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Unraveling Autistic Consciousness:
A Phenomenological Perspective on Perception, Memory, and the Bergsonian Mind

Desvendando a consciência autista: Uma perspectiva fenomenológica sobre percepção, memória e a mente bergsoniana

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the underlying mechanisms of motor and language disorders in autism, employing a propositional critique based on Henri Bergson's philosophical framework. Building upon Eugène Minkowski's application of Bergsonian philosophy, this study reexamines theoretical assumptions in psychiatric research, with a particular focus on schizophrenia and its parallels to autism. In the field of phenomenological studies, this investigation pioneers the application of Bergsonian analysis to autism, dissecting non-social behaviors like stereotypies, echolalia, and exceptional memory. More specifically, based on these propositions, we challenge the prevailing assumption of a dichotomy between physical and subjective states that underpins autism research in psychiatry and cognitive psychology. On the contrary, we propose that autism

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signifies a comprehensive alteration in existential experience, rather than a collection of isolated symptoms. Therefore, establishing as a fundamental idea the existence of an imbalance between perception and memory, we consider that speech and motor "stereotypes", more than mere repetitive and involuntary acts, are part of the subject's creative effort to integrate self-experience. (In regard to) Concerning the conception of cognition, we argue for a broader cognitive model in autism that integrates brain function with motor schemas and environmental interactions. In fact, by examining the problem in its historical, philosophical, and cognitive dimensions, our analysis endeavors to enrich dialogues on pathological phenomenology and consciousness, while critically appraising modern interpretations of autism that overemphasize organic causality. Ultimately, we question the reductionist view that attributes autistic behaviors solely to organic causes and prioritizes social interaction deficits.
Keywords: Autism, Bergsonian Philosophy, Motor Stereotypies, Phenomenology and Cognitive Schema.

RESUMO

Este artigo explora os mecanismos subjacentes aos distúrbios motores e de linguagem no autismo, empregando uma crítica proposicional baseada no referencial filosófico de Henri Bergson. Com base na aplicação da filosofia bergsoniana por Eugène Minkowski, este estudo reexamina pressupostos teóricos na pesquisa psiquiátrica, com foco particular na esquizofrenia e seus paralelos com o autismo. No campo dos estudos fenomenológicos, esta investigação é pioneira na aplicação da análise bergsoniana ao autismo, dissecando comportamentos não sociais como estereotipias, ecolalia e memória excepcional. Mais especificamente, com base nestas proposições, desafiamos a suposição predominante de uma dicotomia entre estados físicos e subjetivos que sustenta a investigação do autismo em psiquiatria e psicologia cognitiva. Pelo contrário, propomos que o autismo significa uma alteração abrangente na experiência existencial, em vez de uma coleção de sintomas isolados. Portanto, estabelecendo como ideia fundamental a existência de um desequilíbrio entre percepção e memória, consideramos que os “estereótipos” de fala e motores, mais do que meros atos repetitivos e involuntários, fazem parte do esforço criativo do sujeito para integrar a experiência de si. No que diz respeito à concepção de cognição, defendemos um modelo cognitivo mais amplo no autismo que integre a função cerebral com esquemas motores e interações ambientais. Na verdade, ao examinar o problema nas suas dimensões histórica, filosófica e cognitiva, a nossa análise esforça-se por enriquecer os diálogos sobre a fenomenologia patológica e a consciência, ao mesmo tempo que avalia criticamente as interpretações modernas do autismo que enfatizam excessivamente a causalidade orgânica. Em última análise, questionamos a visão reducionista que atribui os comportamentos autistas apenas a causas orgânicas e prioriza os déficits de interação social.

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Palavras-chave: Autismo, Filosofia Bergsoniana, Estereotipias Motoras, Fenomenologia e Esquema Cognitivo.

The multifaceted nature of autism spectrum disorders (ASD) presents unique challenges and opportunities for scientific inquiry. While the prevailing approaches have yielded insights into the condition, they often do not fully capture the lived experiences of individuals with ASD (e.g., Amy, 2001; Aubin, 1976; Jerusalinski, 1984; Parnas, Bovet & Zahavi, 2002; Stanghellini, 2001, 2015, 2017; Vogel & Vogeley, 2020). In this vein, our study delves into the philosophical underpinnings of Henri Bergson to illuminate aspects of autism that conventional methodologies have yet to clarify. Bergson's exploration of memory and perception offers a fresh lens to understand the behavioral manifestations of ASD not as disordered symptoms but as adaptive responses to the world (Bergson, 1897/1999; Jankélévitch, 1959).

Building upon French psychiatrist Eugene Minkowski's (1985-1972) application of Bergson's philosophy to psychiatric conditions, this research scrutinizes the dichotomy traditionally imposed between physical and subjective states in the study of autism. It proposes that the phenomena characteristic of autism - far from being disjointed malfunctions - constitute the individual's creative attempt to reconcile an inherent imbalance between perception and memory, suggesting a global change in being in the world (Minkowski, 1927, 1933; Merleau-Ponty 1999, Urfer, 2002;).

Thus, this research extends the discourse beyond the binary of physical versus subjective states, drawing from both clinical findings and cognitive perspectives to offer a holistic view of autism. The Bergsonian perspective posits that the so-called stereotypies in autism are not mere malfunctions; rather, they reflect a deep-seated existential shift in the individual's perception of time and space—a concept that has only recently begun to be explored in the context of ASD (Narzisi, 2021). By bridging phenomenology and neuroscience, we aim to foster a more nuanced conversation about the nature of autistic experiences and the potential for innovative intervention strategies.

