
Preface

A reasonable reaction on picking up this volume might be ‘not *another* book on autism!’, to which my response would be, as you might expect, that this book is different. Although many books have been written about autism spectrum disorders (ASD), most consist either of descriptions of these conditions with a view to developing understanding and dispelling myths; others present more or less detailed accounts of their authors’ own ideas with only passing reference to those of other scientists. Those that do present overviews of different positions tend to be edited volumes where experts in the field present up-to-date reviews of the state of play in their own corner of the field, with little attempt at painting a broader picture. What seems to be missing is a work that provides an overview from a single perspective of the main currents of thought. My first aim in writing this volume is to provide such an overview. I present a summary of the main psychological ideas that have been brought to bear on ASD in recent years and where possible, try to identify actual or potential common themes. The reviews of research are not meant to be exhaustive, but I hope that the selections I have made give a fair reflection of the state of current thinking in each domain. My second aim is to highlight the strengths and limitations of the different approaches and to develop a critical stance in readers that will help them evaluate new material as it appears. Finally, I aim to set out some of my own thoughts about how we should take our ideas forward. Insofar as such a thing is possible, I have tried to present the different theoretical systems in a dispassionate manner and to view my own ideas and those of others in the same critical light. But as the former *Observer* television critic, Clive James, once put it, the ego tends to adjust the light to suit its purposes. My ego is no exception.

No piece of academic work is ever the sole work of its author. Ideas always develop in the context of discussion, debate and collaboration. The thoughts expressed in this book, although my own, have been heavily influenced by encounters with a large number of colleagues and friends, to whom I must express my gratitude. First, I must give equal thanks to Chris Kiernan for giving me my first job as a researcher and for taming my rather adolescent approach to critical evaluation, and to Lorna Wing, who introduced me to the fascinating world of ASD and Asperger’s syndrome. Lorna was among the first to advocate a spectrum (and more latterly, a dimensional) view of what was then referred to simply as ‘autism’. Her tenacious defence against considerable opposition of this once highly unpopular but now widely accepted idea is an inspiration. Throughout my career as a scientist, I have worked alongside

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