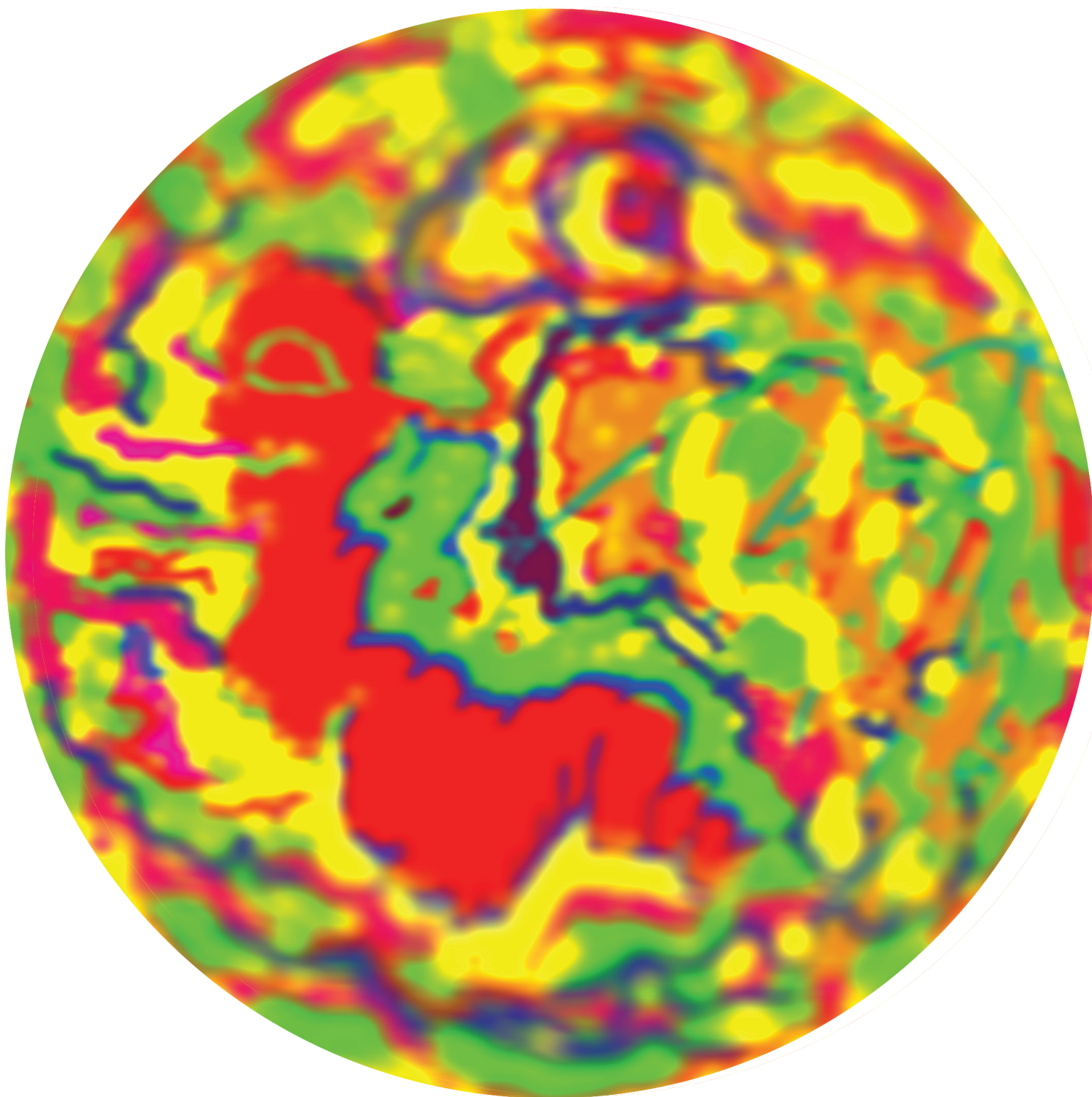


AUTISM'S OWN

Volume 4 - 2016



AUTISM'S OWN

Autism Culture by Authors with Autism

Volume 4 - 2016

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EISSN 1929-6177

Autism's Own Journal

Autism's Own is published annually by:

Autism's Own Publishing
University of Victoria, Authors with Autism
PO BOX 3035 STN CSC
Victoria BC V8W3P3
Canada

Editorial Board

Senior Editor

Joseph Z. Sheppard

Review Editors

Patrick Dwyer
Iris Gray
Heather Mitchell

Layout

Joseph Z. Sheppard

Cover Art

"Free and Happy" © 2015 Joseph Sheppard

Autism's Own is a University of Victoria peer-reviewed journal about autism culture authored and edited completely by persons on the autism spectrum. It offers an intimate first-hand depiction of the subjective experiences and thoughts of autistic persons. Autism's Own was founded in 2012 by Joseph Z. Sheppard, a UVic student and author with autism as a compilation of works by members of "Authors with Autism," a UVic peer-support group for students and lifelong learners with autism. Professor, Dr. James Tanaka became a co-founder by suggesting it become a true academic peer-review journal. This vision was later actualized under the guidance of Dr. Catherine Mateer, A-VP Academic of UVic. We are now pleased to warmly present readers with Autism's Own.

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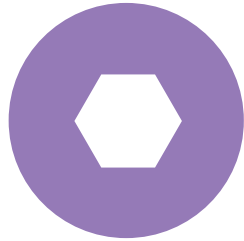


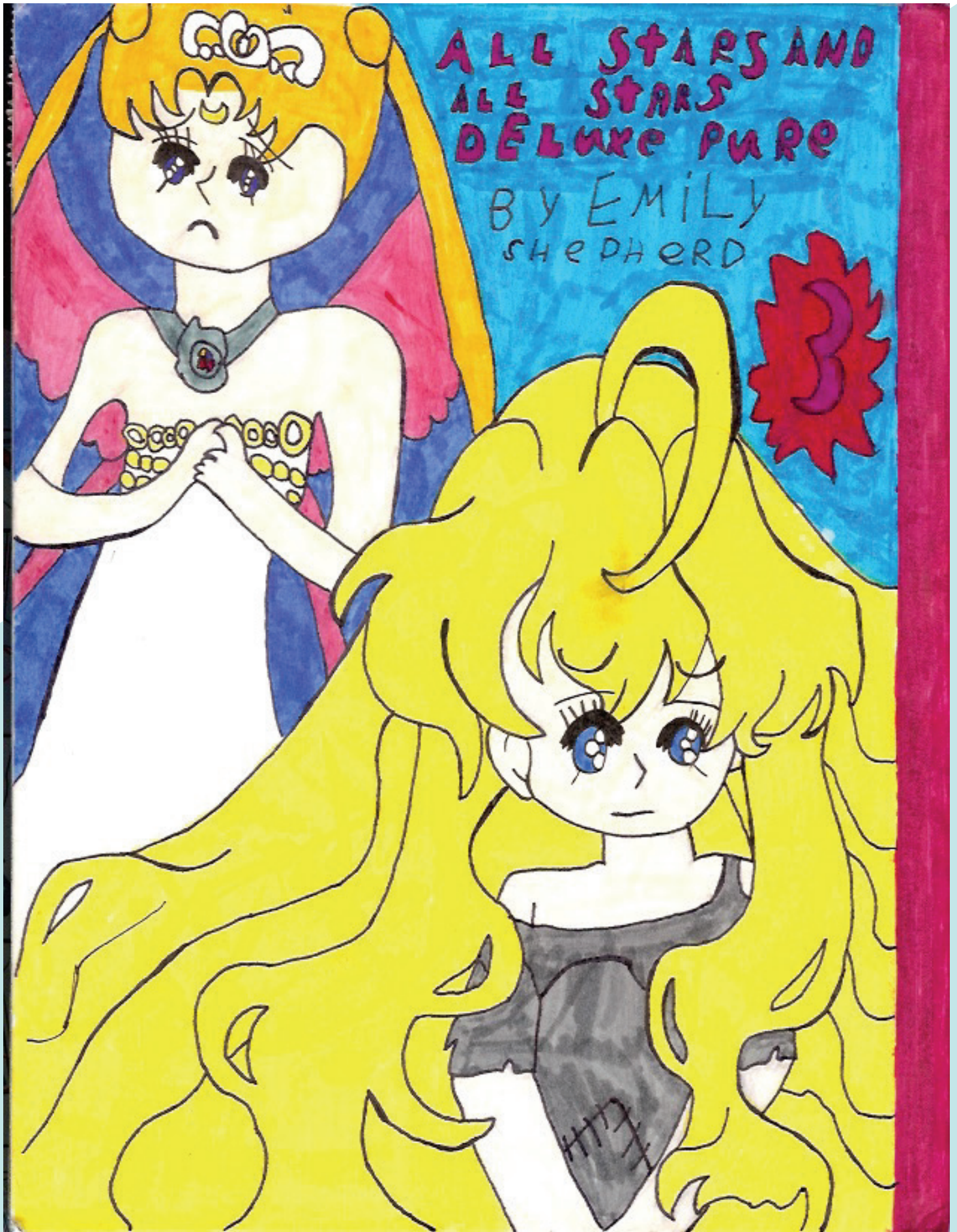
University of Victoria

ALL STARS

by Emily Shepherd

Emily Shepherd is a Magna artist with autism. Here is a sampling of her drawings.