In advancing this exploration, we consider recent calls to reassess the reductionist paradigms that have dominated autism research. It is proposed not only to reconsider the foundational assumptions about the organic roots of autism but also to adopt a broader, more empathetic approach to intervention strategies. By viewing cognition as a function not merely of the brain but as interwoven with motor schemata and environmental interactions, the study redefines the autistic experience, urging future research to embody this integrated perspective.

In other words, acknowledging the intricate interplay between neural processes, bodily experiences, and environmental factors, this paper advocates for a dynamic framework to understand and support the autistic experience—one that transcends the limitations of a purely organic etiology and considers the full spectrum of cognitive and existential dimensions for a diagnosis of ASD (Barros, 2006, Hutchinson, Zielinska & Hardman, 2022). As such, this study serves as a starting point for future research that situates the temporal and phenomenological aspects of autism within a broader theoretical and therapeutic landscape.

The Origins of Childhood Autism: From Introversion to Brain Damage

In a historical resumption of the formation of autism as a nosological entity, as conceived by Leo Kanner (1943), we consider it essential to bring the etiology of the syndrome to the debate, raising critical reflections about the assumption that symptoms related to autism – among them, impairments in social interaction and problems of resistance to change – result from lesions located in the central nervous system.

Of course, the problem here is not that the organism is regarded as an essential element of subjective formation, but that mental life is explained based on the brain or, in the case of autism, brain damage. Considering this discussion in a broader way, which involves the problem of *consciousness*, we can reflect here: to read it in mentalistic terms, taking the brain as the basis of mental life,

would not be to use different vocabularies to affirm that the brain is self-engendering? In the context of this debate, our objective is to make a propositional critique of the role of the body concerning autistic *sameness*. Thus, considering the consequences of Bergsonian naturalism to the elaboration of the hypothesis of an *imbalance* between perception and memory, we seek to explain the cognitive and behavioral aspects of autism. In fact, we do not consider autistic phenomena to be an impairment in *metarepresentational capacity*, nor a *disconnection between* perception and memory. However, we understand that there is an *imbalance* between these elements, which impacts the spatio-temporal experiences of the subjects. In a way, developing idiosyncratic body schemes also leads to other affective/cognitive inscription forms. Because of this, for example, the "stereotypies" of behavior are not taken here as automated or involuntary acts but as part of the subject's adaptive effort in the constitution of semi-unconscious habits. However, before proceeding with our theorizing, let us make it clear that we do not aim to extend the list of symptoms; we only seek to deal with the evident phenomenological diversity of the clinical pictures of autism, as well as not to arrive at the "causes" of autism, but to propose a holistic approach, which encompasses the subject/environment relationship.

Although early childhood autism syndrome has, admittedly, typical and specific symptomatology and well-defined diagnostic criteria, we must ask ourselves if there is a common thread that justifies the use of a standard nomenclature to refer to the most diverse reports on autism (Barros, 2006). For many authors, the initial identification made by Leo Kanner (1943) is the link in many diagnostic discussions, although marked by precise theoretical distances. So, from a diagnostic point of view, do we have, in fact, an interpretative multiplicity or conceptual impasse? There is, undoubtedly, a wealth of interpretation of the symptoms identified in the syndrome. Nevertheless, no finished form explains its etiology, even within a single field of knowledge. However, based on a resumption of the emergence of autism as a nosological entity, it is possible to circumscribe interpretative strands about the symptoms –

in our case, considering the relationships established between the physical and subjective states of the autistic experience (Barros, 2016). Given this understanding, we will turn to the historical context of the emergence of autism, as well as to Kanner's work, approaching – from and after it – the contemporary psychiatric and cognitivist strands of reading childhood autism, bringing to reflection the general and specific aspects of these readings, which will serve as counterpoints to the discussion of the characteristic symptoms of the syndrome based on the assumption of a perception/memory imbalance.

Early childhood autism: the introversion aspect.

Kanner's initial oscillations in proposing autism as a new psychiatric syndrome – from an etiological point of view, with flagrant contradictions, sometimes assuming a socio-pathogenic origin of the syndrome, sometimes affirming an organic basis for it – led to the idea of an "autistic closure" (Rocha, 2002; Barros, 2006). Because this is one of the symptoms that appear from the beginning of life, the innate character of the condition was defended, and the idea of a psychogenic origin of the syndrome was abandoned. Thus, Kanner and other child psychiatrists began to affirm, correctly, that it is unjustifiable to take the personality of the parents as a determinant to characterize autism. The author, as is well known in his seminal work, emphasizes *speech* disorders (echolalia), "turning to oneself" ("self-centeredness"), and "resistance to change" as symptoms of this condition. However, when we review the description of his clinical material and consider the symptoms already well established by him, it is possible to verify that most of the children could speak in relational and meaningful contexts throughout their development. However, Kanner was not confident about his patient's speaking ability since they were "repetitive" and "mechanical." As can be seen from their arguments, echolalia is interpreted as a stereotypy of speech, which, in addition to that of movement, are findings that demonstrate the relationship between stereotyped behavior and brain injury. Regarding "turning to oneself," Kanner (1943) states:

> *(...) The most prominent "pathognomonic" fundamental disorder is the inability of these children to relate in a normal way to people and situations from early in life. Their parents referred to them as always being "as in a shell,"; "self-sufficient"; "happier when left alone"; "acting as if others were not there"; "totally unaware of everything that surrounds them"; "giving the impression of a silent wisdom"; "failing to develop a broad social conscience"; "acting almost as if under hypnosis." (Kanner 1943, p.242)*

However, it should be noted that Kanner signified this phenomenon by referring to Bleuler's propositions for one of the symptoms of cases of schizophrenia in adults, as he describes it:

> "A*utism is also given by the external expression of patients [...] They sit there all the time with their faces averted, just staring at an empty wall, or they cut off all their senses and pull an apron or a sheet over their heads*" (Bleuler, 1911/1967, as cited in Bosch, 1970, p.45).

