without wine” said poet Goethe. Specific supportive acts are necessary to assure a young being’s survival. But this does not mean that the communication which took place under this asymmetric condition was not life-ensuring and essential. The transition into personhood, a “dynamical bifurcation” in the sense of dynamical systems theory (a notion described in the early book “Dynamical System Theory in Biology” of Rosen [12] is a necessary developmental stage for future members of the society of persons. Understanding this inaugural early stage and its mechanisms is a wonderful challenge.

To conclude, the point that I tried to show was that making the invention-out-of-nothing of the “suspicion of encountering deliberate benevolence” transforms an innocent autistic into a responsible person. It is almost impossible to remember this early ontogenetic developmental event, that often occurs at age less than two, as an adult. The occurrence of this spontaneous invention with its far-reaching consequences can be therapeutically facilitated (by rewarding the child, whenever you are happy yourself in the interaction due to the child’s happy friskiness, by an acoustic smile – a bonding sound made on your part) just as the mother’s happy laughter automatically does to a non-smile blind child without her own noticing. No one thinks of this involuntarily rewarding effect when smile-laughing out of joy, but it is not a very heavy burden to deliberately add this acoustic component when you know that this saves your child. Then the smile-blindness does not matter at all – functionally speaking. Infinite love and trust predictably follow again just as they do in the playroom of a “fully” sighted child. This deep, heart-transforming, experience is the embarrassing secret that all mothers know but of course never talk about. It is the best-kept secret of the human species. Only medical doctors are allowed to know this most naked of all truths because “The sum of medicine is love” (Paracelsus). And nurses are the better doctors here as their name implies.

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