Emily Shepherd, 2016

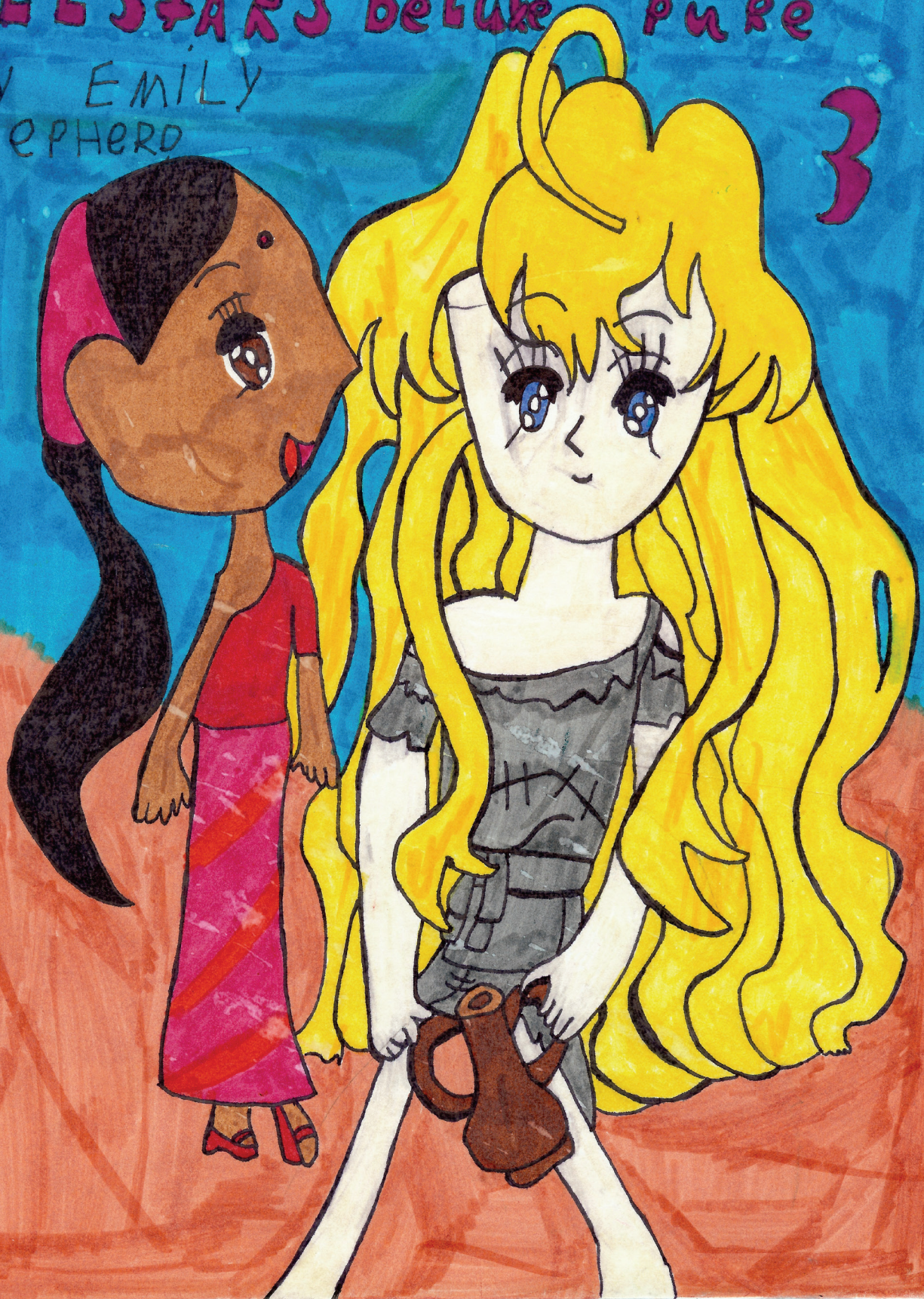


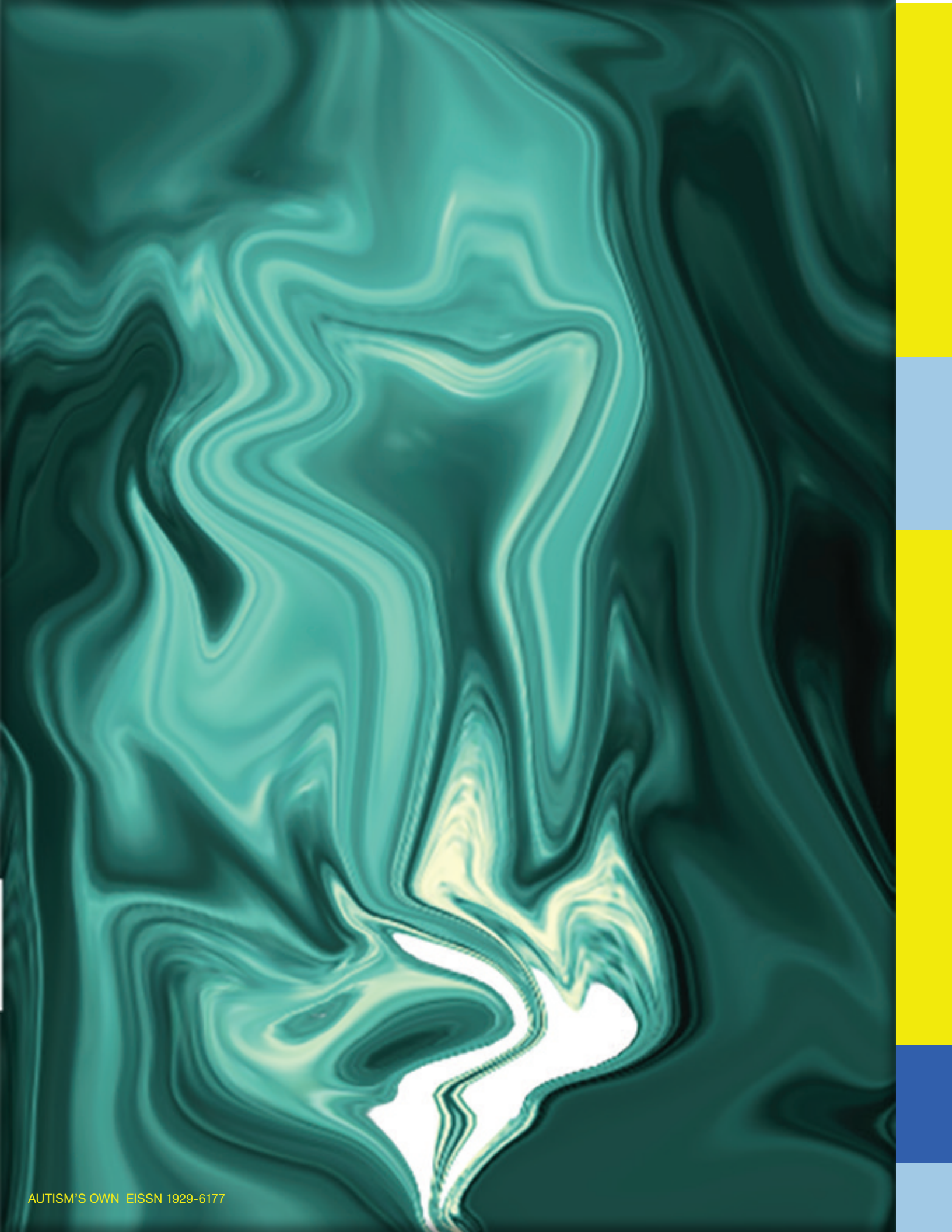


ALL STARS AND ALL STARS deluxe PURE

BY EMILY
SHEPHERD

3





The
glorious
planet
Earth
is
abundant
with
rich
diversity.

It's
a
sad
paradox,
then,
that
diversity
is
so
rarely
embraced
by
humans.

Sociophenomenal Diversity and the Ra- dar of Encounter

by Gordon Gates



The glorious planet Earth is abundant with rich diversity. It's a sad paradox, then, that diversity is so rarely embraced by humans. Supposedly the Earth's most intelligent inhabitants, human beings seem to fear diversity and respond by inflicting pain. Mother Nature knows that diversity is critical for the survival of life – different strategies to cover varied conditions and multiple adaptations for every nook and cranny of the planet's range of present and future occupational possibility. We not only erode our chances to experience peace and harmony but diminish our chances of survival when we marginalize and make adversaries or victims out of differently oriented others. This paper is about an aspect of human variation that is often over-medicalized. It explores a framework of diversity to help span communication barriers and provide traction to elevate socially different people beyond the constraint of society's inhibiting expectations.