The indifference of patients to the outside world is explained through the importance that fantasies would have in keeping them away from the hostility that the world could represent to them. Such indifference is taken as a "secondary factor", derived from their ultra-sensitivity at the onset of psychosis. In Bleuler's words:

> *Desires and fears are the contents of autistic thought; desires are only in those infrequent cases in which no conflict with reality is experienced; fears are when patients are aware of obstacles impeding their desires. Even when there is no true illusion, the evidence of autism can be founded on the inability of patients to establish contact with reality, their inappropriate reaction to external influences (irritability), and their loss of resistance to impulses and exertion.* (Bleuler, 1911/1967 as cited in Bosch 1970, p.45).

In these descriptions made by Bleuler, the term autism is intended to group behavior of withdrawal from reality to the inner life, the intensification of which could lead to the construction of a closed and insurmountable internal world. For Bosch (1970), authors such as Bleuler:

> *"[...] To the extent that they explain the origin of autism, they point to particular factors, disorders, or changes in the properties and functions of the 'soul'. The concept of soul used here was understood as a*

> *constituent stratum of a body endowed with a soul, of the 'body as a natural object.'"* (Bleuler, 1911/1967 as cited in Bosch 1970, p. 46).

Bosch summarizes Bleuler's assumptions about the mental life of the autistic (schizophrenic) as follows: "[...] autistic life in the conscious state corresponds to dreaming during sleep, [...] the term autism is synonymous with 'self-indulgence' or analogous to introversion in normal people [...]." It should be noted that Bleuler's perspective is based on a specific dualistic model, considering the possibility of concentrating on the "soul" (in the sense of mind) and keeping oneself out of the world, that is, "self-isolation." In short, we have a very clearly constituted modality of 'internal/external' dualism: without it, it would not be possible to speak of a "concentrating on the inner world."

In this regard, Eugène Minkowski (1927), shortly after the emergence of Bleuler's propositions, criticized the notion of "turning to oneself," developing a vision based on the idea of cutting out a limited part of the world and a fixation on it, rather than a distancing from the outside world. For Minkowski, what exists is a kind of singular relationship with the environment, which would dispense neither with "turning inwards" nor "turning outwards". Abandoning the scientific model of the "soulful body" (mentioned earlier), Minkowski formulates his analysis of autistic (schizophrenic) behavior as follows:

> *"He cuts off a piece of the world and merges it, as it were, intimately with his person. As soon as he attains the goal, he becomes one with it and all the external forces he puts to work to achieve the goal. So, the demarcation between 'self' and 'non-self' lies not far from the body's surface but moves outside"* (Minkowski, 1927, as cited in Bosch, 1970, p. 49).

In this way, the author avoids falling into the trap of dualism, in which the inner life is treated as an epiphenomenon of neurophysiological processes, considering the body an integral part of self-experience. As Bosch (1970) pointed out, Minkowski's critical perspective would be at the basis of a contemporary reading of autism that, despite the consideration of the importance given to functional disorders, within the limits of "man as a natural object," starts to consider the syndrome as "a specific modification of human existence."

Thus, it seeks to leap to a biological, phenomenological, and anthropological reading of autism. However, in this discussion, it is necessary to be aware that neither Kanner, Asperger's nor any other child psychiatrist have dealt with the concept of autism, considering the criticisms of the dichotomy introduced in the subject's environmental experience. In fact, in this trajectory, we observed that the conception of "turning to oneself" has appeared with such frequency that it has led to the establishment of this phenomenon as intrinsic to autism, including common sense, which believes that autistic people are someone who "lives in their world" or who demonstrates difficulties in establishing social bonds.

Historically, this perspective is conceptually linked to the introversion approach. In the most recent versions of the diagnostic manuals, the DSM-IV and V, as a collective effort of researchers in the medical field, the impairments in the ability of reciprocal social interaction, as well as speech acquisition, are frankly associated with some brain injury, since they are phenomena observed very early in the most diverse cases of autism (references). In fact, the classification as autistic spectrum encompassed some cases that had not yet been identified, removing many children from social ostracism. However, what we are calling attention to here is the naturalization of symptoms, the description of which places autism as a loss, a discrepancy, a deficit, and/or a neurocognitive pathology. To understand the critical aspects of this proposition, we will examine the relationship established between the organism and autistic behaviors, according to psychiatric and cognitive studies.

The psychiatric aspect: Rimland's works and the disconnect between perception and memory.

Bernard Rimland's contributions to our understanding of autism, encompassing its epidemiology, psychology, biochemistry, and treatment, are unparalleled (Rimland, 1964, 1973, 2008; Rimland, Callaway, & Dreyfus, 1978; Edelson & Rimland, 2003). He was instrumental in transforming psychiatry,

moving beyond Leo Kanner's fluctuating views on the etiology of the syndrome. Rimland established the now-accepted notion that autism is a biological disorder, not an emotional condition. His work conceptualizes autism as a "cognitive dysfunction," characterized by the impaired ability to associate new stimuli with past experiences (memory). Rimland makes the following remark:

> *"Many authors who address early childhood autism have referred to it as basically a deficiency in 'ego development', considering the inability to use the 'I' and disinterest in others as evidence for affective disorientation. There is certainly evidence for something like a "deficient ego" in the autistic child, but it is not necessary to refer to Freud to understand this. Scheerer, Rothmann, and Goldstein were clearly correct in emphasizing that the 'I-You' problem seems to involve a difficulty of relational thinking. However, the problem can be explained more fundamentally by referencing the proposed explanation of autism, which suggests a faulty link between teaching and memory."* (Rimland, 1964, p. 81).

