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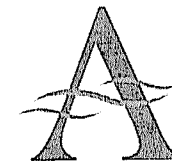
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Real World Economics

A Post-Autistic Economics Reader

Edited by

Edward Fullbrook



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3.

PSYCHOLOGICAL AUTISM, INSTITUTIONAL AUTISM AND ECONOMICS*

James G Devine

As an economist with a son having heavy autistic leanings, the discussion of the "autistic economics" quickly caught my attention. I had never thought of the economics profession or its neoclassical orthodoxy as "autistic." I think that this way of thinking can be useful, at least as a preliminary step, allowing the economics profession eventually to transcend autism. But as with all analogies, we must examine not only the similarities between autism and orthodox economics, but also the differences.

The autism spectrum

As a layperson interested in psychology, I have reached a preliminary understanding of autism, based on others' research and on discussions with other parents of autistic or semi-autistic children. "Autistic disorder" is a social communication disorder and a developmental delay, involving "restricted, repetitive, and stereotyped patterns of behaviour, interests, and activities."¹ I interpret this constellation of symptoms as being the result of an organically-based (neurobiological) sensory-processing problem which is much like the opposite of being deaf. Instead of hearing too little, a person with autism may hear *too much*, and be unable to filter out the noise or to prioritize the information received to make it intelligible. The external stimuli that most treat as normal seem to be a constant barrage of blackboard chalk scraping the wrong way. Not surprisingly, an autistic