Although there are many kinds of diversity, I am familiar with this one in particular because I have suffered from the stigma associated with it all my life. I and others like me experience chronic marginalization due to lack of tolerance for this particular dimension of difference. I refer to this range of human variability as *sociophenomenal* diversity because it involves a fundamentally different social orientation than “normal.” Sociophenomenal diversity refers to deep-set differences in people's experience of social relationality. This does not just refer to specific differences of preference or culture, but fundamental variations in their radar of encounter as human beings. For example, earlier this year I walked past a neighbor who was putting Christmas tree lights up on his porch. Small talk is uncomfortable for me and I usually end up feeling inadequate for not managing to engage in the expected flow. Still, we exchanged a few awkward pleasantries. I forget what exactly transpired, but when I got home my wife told me I could have made a friend. When I told her what he'd said, she told me he had been inviting me to spend time together and that I passed up an opportunity to make a buddy. I usually try to be nice and would have loved to make a pal, but his parlance of camaraderie went right over my head. I didn't pick up on it at all. Social communication must be very explicit for me to grasp unless I find a way to keep my interpersonal radar appropriately tuned for opportunities in a given situation. The dimension of diversity underlying the loneliness that occurs when this kind of social misalignment becomes chronic cuts across cultures; people from many different areas of the world participate in online discussion forums talking about this kind of experience.

The usual way of having non-dominant forms of sociophenomenal diversity recognized by society is to obtain a diagnosis such as autism spectrum disorder. When used as a validating discourse for sociophenomenal difference, however, medical diagnosis is demeaning because it is inherently oriented towards impairment and pathology. I can only speak to the issue of autism from the point of view of my Asperger's diagnosis, but I am on the side of critical disability thinkers who believe that “current orthodox autism theory mismeasures autism” through medicalization (Chown, 2014, p. 2). Such pathologization can make us feel like broken human beings and focuses on the sense in which something is *wrong* with us. It does not capture the phenomenological fullness of existing in the world autistic or promote a strengths-based orientation that focuses

1. The concept of “neurodiversity” supposedly provides an alternative to the impairment-oriented framework of medical diagnosis, but its neuro-centric language valorizes biological reduction and is more consistent with the inherently pathologizing discourse of medicalization than the liberating goals of diversity theory.

2. I put quotation marks around “high functioning” because whether anyone is “lower functioning” than anyone else depends on the context, seems unnecessarily judgmental, and is debatable.

3. This is not to say there is some kind of timeless inner core that sets us apart. Agency is dynamic and lived as a seamless flesh of self, others, world, and history. ASHFA refers to our intimate acquaintance with the unique quality of phenomenological presence at the heart of what makes us different in a world of sociotypical others.

4. I discuss the ethics of using online forum postings in research, which I think applies equally to publishing articles, in my University of Victoria thesis (Gates, 2014, pp.56-58).

on the potential of our humanity.

There is nothing inherently wrong with obtaining a diagnosis, but diagnosis is only meant to identify pathology and provide a blueprint for possible treatment, not to define us or validate the fundamental differences between us. People who have had to live with the stigma associated with autism without an explanation for their marginalization often find diagnosis transformative (Roquivist, 2012). I felt this way when I was diagnosed with Asperger's at the age of 44. Finally, an explanation for my difference! Much of my life was spent in an unexplained state of rejection and I could never understand why I did not seem to fit in anywhere. In response to this, I scrambled anxiously to feel safe or avoided social demands altogether. Diagnosis provides an explanation, but accepting a diagnosis involves adopting a pathology-oriented definition of autistic difference that focuses on disability. Sociophenomenal diversity recognizes widely different orientations towards social interaction as part of being human. Framing autistic difference in terms of sociophenomenal diversity offers us a way to understand the stigma and marginalization we experience without necessarily endorsing medical diagnosis as the only way to be recognized. It offers an alternate validating narrative that does not reduce autistic difference to pathology or impairment.¹

Embracing sociophenomenal diversity does not involve rejecting medical diagnosis altogether. People with sociophenomenal differences may or may not wish to be “treated” or “cured” depending on the kind of suffering they experience. They may or may not want to be diagnosed depending on their views of the medical establishment or how they choose to see themselves. This is best respected as a personal choice rather than an argument with a “right” answer. In any case, it is possible to engage in a curious exploration of socio-

phenomenal difference regardless of diagnosis.

Sociotypes associated with autism acknowledge various challenges of living, including a tendency to become overwhelmed by sensory input, difficulties with emotional regulation, and challenges with executive functioning. Yet if the dominant sociophenomenal world will allow us, and we work with our uniqueness instead of against it, we can find a niche, sometimes a surprising niche, and do very well. At the same time, we may feel pathologized because of research that points to atypical interpersonal responses, different patterns of neural activation when seeing faces, different levels of dopamine release in response to hearing human voices, or patterns of eye movement that track other people less closely than the norm. Exploring the biological correlates of any human behaviour can be fascinating. When it comes to Sociotypes associated with the range of the autism spectrum previously diagnosed according to the DSM IV as Asperger's or referred to as "high functioning" autism, many such individuals feel their suffering is due mostly to living in a sociophenomenally dominant culture in the face of constant rejection. This is the view the research participants expressed in my recent MSW research at the University of Victoria, and it is consistent with my own experience as the organizing participant (Gates, 2014).

In the course of doing this research, I initially used the term *ASHFA* simply as a short form for Asperger's/"high functioning" autism.² I focused on this population because of my own diagnosis, but I soon came to employ the term to refer to a person who chooses to be or is potentially a member of a virtual community that experiences the world in similar terms of sociophenomenal diversity. I now use the term *ASHFA* to refer to individuals (with or without a diagnosis) who face common challenges, experience similar kinds of stigma, and frustrate sociophenomenally dominant others in characteristic ways. The associated range of the autism spectrum has no name in the recently released DSM-5 and is only specified as *autism spectrum disorder without accompanying intellectual or functional language impairment*. I prefer to speak of *ASFHA*, which is not just the short form for a diagnosis but indicates, like Deaf with a capital 'D', that it is not the raw biological condition that is important. Rather, it is recognizing our uniqueness and framing our difference in empowering terms that can enrich our lives.

According to my research and personal experience with *ASFHA*, it is the stigma associated with sociophenomenal diversity that leads to our desperate need for a validating discourse in order to make sense of the rejection and marginalization we experience. A validating discourse means "there's nothing wrong with me – I'm just different in a coherently valid human way." In my experience as a counselor, I have found that issues of sociophenomenal diversity seem to be at work in other conditions such as ADHD, schizophrenia, and borderline personality disorder. Further research is needed to explore the relationship between mental health issues, intellectual disability, and different degrees of autism in terms of how these are experienced, the associated range of sociophenomenal diversity, and the stigma attached to them.

In my research, I interviewed four individuals diagnosed with Asperger's and two with "high functioning" autism about their

experiences with stigma. Participants were asked their opinion about the diagnostic changes in the latest revision of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5). They were asked their opinion about the elimination of the term "Asperger's" and how they felt about the condition now being an unnamed part of autism spectrum disorder. It was generally agreed that "autism" was associated with more stigma than "Asperger's." This finding was consistent with previous research (eg. Kite, Gullifer, & Tyson, 2013). Still, neither those diagnosed with Asperger's nor those identifying with "high functioning" autism were averse to eliminating the distinction between these conditions or seeing themselves on an autistic spectrum. One participant believed that classifying individuals into autism and non-autism (Asperger's) served to generate stigma within a "neurodivergent family." He identified as an individual with Asperger's and was proud to think of this as a variety of autistic being. Another expressed concern that having a diagnosis of autism rather than Asperger's might "mislead" people into associating his condition with more intense forms of autism accompanied by intellectual and speech impairment. This was motivated by an effort to avoid stigma rather than an essential disavowal of autism.

Yet another participant was adamant that eliminating the term Asperger's would "lose the flavour" and uniqueness associated with belonging to a distinct community. One recommendation of the research was that autistic individuals who share common patterns of functioning and experience similar forms of stigma should be recognized as a coherent group even though that group is considered part of a larger spectrum. The research further suggested that future revisions of the DSM may want to reinstate Asperger's as a descriptive term for this range of the spectrum. Rather than calling the underlying condition autism spectrum disorder, the study concluded that it should be referred to more simply as the autistic spectrum with "disorder" to be determined collaboratively on a case by case basis.