Thus, there would be a disconnect between memory and sensory experience that would lead to an impossibility of constructing the idea of self. This would even result in an inability to see people as "people" who are taken as objects. The insistence on preserving sameness is interpreted as follows: "*He does not understand the meaning of any change and thus insists often, very emotionally, that the environment returns to its original and presumably safe condition."* (Rimland, 1964). Similarly, interest in mechanical objects, such as a vacuum cleaner or a fan, would be attractive without being unpredictable. The problem is posed in terms of a relationship of remarkable identity between stimulus and response. Thus, the author develops his idea by stating that, for example, there would be no change from what is heard to what is spoken. Referring to this issue, Rimland comments, specifically concerning the mental functioning of autistic people:

> *" ... it seems that, although the material entered the nervous system in a single groove, proceeding to the point of stock without even having been analyzed or supplemented, it emerged from the stock in its virtually original condition"* (Rimland, 1964, p.85).

Continuing his reflections, Rimland supposes that there is damage to the reticular formation, which justifies the inability to relate objects of current sensation with what is found in the memory of the autistic person, even though he has not found neurological data from research to serve as a safe aid. Sharing the same argumentative principle found in the works of Rimland (1964; 2008), the study by Damasio and Maurer (1978) also establishes a clear association between brain damage and impairments in motor and linguistic behavior, perception, and attention of autistic children. The latter authors report the occurrence of stereotyped movements - such as, for example, a "flapping of wings" - and a posture in which parts of the body are not synchronized, as in "dystonia of the extremities." Also among the related problems is *reverse facial paralysis*, observable only when the child spontaneously moves the muscles of the face. This dysfunction would be associated with impairments in the frontal lobe's middle region and other structures, such as the thalamus and basal ganglia (involved in the reported motor disorders). In this case, if they do not have voluntary control, for example, of the movements of the face, the subjects would lose the ability to relate correctly through mimicry and, consequently, would have their social relationship compromised.

In summary, the alignment of reverse facial paralysis with the symptom of *self-absorption* led them to formulate the hypothesis that the *atypical social behavior* presented by autistic children would be due to damage to those CNS structures. They also consider that *verbal communication* disorders (variable according to the stage of development and severity of the syndrome) would be related to frontal lobe lesions since damage in this area is accompanied by mutism or relative speech inhibition. Apart from the methodological differences between the studies, for these authors, autistic behaviors are undoubtedly related to impaired cognitive functioning, which, according to these approaches, is ultimately due to some organic-based impairment. However, one issue remains concerning the localizationism and brain reductionism surrounding the cognitivist theory of mind. So, continuing this discussion, let us take some

fundamental points involved in the diagnostic construction of autism based on the Theory of Mind.

Cognitivist strand: autism and mental blindness

As Tooby and Cosmides make clear in the preface to *Mindblindness*, Baron-Cohen, based on biology and evolutionary psychology, proposes a neurocognitive reading of autism, which many authors have taken as paradigmatic, and according to which impaired social interaction and understanding result from damage to a specific mechanism of the human brain structure: the so-called "theory of mind mechanism" - ToMM. This would be responsible for the possibility of conjecturing about what might be going on in other people's minds. From an analysis of one's mental state, a subject can make inferences from the intentions of another's behavior, enabling us to establish intersubjective relationships. An autistic person who lacks the development of this mechanism would suffer from what Baron-Cohen calls "mindblindness."

Quoting Sperber's words about the importance of such a module, Baron-Cohen states, *"the attribution of mental states is to humans what the allocation of the echo is to the bat."* "*It is our way of understanding the social environment."* In fact, wherever they seek to find such a capacity, anthropological investigations only corroborate that mind-reading is a universal human capacity produced by natural selection. Proceeding with his autism analysis, Baron-Cohen breaks down the ability to read the mind in four steps (related to volition, perception, shared attention, and epistemic states), corresponding to four mechanisms that have bases in the central nervous system.

The first called an "**Intentionality Detector**" (ID), is a perceptual device that interprets motion stimuli in terms of volitional mental states of goal and desire. Such a device allows the interpretation of movements of beings (perceptual inputs), working basically through the senses of sight, touch, and hearing (with priority for the first two). The second mechanism, called the "**Eye-Direction Detector"** (EDD), unlike ID, would work only through vision, identifying "stimuli of the presence of eyes or similar to them," calculating

"whether the eyes are directed in their direction or another," and inferring "on its account that if the eyes of another organism are directed toward something, then that organism sees that thing." These two mechanisms, already described, would only allow us to think of relations "between two objects (agent and object, or agent and self)," not allowing us to represent the fact that we and another person would be "both paying attention to the same object or event." It would be this ability that would allow us not to live in an "autistic universe."

Thus, a third party, i.e., the **"Shared-Attention Mechanism"** (SAM)", would allow the development of triadic representations between an agent, the self, and a third object. SAM would allow us to make statements like, "Mom and I are looking at the box," from the reception of "information about the perceptual state of another agent." The fourth and final mechanism of the Baron-Cohen (1995) model was called the **"Theory of Mind Mechanism**" (ToMM)". A theory of mind would include much more than information processing. It then states:

> *"The first thing still needed is a mode of representation of the set of epistemic states of mind (which include intending, thinking, knowing, believing, imagining, dreaming, guessing, and deluding). The second is the way to take together all these concepts of mental states (the volitional, the perceptual, and the epistemic) into a coherent understanding of how mental states and actions relate to each other. ToMM does precisely these things. It has the dual function of representing the set of epistemic states of mind and turning all this mentalistic knowledge into a useful theory"* (Baron-Cohen, 1995, p. 51).

The ToMM would perform this function (described above), leading us to more abstract inferences in complex social situations or simply an immediate absence of the stimulus. The ToMM would be related to the inputs received from the DI and EDD and, above all, to the SAM, from which it would receive the triadic representations, transforming them into mental representations. Specifically, his approach to autism and mental processes is summarized as follows:

> *"(...) I am going to argue from the existing evidence that there are real children – [and] not hypothetical beings – who suffer from mental*

> *blindness as a result of SAM (Shared-Attention Mechanism) or ToMM (theory of mind" module) damage. These are children with autism. In contrast, I emphasize how children with congenital blindness are surprisingly capable of mind reading because they have a SAM and ToMM despite having no EDD (Eye-Direction Detector)"* (Baron-Cohen, 1995, p. 60).

In this case, the key symptoms are the abnormal development of social relationships and communication in the first years of life, as well as the lack of the usual flexibility, imagination, and pretension. In the case of SAM, there would be clear harm to its functioning in autistic children since they would not show any of the primary forms of shared attention, nor would they act to invite others to share what they might see. Still considering his arguments, let us look at what he calls the "physical instance" of the mind. Baron-Cohen (1995) starts from the notion of the development of a kind of "inner eye", characteristic of human beings, which would allow "translating brain states as states of consciousness of the mind." Here is the Humphrey diagram used by Baron-Cohen to clarify the theory of the "inner eye" (Baron-Cohen, 1995:87). In this sense, Baron-Cohen argues:

> *"[...] Imagine that at some point in history, a new kind of sense organ emerges, the inner eye whose field of vision is not the outside world but the brain itself. Like other sense organs, the inner eye provides a picture of its information field that is partial and selective; but, like the other sense organs, it is developed by evolution so that its image is useful [...] permitting, by a kind of magical translation, to see its brain states as conscious states of mind*" (Baron-Cohen, 1995, p. 95).

Furthermore, Baron-Cohen (1995) concludes, from a series of experiments - including the classic Anne-Sally dolls false-belief experiment - that autistic children do not have a developed theory of mind like normal children, not recognize certain emotions and thoughts, as well as being unable to understand that the "brain is an organ with mental functions". Consequently, the flaw in the brain mechanism, the DOT, which enables the subject to infer mental states and predict the behavior of others, would explain autism in terms of mental blindness. In this case, the advantage of this approach, according to

Uta Frith, would be that such a detriment would explain many aspects of the diversity of autistic symptoms, the scientific proof of which lies in the evident failure of autistic children to pass the false belief test. Indeed, some theoretical limitations in this approach have already been discussed, including by the researcher herself and collaborators (Frith & Happé, 1999).

In the field of Phenomenological Philosophy, Shaun Gallagher (2004; 2008) has pointed out at least two issues, which he calls "internal problems", around the explanation of autistic behaviors based on the theory of mind. The author considers that if the theory of mind is to be an account that captures the definitive nature of autism, it is problematic that a significant percentage of autistic individuals are capable of passing false belief and other theory of mind tests. For Gallagher:

> *"Another problem involves the fact that although the theory of mind approach is capable of assessing some of the major cognitive symptoms of autism, especially those involving social cognition and communication, it is unable to explain other symptoms, most of them nonsocial symptoms, characteristically found in many autistic individuals, namely: restricted range of interest, obsessive concern for sameness, preoccupation with objects or parts of objects, the high cognitive ability for rote memory, echolalia, non-semantic form perception, and variety of sensory and motor behaviors such as oversensitivity to stimuli and repetition and odd movements"* (Gallagher, 2004, p. 200).

In fact, taking these limitations together, one can question whether the theory of mind, by leaving aside characteristic non-intersubjective symptoms, constitutes a valuable tool for thinking about autism or whether it is a reasonable parameter for understanding what happens in our encounters with others. Therefore, based on phenomenological and developmental studies, the author mentioned above considers that the "interaction theory" offers a better contribution to understanding intersubjectivity than the theory of mind. We agree with Gallagher's perspective, regarding, on the one hand, the insufficiency of the theory of mind to explain the problem of social interaction and, on the other hand, the need to face the challenge of building a conceptual basis

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(neurophenomenology) that encompasses the subjective, perceptual, and sensory-motor aspects of the autistic condition. However, it is worth remembering here that the general aspect with which we are dealing concerns the assumptions about the physical-mental relationships involved in identifying the characteristic symptoms of the syndrome. As we have already reported, the elements of our analysis are precisely the symptoms of the insistence on immutability, stereotypies, and prodigal memory, phenomena observed in many cases of autism. As a theoretical starting point, we will consider the re-semanticization of the notion of perception proposed in Henri Bergson's analytical model, allowing us to carry out a holistic reading of the characteristic symptoms.

The brain is a "pantomime organ": brain states, perception, and memory

Bergson, especially in his formulations in *Matter and Memory*, states that there would be nothing in the anatomy of the nervous system that would account" for the depth and inexhaustible richness of the most straightforward spiritual fact." Objecting to idealism and materialism that take perception as something of the order of the intellect or a jumble of sensations, for this author, perception (because it develops in space) puts us in contact with matter and memory (in the face of its extension), with subjectivity.