Participants reported that diagnosis not only provided a helpful explanation for their difference from sociodominant culture, but also a much-needed form of validation. Yet as we have seen, medical diagnosis inherently implies pathology and participants agreed that autism was not a disorder added onto their personality. This inconsistency emerged as a fundamental contradiction at the heart of the study. Participants saw their autism as part of who they were. This is consistent with Iris Gray's position in her *Autism's Own* article when she declared that "Autism is my life. It is who I am" (2013, p.2). Autistic writer Lane Chevrier (2014), on the other hand, seems not want to over-identify with his autism because he sees his Asperger's as nothing more than a "personality profile created by a team of psychologists" (2014, p.9). On closer examination, it may not be autism as a way of being he wants to distance himself from but the pathologization of medical diagnosis. He acknowledges a deeper level that sets people with autism apart (the "own" in "Autism's Own") and says that these "differences are the underlying core of their entire world perception" (p.10). It is this deeper level I am trying to get at with the designation *ASHFA*; the raw unappropriated agency deeply entwined with our sense of self that is associated with our difference from mainstream others.³ Lane's insightful position is consistent with maintaining that medicalization is inherently disempowering. This leads to the need for *ASHFA* need to find a validating discourse

elsewhere, and the concept of sociophenomenal diversity can be used to disengage our difference from medical sovereignty.

ASHFA is associated with many characteristic traits. Only two are part of autistic diagnosis - stereotyped movements and difficulty with emotional reciprocity. Another much-researched formulation tries to locate the “problem” with such individuals in an impaired “theory of mind.” This characteristic involves the ability to apprehend the contents of other people’s minds, or to put it another way the capacity to appreciate the sense in which others have unique thoughts, feelings, and perspectives. Impairment of this ability does not apply to all ASHFA. I know because I am ASHFA. As one who is a mental health counselor, I work primarily from a standpoint of curiosity. I never assume what others are feeling, even though I have a sense of other people that presupposes their ability to have a unique perspective. I undertake a collaborative exploration of their perspective on what brings them to the session, although I have to make a conscious effort to position myself to take an interest in their experience (at home with my wife this sometimes seems to be more of a challenge than at work). It is interesting that my passion for building therapeutic relationship started as a child having to talk my mother through depression. I eventually learned that engaging in therapeutic relationship provided a well-defined role that could spare me from having to engage in the spontaneous flow of typical social interaction.

Other characterizing ASHFA traits sometimes include lack of concern for appearance and hygiene, not because of self-loathing or laziness but lack of appreciation for predominant social graces; not being able to immediately sense social expectations or appreciate mainstream social conventions; vulnerability to bullying and manipulation because of naïve trust and not knowing when people are underhanded when they are acting “nice”; doing things in an independent and eccentric manner because the value of dominant social codes may not be appreciated; being logical and concrete; using language in a literal or pedantic manner; relying on structure and routine; lack of cognitive flexibility; difficulty with change and changing streams of behaviour on short notice; and a tendency to relate to mechanisms and concepts more easily than people. Any of these can be seen as strengths when they align with an appropriate social role, and any of them can be compensated for. For example, as a counsellor I feel ASHFA helps me start fresh with each client from where they are at because I may have less of a tendency to jump in with my own felt responses to their presentation. I need each client to inform me about their thoughts and feelings in an explicit way, and to me this is a definite strength for a therapist. I am also less likely to get over-involved with the pain of others. It’s not that I have some kind of “empathy disorder” (Smith, 2008 as cited in McDonagh, 2013, p.37). Like all therapists, I have to manage the amount of empathy I allow myself to engage in if I want to avoid compassion fatigue. Still, ASHFA may give me an advantage with this because of my strength at formulating emotional interaction in cognitive terms. In addition, I may find it easier than others to avoid taking work home with me; ASHFA helps me compartmentalize my routines in a way that turns out to be resilient and healthy.

I can manage my usual discomfort with socializing by relating

to the people I see as clients rather than friends. This becomes another strength because it helps maintain appropriate boundaries. Not that this makes my sessions cold and clinical. I never take a distant, detached, or “objective” stance. My security in the role of clinician allows me to be more comfortable and easy going in my interaction than I am usually capable of. The clinical knowledge and ability to explore personal meaning I have developed through training and practice do not make me better than anyone else; they simply position me to be of service. That it took most of my working life to develop into a person able to take on the role of clinician has seasoned me with wisdom. The journey was an adventure in itself. Good listening is crucial so I can utilize my skills and experience most effectively with each person. Living with autism has shown me the importance of patient, genuine listening as a way to make people feel supported and heard as unique individuals. Above all, ASHFA gives me compassionate insight into the plight of others whose sociophenomenal and other differences make them feel rejected by society and unable to engage as equals with other human beings.

People with autism may claim that many of the characteristics listed above are only statistical tendencies of behaviour rather than fundamental impairments. For example, another theoretical mechanism of pathology for autism has been formulated as an impaired sense of global perspective. This involves a tendency to see isolated parts of things rather than the overall picture. Yet impaired “global coherence” does not relate to everyone ASHFA. I know this because I am ASHFA. As one who identifies himself as a philosopher, I have always cultivated the ability to step back and take a broad, global view of any issue in order to discern patterns, inconsistencies, and previously unconsidered relationships with other issues. I pride myself on being able to create higher syntheses out of competing perspectives. This interest in philosophy started with an attempt to avoid the spontaneous give and take of social interaction by hiding behind theory and rational contemplation. I was always trying to look thoughtful - my uncle used to call me “Einstein.” This goes to show that our special interests and passions, even when they are used as a way of avoiding interaction and aren’t appreciated by others, help construct us into who we become. While my peers were busy interacting with each other “normally,” I was engrossed with George Berkeley’s characters Hylus and Philonous as they debated whether the material world was real. Much later, I obtained a Master’s Degree in philosophy from McMaster University. I like to think that lack of global coherence is not a problem for me. Let me give you an example - my love of chocolate comes to mind (as it often does). My first reaction to a cocoa crop failure would be distress about changing my favorite eating habits rather than any concern for widespread economic losses or the suffering this might generate for certain communities. I must admit my first response is not always my best response, but it’s not all I’m capable of. Like sociophenomenally dominant others, I am able to rise above my habitual responses when I see the need and make an effort.

One career choice for ASHFA that surprised me was being a police officer. That’s more because I can’t imagine myself having to tell if people are lying or trying to manipulate me than any hurdle the right person can’t overcome with familiarity and practice. Policing involves a strong culture of rules and constitutes a very specific



social role. In the UK, a special association was set up for police officers with Asperger's in 2015 (NPAA, 2016). Wrongplanet, an autism forum set up in 2004 by a 17-year-old diagnosed with Asperger's, has a thread of postings for people with Asperger's who aspire to be police officers. One person posting there who identifies as a corrections officer, but does not mention what country he is from, talks about the challenges involved. Based on his experience, he advises ASHFA applying to join the police department to avoid disclosing their autistic identity because of stigma (Lawenforcement, 2016).⁴ This, of course, is assuming their autism is invisible enough not to arouse concerns about their difference and they are able to fulfill rigorous professional expectations.

Greater acceptance of sociophenomenal diversity will involve education. Not just to build technical knowledge, but a compassionate awareness of how various groups of individuals experience the world and others. In order to build this understanding there must be a certain will towards solidarity; the recognition that human survival is a global matter rather than a local affair involving the exclusion of people who are different. Sociophenomenally dominant others are supposed to be better equipped to take a global view, so why is it so hard? When we see how enriched the world would be if everyone were allowed to contribute their unique strengths, how allowing different perspectives and making the effort to be inclusive enlarges the horizon of our world and increases our potential for survival, how can we go back to the petty and parochial limitations involved with the defensive exclusion of non-dominant diversity? Especially when we recognize that "dominance" is itself a local concept, relevant only in specific contexts.

In conclusion, ASHFA is a way of being in the world that is deeply ingrained in an individual's personality. It is lived in a profoundly existential sense as a fundamental style of being that transcends getting a diagnosis. Diagnosis is based on ephemeral criteria that can change with the updated version of a manual. ASHFA, on the other hand, is an enduring way of being present in the world that diverges from the mainstream. Sociophenomenal diversity remains a valid framework of difference regardless of how the diagnosis of autism is redefined in the future. Rather than basing this population's eligibility for services strictly on the degree of supposed pathology or some medical definition of required level of support, it should be predicated on the lifelong suffering that can result from the stigma associated with their difference. Mental health and other social services for this population should be available on the basis of felt need with workers familiar with the challenges of being ASHFA in a sociodominant world. It should be every citizen's right to be assessed for whatever assistance they need in order to enjoy as equal an opportunity as possible to function happily in society. In a culture dominated by sociotypically-oriented others, social justice for ASHFA must include access to resources capable of addressing the pain of stigma. When the right to be a full citizen on this wonderful planet is stifled for certain people because they are different from dominant others, action is called for. Even the smallest acts of defying oppression take courage. Coming to understand our differences in empowering ways that challenge stigma is a form of resistance. An effective way of doing this is to work with our sociophenomenal temperament to reinforce personal hopes and dreams rather than feeling limited by internalized stereotypes or inertia motivated by stigma avoidance.