To clarify his dualism Bergson (1897/1999) compares the brain to a "pantomime organ", stating that its role would be to "imitate the life of the spirit", not to engender it. Thus, there would be a synchronism between changes in the cerebral cortex and conscious perception, but subjective life is not considered the juxtaposed translation of brain movements. The perception concerns the possible action, that we can say virtual, upon the objects surrounding us and of the possible action upon us, always delineating the body's position in space, that is, the points on which such movements can be exercised. In this sense, the entire extent of conscious perception is inextricably related to the body's actions. It is then formed between the object, the brain states, and the perception of an indivisible whole. As many phenomenologists have advocated, cognitive

processes are not just occurring internally. Instead, they depend on the body pattern and environmental factors. In this sense, the subject's experience is rooted in integration with the environment. As Hutto exemplifies, regarding the use of tools, "not only are the hands not isolated from the brain, they are not isolated from the objects they manipulate" (Hutto cited by Gallagher, 2017, p. 189). Gallagher, when talking about the enactivist idea of perception, states that: "there is an integration of perception and action in a continuous dynamic pattern, Gestalt or figure-ground relationship" (2017, p. 191). The enactive approach argues that without any extra-perceptual processes, perception can understand more than just superficial behavior - or, to say precisely, it can grasp behavior as meaningful - it's a kind of smart perception (Gallagher & Varga, 2014).

Let us return to the Bergsonian arguments about this relationship, which refer to the well-known Bergsonian thesis of “pure perception”, according to which we immediately place ourselves in things; so to speak, at first we are more in objects than in ourselves.

However, as Bergson (1897/1999) points out, no perception does not occupy a certain thickness of duration, so the unfolding of successive visions of the real already implies a work of memory. There would be the subjective aspect of perception: the separation of the object and the subject – which can only be constituted to the extent that memory operates a contraction in the real, or rather, a snapshot of the whole experience. It is essential to clarify that the relationship between perception and brain states is a relationship of expression, in which perception symbolizes the growing part of indeterminacy left by the possibility of the brain's moratorium. This marks the difference between responses to excitations at the spinal cord level (reflex arc-type motor reaction) and responses involving brain activity. Thus, Bergson pushes, albeit counterintuitively, perception "outside" the body, or at least poses it as an immediate question posed to our motor activity and sensory stimulation in the same way.

Therefore, we have two developments: the first, which admits that there is only a difference in degree between matter and the formed perception, and the

second, which establishes a difference in nature between perception and memory. To show the relevance of his arguments about the heterogeneity between perception and memories, Bergson resorts to pathological phenomena of memory, mainly those that concern recognition, which include the pathological phenomena of visual or auditory recognition (blindness and psychic deafness) and the recognition of words (verbal blindness and deafness). The author defines *recognition* as the concrete act by which we return to the past in the present. Particularly referring to a case of psychic blindness (inability to recognize perceived objects), Bergson states that "the conservation, even conscious, of a visual memory is not enough [...] to the recognition of a similar perception." According to Wilbrand's description, a sick woman could, with her eyes closed, describe the city where she lived and walk through it in the imagination: once on the street, everything seemed new to her.

However, these memory pathologies do not result from memories occupying the injured region. Such pathological manifestations, Bergson supposes, must result from two causes: sometimes from the fact that our body is no longer able, in the presence of excitement from without, to automatically take the precise attitude through which a selection of our memories would take place, and sometimes from the fact that the memories no longer find a point of application in the body a means of prolonging itself in action.

To contest the assumption that the brain is the *repository of memory*, Bergson (1897/1999) focuses mainly on the issue of hearing articulate language. However, from the diagnostic point of view, analyzing aphasia places us in a favorable terrain to understand the possible relationship between memories, memory, and motor habits, which is fundamental to understanding the hypothesis of imbalance and repetitive behaviors. According to Bergson, experience allows us to see two ways in which the auditory memory of a word can disappear: either there is a definitive loss of hearing of the word, or there is a progressive weakness, as is the case with forgetfulness in aphasia. In this case, says the author, the words disappear in an invariable order, according to the law

of regression formulated by Ribot: first, the proper nouns, then the common names, and finally, the verbs (Ribot, 1900, as cited in Bergson. 1999, p. 137).

To have the verbal images distributed over the surface of the cerebral cortex according to the grammatical class to which they belong would be at least an incipient explanation since how could the lesion always affect the same cells of the nervous tissue? Strictly speaking, the sounds of a word can be recalled to the extent that a mental attitude is inscribed in a bodily attitude, in the face of which, Bergson explains:

> *"Verbs, whose essence is to express imitable actions, are precisely the words that a bodily effort will enable us to reach when the function of language is about to be lost; on the contrary, proper names, being of all words the furthest removed from those impersonal actions which the body is capable of outlining, are those which a weakening of function would strike in the foreground*. (Bergson, 1999, p. 139).

Thus, while denying any form of reductionism, Bergson draws attention to the fact that the relationship between the body and the spirit is not measurable. As a result, Bergson launches the following reflection: when listening to and interpreting speech sounds, for example, where would be the "*line of demarcation between the sounds perceived en masse and the clarity that the remembered auditory images add there, between the discontinuity of these remembered images themselves and the continuity of the original idea that they dissociate and refract into distinct words?"* (Bergson, 1999, p. 41).

The big question for him is: where would be the multiplicity of possible rearrangements and readings for the same particle? It therefore makes the following consideration:

> *To be sure, there is only a question of degree here: refined or coarse, a language implies far more than it can express. Essentially discontinuous, since it proceeds by juxtaposed words, speech is limited to marking, at regular intervals, the principal stages of the movement of thought. [...] Images, in fact, will always be things and thought is a movement. Therefore, it is in vain to treat memory images and ideas as finished things, which are then assigned a place in problematic centers.*" (Ribot as cited in Bergson, 1999, p. 137).

In any case, there is still a question that must be understood: in what way can the excitations emanating from within give rise to sensations by their action on the cerebral cortex or other centers? That is, how does *pure memory* become action? This discussion about the actualization of "pure memory" will be taken up later since it supports our hypothesis of the perception-memory imbalance.

The Brain, Perception, and the Body: Cognitivist and Psychiatric Perspectives.

We have seen how Bergson (1999), using some psychic pathologies as a matrix of reflection, constructed arguments that reveal the problems of a hasty belief in phrenology that, because it is scientific, could account for any problems, since the brain would be the final repository of any manifestations of mental life. This question, according to the Bergsonian arguments already posed, concerns the impossibility that the brain - as one image among many others we have of the things of the world - can be a generator of mental representations (Jankélévitch, 1989). Referring to this problem, Bergson states that we must admit the following proposition: the part is the whole (Bergson, 1989, p.166). That said, let us move on to the specific questions that follow the critique of reductionist physicalism, which runs through the psychiatric and cognitivist readings of autism studies.

Concerning the psychiatric aspect, Rimland (1964), as we know, raises the hypothesis that a symptom such as *sameness* could only be explained by considering a *disconnection between memory and sensory perception*: the difficulty of accessing memory data to reflect on present changes would lead to anguish and, thus, to a search for the maintenance of the world as it is. It is important to note that he clearly distinguishes between memory and perception. However, the theoretical impasse lies in the fact that the difference in nature between perception and memory is not considered. Starting from a reductionist naturalistic realism, he simply considers that memory and perception are faculties allocated in areas of the cerebral cortex. In the case of autism, he proposes that damage to the reticular formation would prevent a series of

biochemical connections, which would lead to the symptom of self-indulgence. Specifically, from the Bergsonian perspective, adopted here, we will conclude that it is not possible to develop the idea of a 'disconnect' between perception and memory – since, in every perception, there is already a temporal component at work, just as memory is only updated through the perceptual component.

In this way, we could ask ourselves: associating samenesses with the issue of remarkable mechanical memory – a characteristic observed in many autistic children – how can we say that memory access would be largely obstructed? Doesn't it seem to be just the opposite? The more the subject attaches himself to memories as they appear in memory, the more he attaches himself to the repetition factor. For example, when a child arranges his toys in a highly complex order, and someone modifies a single detail, upon noticing the change, he immediately goes into an emotional crisis, or when she does not accept an element that does not conform to her scheme, and it is seen that she either despises it or even throws it away. If there were this alleged disconnection, what would probably be observed would be a simple disregard of any ritualism – that is, the environment could present new things without any despair on the part of the child – because he could resort to schemes kept in memory, day after day, to keep part of this environment unchanged.

Another point that can be considered challenging to sustain found in the work of Rimland (1964) is that, in arguing in favor of an explicit biological origin of the condition, the author considers that there is a high degree of interindividual similarity in the symptomatology of autism. If we judge his argument to be correct, we could admit that children who do not make pragmatic use of speech, who can calculate dates accurately, and who can communicate verbally would have 'similar subjectivities' among themselves. However, how could we put such performances on the same level? In short, Rimland (1964) considers that derangement in the cells, tissues, and complex structures of the reticular formation can determine neurological problems and subjectivity. Along this path, we find a real impasse in explaining how the extensible joins the

inextensible without introducing a "ghost in the machine" - an expression used by Riley regarding the critique of physical/mental dualism (Riley, 1951).

We can observe that the same type of arbitrary construction also permeates Damasio and Maurer's (1978) interpretation of the relationship between motor problems and atypical social behavior. The alignment between the disorders in the motor behaviors described and the reverse facial paralysis leads them to formulate the hypothesis that the atypical social behavior presented by autistic children (e.g., *self-indulgence*) would be due to damage to CNS structures. This is because, without voluntary control, for example, of facial movements, the subjects would have obstructed the ability to relate correctly through mimicry and, consequently, would have their social life compromised. There is a clear slide from a discussion of a biological (organic) order to a discussion of a metaphysical order, with symptoms being reduced to states of mind. We clarify that it is one thing to affirm that a particular organic lesion can influence the updating of specific memory data (as we have seen about the pathologies of recognition) and another to affirm that motor problems can lead to patterns of social aversion. Thus, as Bergson proposes, what can occur is the disarticulation of a particular motor scheme but never a disconnection between perception and memory or even in the determination of standard subjectivities. Therefore, we understand that an imbalance involves the body schema and its possibilities of action and affects the subject's environmental relationship.

It is important to emphasize that we do not aim to extend the list of symptoms but rather to consider the identified phenomena from a holistic approach, which involves the temporal (subjective) dimension as well as the spatial dimension (the motor and perceptual schemas) of the experience. We add here that, from the point of view of Phenomenological Philosophy (Gallagher & Zahavi 2008) and Philosophy of Language (Wittgenstein, 1979), which inspire our reflections, it is the data of experience that must be taken as a matrix for the analysis of psychic phenomena since the brain does not develop in a vat. In this sense, as a tool of analysis, Bergson's theory, in four specifically essential points,

can oppose the cognitivist perspective: the "theory of the inner eye", brain localizationism, studies directed only to children who speak, and limitation to explain non-social symptoms, samenesses, islands of interest, prodigal memory, etc.

Cognitivist Perspective of Autism: The Notion of Mental Blindness and the Nonsocial Symptoms of Autism

Let us now take as an object of discussion the "theory of the inner eye" which refers to the characteristic ability of humans to become aware of their own psychic/mental states by forming a "brain image." For Baron-Cohen (1995), autistic children, because they do not have this "theory of mind" mechanism developed, are incapable of constructing meta-representations and, therefore, this compromises the ability to establish empathic relationships. We bring to reflection some logical conclusions of Bergson, which make it possible to identify the tautological construction of Baron-Cohen, when proposing autism as a "mental blindness", namely: the body, as the center of action, could not give rise to representations; and the brain modifications are themselves images among many others that we have of the world, and we cannot derive other images from them. In other words, as a reality extended in space, the brain cannot occupy more than the space it presently occupies, constituting "with the rest of the material universe, an incessantly renewed cut of becoming universal." How, then, could the brain engender an image of itself, as the mentalist reading of cognitivism presupposes? Looking at the Humphry diagram used by Baron-Cohen to explain the TOMM, we wonder: Is it the brain that sees the eye, or the eye that sees the brain? This reveals the almost Cartesian circularity of his arguments.