Gordon Gates

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The ideas in this article will be further explored in an upcoming book. More can be read about my work by searching for my blog.

Athena

by Maria Iliou

From the depth of history, the name Athena
echoes with meaning... Wisdom of arts
Fountain of knowledge
Pure innocence and beauty

In my life, the gifted daughter Athena resonates
with life Able to translate inner beauty Onto can-
vas, a capable Abstract artist

Pictures transfer images Seen only in her mind
Transformed from brilliant Smile, or heartbreak-
ingly Teary eyes

A gift in my life, another Perspective, different
yet Powerful, touching the deepest parts Of my
heart and soul

Empathic, my entire body feels
Her emotions, penetrating inner layers As the
core of my being
Echoes with meaning

Constantly in my thoughts, simplistic Yet sensi-
tive conversations arise From the connection
that binds

**“A gift in my life,
another Perspective,
different yet Power-
ful”**



Athena (Owl)
By Maria Iliou

The Accepted Duckling

by Patrick Dwyer

In a classic story by Hans Christian Andersen, “The Ugly Duckling,” a young swan is ridiculed by others for his appearance. He is, as the title suggests, mocked as an “ugly duckling,” but only until he matures and realizes that he is a swan, and not a duckling at all. One could interpret this story as a case of transformation for the better, or even as a moral tale urging its readers to accept difference.

It is interesting to consider this tale in the context of autism. Today, people with autism are routinely treated as ill, as needing to be “cured.” This is most explicitly seen in the various biomedical treatments that allegedly are capable of curing autism, but one can sometimes even detect underlying assumptions of illness or hidden patronizing tones in social and cognitive-type interventions.

If we were to write a new version of “The Ugly Duckling” that is relevant to people with autism, it would be very different. Instead of simply being mocked, the young swan would be both sometimes mocked, sometimes treated with pity, and sometimes urged to accept all sorts of treatments designed to transform him into a proper duck. He would be expected to become something that he is not.

Anyone who applied this sort of logic to other marginalized groups in our society would be widely condemned, and rightly so. One could say that, because people with black skin are victims of oppression in our society, we must force all African-Canadians to undergo skin bleaching procedures à la Michael Jackson. However, this “solution” seems abhorrent to us. Saying that people with autism must become typically-developing in order to escape structural oppression within our society is essentially no different from saying that black people should just become white.

This is the issue facing people with autism today. I would feel confident in saying that, right now, autism – despite claims to the contrary by some individuals and organizations – cannot be cured. There are some people with autism who can pass for typically-developing when we wish, in most contexts, but many people with autism have not been able to even fit in this much. Demanding the creation of a cure only reinforces the message that people with autism are inferior, ill, diseased, and in need of a cure.

In fact, many people with autism are entirely capable of functioning well, if our society would only allow them to. Even many of so-called “low-functioning” people, if I can be forgiven for using a perfect example of a rather condescending term, have unique skills, and those on the higher-functioning end of the autism spectrum should certainly be able to find jobs based on their task-relevant skills. In fact, there are sometimes advantages to hiring people with autism (“Benefits of Employing People on the Autism Spectrum,” 2016). Certainly allowing people with autism to participate in the labour force would help to alleviate the financial burden that people with autism impose on families and on government.

Why, then, are only 25% of people with autism employed (Holwerda, van der Klink, Groothoff, & Brouwer, 2012)? Why, then, are many of these lucky few employed people in positions that are below their skill levels? Why, then, are the lucky few employed people with autism in the United States generally earning below the minimum hourly wage (Dudley, Nicholas, and Zwicker, 2015)?

The fundamental issue facing people with autism is that society is not set up to accept our contributions. For example, we might be perfectly capable of performing task-relevant work, but office politics are beyond many of us. It is in no small part because of these areas of reduced skill, which are generally irrelevant to actual job performance, that we have been marginalized and excluded from the labour force. Demanding that people with autism be cured simply demands that we change to fit the expectations of society, which is not always possible, instead of demanding that society make adjustments – often quite minimal adjustments – to its expectations.

Does this mean that I think that we should focus all of our efforts on modifying society, and make no efforts whatsoever to intervene to increase the skills and abilities of people with autism? Should we even go so far as to accept any and all behaviours by people with autism, however offensive they may be? Certainly not. While our ultimate objective should be to spread the idea that society as a whole needs to change in order to prevent marginalization of people with autism, it is impossible to deny that teaching social skills and other abilities to individuals with autism will often be effective at improving the lives of specific individuals.

The challenge that we face is to somehow reconcile the need to provide such teaching with the need to ensure that our overall message is not lost or drowned out. It is counter-productive to burden people on the autism spectrum with the idea of inferiority, as much as it is counter-productive to offend other oppressed groups by propagating similar messages. Doing so simply harms the self-esteem of vulnerable people. It would be better to ensure that interventions are constantly accompanied by a consistent message that stresses the value of people with autism. I believe that this can be done.

Returning to the example of the ugly duckling, all this means that we must simply accept difference where it arises. The ugly duckling should be accepted, whether it is an ugly duckling, a young swan, or something else entirely. Perhaps we need to teach it a little about how to live in duck society, but we must never lose sight of the fact that it is our obligation to include the duck, not to impose on the ugly duckling the impossible task of changing its fundamental nature.

Patrick Dwyer

My Life and My Travels

By Dev Percey

My life can be very interesting. I was born and raised in a small town called Powell River. Powell River is a tiny town with marvellous sunsets by the ocean. It is known to be one of the world's most beautiful places.

I have a family of four with my mom, dad, and brother, Connor. They live in a house with a magnificent view of the ocean. I was very blessed with the high school I graduated from. It was new, freshly built, and located close to the ocean.

I am mildly autistic and very motivated. I lived in Nanaimo for two years and attended Vancouver Island University, then saved up four thousand dollars and travelled independently to Mexico for the three months. I participated in three volunteer projects: doing ceramics, working at a juvenile jail for boys, and at participating in a conservation project working with crocodiles and turtles. It was a very life-changing experience. I don't look at Canada the same way now. We have a more stable government and poverty is different in Mexico. There, the government does not care if the families and children are starving on the streets. Lots of them make little crafts to help earn a few dollars to survive.

Mexicans used to also tell me that they don't actually care about the drug wars and that the government steals their money. I lived with three families in Mexico. I got sent to the first family right off the plane to Guadalajara at 5 a.m. I woke up in a big house with the sound of the church bells. Guadalajara is Mexico's second largest city. It was a big colourful city; the street smells of Mexican food roasting; cathedrals and chapels are everywhere. It was also a very intense city. It was big and easy to get lost in. The traffic, buses, and taxis were crazy. Drivers will run right over you at the cross walk, buses don't stop for you – you stop for them – and taxi drivers will get you lost if they know you are a foreigner.

The first family wasn't the right one for me, so I went to live with the second family, which was the one who ran the ceramics. I loved living with them. The mother Silvia was this big chunky lady, who gives you hugs and kisses all the time. I got super close to her. She was also a gifted cook. I could talk to her like she was my real mom, but we mostly spoke all in Spanish. I could even talk to her when I would be thinking about a Mexican guy in a romantic way. There was also her husband Eduardo, and her two sons Cobbie and Eddie. Cobbie was really sweet. He spoke English fluently. Eddie I didn't really get. He was a little bit creepy, somewhat opinionated, and had confusing humour. They had five cats. Animals are not treated the same as they are in Canada. Pets are mostly used as garbage cans and ate all the scraps. Dogs were often kept in a pen or on the roof of people's houses. I worked in their yard making tiles and painted them. I met a friend there who understood me like no one else in the world would. Her name was Jonquil. She was from Vermont. Jonquil was kind of a hippie-type person and little bit wild. We got to know each other. She asked, me do you have Asperger's? I looked up at her. I was shocked that she would think to ask that. I told her no, but that I

was autistic. It is hard to find someone who understands me like that, especially in a poorer country. Most Mexicans didn't seem to understand what autism means or how it works. Poorer countries are often not as educated on learning differences as Canada and the United States. Jonquil became my closest friend in Mexico because of that.

A month later I went on to another town, to Guzman, to go onto my next project. I was going to work with boys twelve years of age to seventeen. They had been living on the streets with gangs, doing drugs and doing other crimes. I lived with my third family, just a mother and daughter. The mother, named Gina, seemed really sweet. She was a little bit too controlling of me. That is a typical Mexican family. I had a roommate Julia from Germany. I remember going to the juvenile jail the first day. It was overwhelming. The boys were sweet, but they were rough. I met a twelve-year-old boy who had a son, one was dating three girlfriends at time, another had a father in jail, and some of the boys' parents were prostitutes. The boys that were in gangs had to stand for twelve seconds and get beaten to get accepted in the gang. In the juvenile, we had to teach them about love, respect, and what's healthy. They were usually there for three months. They were the hardest people to speak Spanish too. They are impatient, they don't understand that foreigners had just learned to speak their language overnight.

At the end of my project in Guzman, I was supposed to go to the conversation project in Tecoman, Colima. Time slows down in Mexico. So it was delayed. One morning I was supposed to leave for Tecoman. I woke up for breakfast in Mexico. The news was on as I was sitting at the table, eating quesadillas, beans, and fruit salad in a fancy glass. The tsunami had hit Japan. It was all over the news in Spanish: images, scenes of massive waves going over millions of peoples' heads, of destruction. After breakfast I started packing my suitcase thinking I was supposed to go to the turtle camp. The phone rang. It was for me. It was Jonatan from the office in Guadalajara. Jonatan told me I had to stay one more day in Guzman. The waves at the turtle camp on the beach were too big from the tsunami. It would be unsafe. I was disappointed. I was desperate to move on. I sat in the biggest cathedral. I knelt down and prayed that God would let me go to Tecoman the next day.

The next day I was on the bus to Tecoman. I said goodbye to my family and the worker Jose in Guzman. I was on the bus with another volunteer going to go with me the turtle camp. She was from Toronto, Canada. It was super-special to have someone from Canada. I had been away from home in a foreign country for two and a half months. I hardly ever met anyone from Canada in Mexico. When I did it would be so powerful, especially once I had been there for a while on my own. Her name was Lydia. She was seventeen. She was in Mexico for her spring break. We got picked up off the bus by the lead worker of the conservation project, Oliver. He was a big, tall, tough-looking tattooed guy. He was cold. We got into a van. We stopped somewhere to pick another volunteer from England. He hopped in the van with us. His name was Michael. Meeting Michael was amazing. He was very friendly and instantly your friend. We all got close very quickly. Michael wasn't like anybody else I have met. We got to the turtle camp. It was paradise. Right by the tropical ocean; blue water; black sand; palm trees; coconuts on the ground everywhere. The sand on the beach had gone up a foot from the tsunami in Japan. I never would have thought something from other side of the world could affect me all the way in Mexico. It was so strange.

We had tents to sleep in; there was an outdoor bathroom and no hot water. The air was moist and the heat was punishing, but at night it was cozy. We weren't allowed to swim in the ocean. There were currents. There was a classroom on the beach with a loft. Michael slept there. There were two dogs, Tigre and Bennie. They were the sweetest dogs. That first night we all went to the pub which was a 20-minute walk away, by a lagoon. The pub was a wooden, cheap-looking pub with plastic chairs. The pub could be blown over easily by hurricane. We all had a beer. One of the workers, Oscar, had a quad. We all hopped on for a ride. Lydia sat behind Oscar.



Michael was on the back, and I sat on the front. We constantly had to check our sleep bags for scorpions. I was paranoid.

We all took turns going on turtle patrol. One of the workers would wake us up at 4:00 a.m. We would hop on the quad for 40 minutes, and drive along the beach looking for abandoned turtle eggs. Poachers and raccoons take them. It's illegal to take turtle eggs. Poachers sell them for five pesos. We would grab the eggs that were abandoned, put them in the bag, bury them the next day, and put them back in the ocean when they hatched. The beach was amazing at 4.00 a.m. Sunrise would occur and the palm trees at dawn were like shadows. The ocean and the midnight sky were magnificent. We had to clean the turtle nests with our bare hands. It was like a fear factor challenge. There were maggots and ants eating the dead turtles. The dead turtles left a horrid smell on your hands. When we found a turtle that was alive, it would bring a smile to my face. Some nights millions of turtles would hatch at once. The nests would be just swarming.

We also went to the crocodile farm. There was a lagoon with three hundred crocodiles in it and there were cages with injured crocodiles. Our job was to clean the cages. The workers would tie up the crocodiles in a corner by their necks. They would fight very aggressively and would leave blood marks on the walls. They made me jump. I held a baby crocodile.

At night we mostly went to the pub and or had a fire. Roberto, one of the workers, would hang out with us. He was the complete opposite of Oliver. Roberto was trouble though. He would take advantage of the female volunteers. He would be dating two volunteers at once and they were okay with it. It was strange. Michael and I didn't like it. Oscar on the other hand was an alcoholic. Once I bought a case of beer, and he asked me if he could pay me to have a beer. I gave him one. I didn't know how to say no to him and the next day he still stole two beers from me. I only had one left. I was angry.

After a week Lydia left. Michael and I went to climb a volcano. Roberto drove us to Colima and we got a hostel. Michael and I went out for drinks. I appreciated the hostel. It was nice to sleep somewhere with no scorpions and a proper shower. The next day we headed on the bus to climb the

volcano. We had trouble figuring out how to get to the volcano on the bus. We got stuck in the middle of nowhere. I am so glad I wasn't alone that day. Michael didn't speak much Spanish, so I had to speak for him to get by. We got to the volcano. We climbed a bit of it. It was harder than we thought. The heat was so punishing going up the mountain. We didn't have water so we were dehydrated. We gave up and climbed back down.

We were at the bus station in Guzman heading back to Colima first. A kid strange came on the bus with headphones on and just stood there staring at us. We just stared back. I asked, in Spanish, "What happened?" He told us, "Nothing." I asked, "What do you want?" He just told us, "Nothing." It was weird. We have never stopped talking about that kid.

I had two weeks left in Mexico. I was ready to go home; I was homesick. One day back at the camp, there was a dolphin beaching itself. We tried to get bucket of water. Michael and Oscar came on the quad holding the dolphin. Michael had blood from the dolphin all over him. Michael looked like something happened to him. We poured lots of buckets and towels soaked with water. The dolphin didn't make it. We were sad about that. We buried him on the beach.

One night we were all in bed. I got up sometime in the night to use the washroom. I noticed there was a light on in the kitchen. It was odd. I felt like something wasn't right. Bennie came up to me. I petted him and when back to my tent. The next day Oliver told us we had a robbery. My iPod, two gas tanks, and the stereo in the van got stolen. The thieves tried to take the van, but they couldn't because they didn't have keys. We all got up sometime in that night and knew something was going on. Something was not right. Oliver called the police. It costs money to get help from the police in Mexico. I decided to go back to Guadalajara for one more week. Things were falling apart at the turtle camp. The food was not good, often rotten. I got upset with Oliver. Two days later Oliver took me to the bus depot. I went back to Guadalajara and stayed with my favorite family one more time. I didn't get to say goodbye to Michael. Oliver called me from an internet café without telling me that I was leaving.

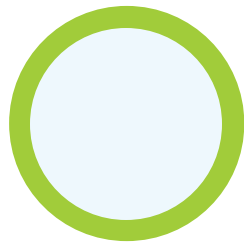
Staying with my favorite family one last time was nice. It was very much like being at my parents' house; I was well fed and slept well. I spent my last week just spending time hanging out in my favorite neighborhoods in Guadalajara and eating from my favorite food stands. On the day I left, I sat with Silvia just sitting and talking in Spanish. Alejandro came to pick me up. I said goodbye to everyone. It was sad. Alejandro drove me to the airport. We had our last conversations. We talked about my experience and how much I had grown in three months in Mexico. We said our goodbyes. I went through the customs, speaking Spanish to get by. When I got to the gate, I had a misunderstanding about my plane ticket. I had to speak Spanish to get through. It was a challenge. I went onto the plane. As the plane took off I burst into tears. It was a shock that it was over. My dream was over. People thought I was afraid of flying. It wasn't that. The plane landed in Houston. I had to switch onto the plane to Vancouver. It was a little bit of a challenge to find my way to the right flight. I got on to my next flight and landed in Vancouver. I went through everything in the airport. It was a process. My mom and Connor were waiting for me at the gate. They went crazy and told me not to do that to them again. I said, "Sorry, I am always going to have the travel bug!" I was wearing shorts, sandals and a t-shirt. It was pouring with rain. Mom put loads of coats on me. It was 5 a.m. in the morning. We went to a hotel, and slept. I was disorientated and mentally confused about leaving Mexico and where I was while I slept. I had big party with all my friends and family at Earls and the hotel.

Mexico is part of my life. It is a massive part and I plan to travel again. I want to go to India. I have a friend in Abu Dhabi, so I may visit her or go to Uganda for a year. I might want to go to university abroad, but first I plan on visiting Michael in England. Michael and I have remained in touch. We still laugh about the creepy kid on the bus.

Dev Percey

On Science as Morality

By Guthrie Prentice



Abstract

Owing to recent developments in science and technology, we now have the data, and the requirement, that moral systems should no longer be based on fallacies such as appeals to tradition, force, authority, and other similar fallacies. A reasonable way to address this problem is to adapt the most effective method for determining fact, the scientific method, applying its methods and its findings to decisions about how we live. Using a pragmatic and evidence-based approach, we can derive the morally right act, for any situation, independent of institutions or cultural biases.

On Science as a Morality

Descartes said, “*Cogito ergo sum*,” meaning, “I think therefore I am.” Based on that deduction, he further reasoned that there is an outside world, as he judged that his imagination was not complex enough to create one. But how does one deal with the outside world? If we assume, hypothetically, that there is such an outside world, then one must determine a way of dealing with it. This paper will hopefully open a discussion on the use of science, mathematics, statistical models, and reasoning, both inductive and deductive, to determine what is actually the best outcome for any given situation.

Now there are certain premises that I propose may be universally observed and, as yet, not contradicted, based on common human experience:

1. We do not know everything. We appear to always be learning something new. This could be as simple as learning someone’s name when we meet them the first time, all the way through to fascinating discoveries light years away.
2. We can be fooled. This arises from the state of not knowing and/or from failing to correctly apply the principles of deductive and inductive reasoning (in short, fallacies.)
3. When we obtain more knowledge, it seems our lives improve, if we can figure out how to use that knowledge.¹
4. Not paying attention to details, overlooking things, or detaching ourselves from reality, seems to limit what we know, and can generate unpleasant results for us because we didn’t know or didn’t pay attention to particular details.

1. For example, courtesy of advancing scientific knowledge and medical technology, human life span has increased over the past century or so (as cited in Burger, Baudisch, & Vaupel, 2012).

5. We appear to have difficulty learning or knowing when we are not performing at our full capacity, such as when we are tired, ill, hungry, or too emotional.
6. There appear to be other agents, like us, who seem to be engaged in the same exercise, to a greater or lesser degree, for various reasons and they appear to be better than us in some ways, and worse in others.

If these six premises are true, perhaps one can infer the following:

1. If not knowing can cause unpleasantness, and knowing things improves our lives, then it behooves us to learn as much as we can and figure out how to best use that knowledge.
2. If we are always learning something new, then understanding of objective reality (defined as knowing and understanding everything in existence) is an asymptote² that cannot be approached, but one must still continue to learn, and pursue understanding of objective reality for the reasons stated in conclusion 1.
3. From premises 1, 2, 3, and 4, we can infer that in order to fulfill the requirements of conclusion 1, then one has an individual obligation to check what one knows against what other agents know so that one may confirm their own findings and may learn more.
4. If premises 5 and 6 are true, then one might infer that it is possible that premise 5 is true for all agents. Therefore, there is a collective and individual responsibility to work on social, political, economic, educational, and experimental systems that keep all agents performing at maximum capacity, thereby ensuring maximum learning and operating potential.
5. There is also an individual as well as collective responsibility to share with others, including knowledge and scientific methodology, so that each individual, group, and society can learn and apply new skills to make sure everyone is continuing their pursuit of objective reality. This way the maximum number of competent observers can be generated to focus on any given problem. One can also infer that any method that allows the maximum capacity performance of all agents best meets conclusion 1.
6. As the scientific method, which requires publication of knowledge, peer-review of said knowledge (checking the knowledge), and replication (also checking the knowledge) (as cited in Bradford, 2012), seems to be the most effective method so far for learning, the scientific method, modified as necessary for each circumstance, should be applied as consistently as possible throughout every facet of one's life, including avoiding fallacies and applying all methods of empiricism as an offshoot of research in order to determine ethical research guidelines in any field.
7. From conclusions 1-7, one can infer that for this system to work properly, resources must be distributed based on needs, and if the resources are not available, finding a more efficient way to do the job, or finding the necessary

2. An asymptote is a line or value that can never be truly achieved. In mathematics, an asymptote is a value that is approached in one variable as another approaches infinity. One example would be the function $y=\tan(x)$. As it increases in the y direction towards infinity, it approaches, but never becomes, the x value $\pi/2$. In this case, the complete knowing or understanding of objective reality is an asymptote because it is impossible to achieve. New things are happening all the time and the universe is expanding, making it less and less likely we will be able to explore certain parts of it. If reality turns out to be infinite, then understanding or knowing all of it becomes that much more impossible.

“What is morally right can therefore be inferred for any situation from these premises and previous conclusions based on the best available scientific data.”

resources, without redirecting resources away from other important areas, is necessary.

8. One may also infer that taking data out of context will distort the truth, and as such, hinder learning, so it behooves every agent to do one’s best to take everything in context and to find relevancy of all data so that one may continually pursue one’s understanding of objective reality.

9. Toxic or falsified data or claims are worse than bad data, as spreading such hinders pursuit of truth and does enormous collateral damage to civilization, even putting the very basis of society and its viability in jeopardy. For evidence of this conclusion, see previous societies which have fallen due to over-exploitation of resources (as cited in Motesharrei, Rivas, & Kalnay, 2014).

10. What is morally right can therefore be inferred for any situation from these premises and previous conclusions based on the best available scientific data. However, obtaining perfect moral conduct is as impossible as obtaining 100% knowledge via science and to demand it is invoking the call for perfection fallacy.

11. The conclusions in this document are subject to revision as soon as a better empirical method, or better method for revealing objective truth, is developed.

“Using a pragmatic and evidence-based approach, we can derive the morally right act, for any situation, independent of institutions or cultural biases”

Now, some people might ask how these ideas might be applied to their lives or why they should even care about this line of reasoning. What purpose does it serve? To be perfectly frank, the context for this not only affects autistic people, but the population in general.

Morality typically develops as a cultural norm. It may vary from culture to culture, but each culture has its own social customs and views of morality that it considers to be the pinnacle of good behavior and how a person’s conduct should be. Unfortunately, these views appear to be based on fundamental fallacies, including Appeal to Authority, Popularity, Force, and Tradition, for example.

Examples of fallacious beliefs and customs prevalent in our society include:

- Appeals to Authority in the form of statements such as “Because I said so.” By telling children this, we encourage obedience without question and discourage thinking for oneself. A more appropriate way to handle such a scenario might be to explain to the child more simplified reasons early on, and for cases where time constraints prevent full explanation of reasons, such as emergencies, explain to the child in advance that during an emergency, listening to an authority figure who has greater experience will increase their chances of coming out unharmed. Also, the authority figure should explain their reasoning after the emergency has passed to encourage the child to develop reasoning skills pertaining to emergencies themselves.

- Appeals to Tradition in the forms of segregated washrooms and having the father give away the bride at a wedding. The former has only had the major objection about sexual assault on women, which has been falsified by the actual behavior of users of gender neutral washrooms in public locations such as businesses and nonprofit organizations worldwide. For example, Oklahoma University has had up to 13 gender inclusive washrooms with no difficulties of this sort (as cited in Bergrum, 2014). In the time since the University of Victoria Student Society has installed gender neutral washrooms in the Student Union Building at the University of Victoria, there haven’t been any complaints of sexual assault arising from people attending those washrooms while they’ve been there. Another variant on this argument is the

3. Yes, there is the problem of limited resources, but space travel can address that problem via significantly more solar energy and mining the moon and asteroids. A detailed argument for this can be found in O’Neill, 1976.

claim that allowing transgender people into the washroom of the gender they identify as would allow molesters to attack women. This claim has been part of the argument behind North Carolina's HB2 bill. These arguments have been falsified by statistics from a number of states where transwomen have been allowed to women's washrooms (as cited in Steinmetz, 2016). Giving a woman away at the altar is a leftover tradition from viewing women as property – a view which has, nominally, been left behind, though the problematic symbolism remains.

- Religious morality, especially when discrimination is involved (such as discrimination against the LGBTQ community). By appealing to religious texts or customs for the basis of one's morality, one is appealing to authority, tradition, and popularity (in the sense that the majority of people in a group believe it). Among religion's main functions have been to provide a sense of community, explain the universe, ponder upon what may happen after we die, and provide codes for how we ought to live (as cited in Swaab, 2014). The proof of the appeal to popularity for claims of morality based on religion can easily be shown with Christianity, which currently boasts about 2 billion followers worldwide (as cited in BBC, 2014). From a social perspective, if the majority of the people in a religious group believe something, then all members must profess to believe it as well if they do not want to face such consequences as rejection from the group, punishments up to and including death (such as people being burnt at the stake for heresy (as cited in Summer, 2007)), and other unpleasant situations. As for the appeal to tradition being evident, Christianity has been around for nearly 2000 years, and there is evidence of religious burial practices reaching as far back as 100,000 years ago with *Homo heidelbergensis* (as cited in Pettitt, 2002). The Appeal to Authority is evident, since there may be an all-powerful being dictating the definition of morality, and this being will punish those who act out or "sin" (appeal to force).

Given that our world is ever evolving, especially with the development of new technology, humanity needs a moral code and system that will meet the current demands of society. Ancient religious scriptures and philosophical texts make no mention of advanced technology or advanced scientific practices. So as a result, new ethics have had to have been developed to address said problems. For example, scientific research ethics have had to evolve as we discover new data (as cited in Resnik, 2014). As we are discovering new things, we need a way of thinking about what we ought to do and how we ought to apply those new discoveries and technologies in a way that helps ourselves and others continue perpetuating life and the empirical process. To that end, one could argue from the above conclusions that it is reasonable that education be provided to everyone to the maximum level they can achieve, so that critical thinking, scientific reasoning and observation, and proper methods of interpreting data statistically and mathematically are as widespread as they can be in the population. This, in turn, would help both individuals and society become more aware through ongoing, mutual, peer review. Furthermore, the average person should be encouraged to use data and logic to back up their arguments, and would also do well to write down their experiences of life (This would also mean that information would not be released prematurely, and it would undergo peer-review before publication, to make sure that discursive oppression of other agents in all forms, including by third-parties, was avoided. This would include the peer reviewing of each other's writing and newspaper articles being peer reviewed for accuracy prior to publication).

As a practical example of applying this concept of scientific morality to everyday life, let us consider the example of a typical customer service worker. They normally provide service and interaction with people who are making standard transactions, including purchases and the managing of financial transactions. As such, the front line service worker could be an invaluable source of information about human interaction. If customer service

workers wrote about what they experienced from their customers, and even generated hypotheses about the reasons behind those experiences and, perhaps, tested them, then these could be valuable qualitative studies for the social sciences and psychology as such information would, effectively, be observations about the subject of study in their natural environment, providing a slew of case studies which social scientists could analyze and shape theories that in turn could be tested elsewhere. For example, all professions, including front line customer service, could keep journals documenting experiences and other things at the end of each shift, much like nursing/medical notes. This in turn could be used to help generate fresh policy and law regarding treatment of workers and how to foster ethical behavior in the workplace.

For the average person and family, teaching of children would involve bringing them up with how science works at an early age. Teaching children to express new ideas through creative processes would be included, but one should also teach the necessity of testing said ideas against understanding of the real world. Teaching both by parents and by schools should not be based on authority and rote memorization, but actually going through processes and learning how things work. Instead, young people should be encouraged to form opinions for themselves, based on best available data, and should also be taught how to assess the quality of data prior to making any decision on any issue. With practice, these principles can be applied to even such snap decisions as "Can I stop for the traffic light that is about to change, or should I go through the yellow?" If one knows how fast they are going, what the weather is doing, and what obstacles may be in their way, this data can and should be processed by the subconscious to make the safest decision for all parties involved. Not all decision making processes are done consciously (as cited in van Gaal, de Lange, & Cohen, 2012), so training those decision making processes to be rational and quick would be a very effective way of processing all available data under time pressures.

One could also argue that technology is a human right and needs to be shared among the populace so that everyone can live full lives and use it to the best of their ability. As new medical and other advancements come available, not only is there an ethical way of using them, but there is an ethical way to apply it so that everyone can get it. (Of course, resource expansion would have to go in tandem with these developments not only so the technology could be provided to everyone, but so all involved in building and using it might be remunerated.) The more competent and healthy people there are in a population, the more perspectives there are, leading to both a deeper understanding of reality, and more innovation, thus improving everyone's standard of living. One only needs to look at modern technology to see the benefits of widespread education and its application, compared to how we lived even a century ago. If we spread the higher techniques even further, this progress should only continue. To that end, resources should be distributed in such a way that not only are people's basic needs met, but replication of discoveries can be done and the average person can apply their minds to innovation.³

One major element of morality is its use in the field of politics. Since both law and morality have to do with controlling the behavior of the citizen, there is a certain amount of interplay between the two. Unfortunately, the creation of policy and law is often based on systems of power and authority, for example, via lobbying, so that one group can effectively gain an advantage, and power, over another. Since this kind of system is about power, truth (particularly scientific truth) can be tossed by the wayside. One example of this was when scientists in the Canadian government were not allowed to speak to the public without permission from the Prime Minister's office. Even the journal *Nature* criticized the Canadian government for this move (as cited in *Nature*, 2012). A more moral system, based on this line of reasoning, would have a government making policy and law, not only based on the best available scientific data, but scientists would at least hold seats in one house of government. This way, when the lower house sent up bills, people in various

fields and disciplines, scientists could send the law back, pointing out where there were problems with the law and how it could be modified to incorporate the best available scientific data, in such a way so as to help the greatest number of people. A house of sober second thought was the original intent behind the United States and Canadian Senates (as cited in United States Senate, 2015 and Government of Canada, 2015). A house of sober second thought whose members are trained in the latest science and technology would be able to apply both the latest data and scientific reasoning to questions of policy and law coming up from the lower house.

This system could be of particular help to the population of people with autism. With a clear and rational framework, it would be easy to explain and understand why systems of cultural norms and morals exist and why they are helpful. Furthermore, the person with autism would be less likely to miss the hidden cues and assumptions so prevalent in our society, as there would be fewer of them in the first place. Such a system might also help persons with autism not only to function more effectively in society, but perhaps hold leadership positions within society. Dr. Temple Grandin points out the following: "Jobs need to be chosen that make use of the strengths of people with autism or Asperger's syndrome. Both high and low functioning people have very poor short-term working memory, but they often have a better long-term memory than most normal people" (Grandin, 1999). Grandin also points out that ideal jobs for some persons with autism are in statistics or as a mathematician or physicist (1999). There are a number of indications to suggest that persons with autism are not only highly logical, but can deal with data processing and finding inconsistencies in claims. Take for example, this particular description from Scientific American:

The hidden potential of autistic people seems to fall in common areas—tasks that involve pattern recognition, logical reasoning and picking out irregularities in data or arguments. Soulieres describes working with an autistic woman in her lab who can pick out the slightest flaws in logic. "At first, we argue with her," Soulieres laughs, "but almost each time, she's right, and we're wrong."

Recognizing these talents, rather than pushing them aside to focus on the drawbacks of autism, could benefit not just autistic people, but everyone else as well. Mottron chronicles how much better his science got by working with his autistic lab partner. "I got far higher marks on my homework than I would have without Alex, even though his corrections were sometimes infuriating." And many think their potential extends beyond science to all professions, if given the right chances" (Eveleth, 2011).

If these claims are true, not only would adopting an evidence based system of morality benefit society, and persons with autism, but persons with autism could shine in most professions, helping society benefit as a whole. In such a system, perhaps persons with autism might even be able to take positions of leadership and help guide society to an even better place, while encouraging and guiding the individual citizen to adopt empirical modes of thought more thoroughly and effectively. Of course, this would require that education in science and mathematics be highly encouraged for persons with autism, and for everyone else, and such an education system would need to be tailored to their particular idiosyncrasies of learning. An evidence-based moral and political system could allow persons with autism to help reset the social paradigm of society to one that is open, transparent, honest, and rational, so that everyone would be working on the same page and disagreements would be resolved by being more in touch with reality, rather than on privilege of one sort or another.

In conclusion, the system and framework described in this paper allows for a new concept of morality that would be more in concert with the modern, ever-changing world we inhabit. Our society, with its advanced technology and enormous population base, produces vast quantities of data. A system is needed to handle that data and make use of it in a way that provides benefit to all, so in turn, more data and greater understanding of that data can be produced. To that end, it is time we had a moral framework that

was adaptable, and yet also specific enough, to work with these conditions. A moral system as described herein needs to be adopted to enlighten society and help societal, social, and political progress catch up to technological progress.

Guthrie Prentice

Acknowledgments: I'd like to thank Michelle "Mishi" Sillars, William Johnson, Cara Kronisch, and Justin Whitman for acting as editors and consultants regarding wording and checking for any issues I overlooked.

Biographical Statement: I am a second year Physics Major at the University of Victoria with Asperger's Syndrome. As a former world traveler, I have been exposed to various cultures, and I have always been interested in the philosophy of morality and social norms. I have spent a number of years trying to figure out how to make them more rational and understandable to the autistic mind. This paper outlines some of my thoughts on the subject, in a distilled format.

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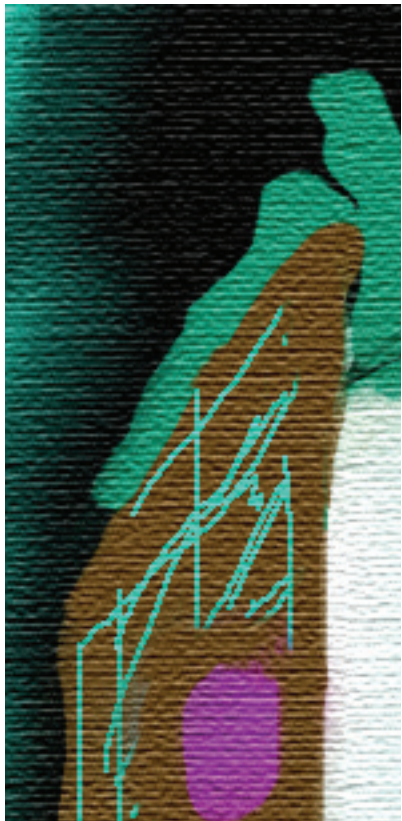
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