The second critical point concerns the issue of brain localizationism. Baron-Cohen (1995) and a whole series of cognitivist authors (such as Leslie and O'Connor), based on psychiatric findings, insist that we can locate specific areas for autism. It is necessary to clarify that it is one thing to relate certain brain areas to problems of vision, touch, hearing, etc.; and another is to associate such

areas with the construction of abstractions, grammatical structuring, etc. Here, once again, we highlight Bergson's reflections on the problem of aphasia and, therefore, on how we cannot infer that some regions of the brain could be responsible, for example, for determining the sectoral "archiving" of verbs, pronouns, articles, etc.

The third problem, common to the cognitivist studies of Baron-Cohen (1995) and Happé & Frith (1995), concerns the fact that the tests and experiments only allow the participation of autistic children who express themselves verbally, excluding a large part of those who do not speak. On the other hand, because there is a significant percentage of autistic subjects who can pass such exams – that is, to form a theory of mind – there is evidence of a theoretical inconsistency in explaining the impairments in social interaction, both from an epistemic and diagnostic point of view.

The fourth counterpoint – also part of what has been called "internal problems" by Gallagher – concerns symptoms such as the insistence on immutability, stereotypies, and the skills of knowing, which, admittedly, escape approaches based on the theory of mind (Barros, 2006; Frith, 1995; Gallagher, 2004; Gallagher & Hutto, 2008).

As Gallagher points out the external challenger to the theory of mind account of autism, then, can be started clearly: Deficits in theory of mind cannot explain autism because the theory of mind itself is not a good explanation of non-autistic intersubjective experience. If theory of mind does not offer a good or acceptable account of our everyday normal interaction with others, then the lack of theory of mind does not offer a good or acceptable account of the problems involving social interaction in autism (Gallagher 2004, p. 201)

In addition, we understand that the Bergsonian model offers a better argumentative basis by shedding light on the study of autism, as well as bringing compelling advantages to the understanding of samenesses. That said, let us return to the question of the survival of the past, that is, of how "pure memory" acts on our motor schemas. To this end, we will address the types of memory

Bergson establishes since this places us directly at the center of the discussion about the perception/memory imbalance and the "stereotypies" in autism.

The survival of the past: Thinking about autism from Bergson's theory of memory

For Bergson, as is well known, perception is never a simple contact with the world of objects; it is entirely impregnated with the image-memories, which, in turn, participate in the 'pure remembrance' that it begins to materialize, and the perception in which it tends to incarnate". Therefore, we must treat the psychological state called the present as "a perception of the immediate past and a determination of the immediate future." If the past no longer acts unless updated in the form of the present (sensation and movement), it is because it thus has a different nature from the present action. While this is essentially sentient-motor, the past, in Bergson's terms, proves to be inextensible. The past to which we refer here can be summed up in terms of pure remembrance. To clarify the time dimension of experience, Bergson defined two memory species:

> *"[...] one fixed in the organism is nothing but the set of intelligently assembled mechanisms that ensure a convenient reply to the various possible interpellations. [...] The other is a true memory. Coextensive with consciousness, it retains and aligns all our states one after another as they are produced, giving each fact its place, and consequently setting its date, effectively moving in the definitive past and not, as the first, in a present that starts all over again."* (Bergson, 1999, pp. 176-177).

As they are not separate things, mutual support is provided, with the memory of the body being properly referred to as the sensorimotor systems and the other as the true memory of the past, which serves as a basis for them. What would characterize a "well-balanced spirit" would be precisely the firmness of the agreement between these two complementary memories: it would be necessary to bring the memories related to a present action to help in its accomplishment and to create a barrier to useless memories. Those who live reacting without an adequate resource to this memory, responding to excitations through immediate reactions, are considered "impulsive." On the other hand,

anyone who lives immersed in the past for mere pleasure, without an adaptation of memories to the present situation, will readily be labeled a “dreamer”. “Common sense” would be nothing more than a balance between these two extremes.

The way Bergson describes memory in children with typical development appears extremely important since it gives us a great clue to think about the prodigal memory, autistic motor and linguistic samenesses. According to Bergson the extraordinary development of spontaneous memory in most children is precise because they have not yet united their memory with their behavior. They habitually follow the impression of the moment, and – as the action in them does not submit to the indications of memory, conversely, their memories are not limited to the needs of the action. They only seem to retain more quickly because they remember less discerningly. Only in some states of disinterest in effective action, such as sleep, would this memory regain its richness in an infinite multitude of details of the subject’s history. If it were possible for one to repudiate all this memory that comes in the dream, one would become a kind of “conscious automaton”, following “the slope of useful habits that prolong excitation in appropriate reaction”.

On the other hand, anyone who delved into this memory “would never leave the particular”, accurately dating each image, indicating its place in space, and realizing how it differs from other images. In the first, it “would take the evident form of a bodily attitude or a spoken word”. In the second, “it would take on the aspect, no less clear, of the thousands of individual images in which its fragile unity would break”. We would tend to disperse in our pure memory whenever closer to the dreamlife, while we would tend to focus on perception whenever more firmly focused on present reality, "responding through motor reactions to sensory excitations". In fact, the “normal self” would not be fixed in any of these extreme positions, moving between them, providing its representations with enough image and vice versa.

The happy mention of the functioning of memory in children made by Bergson, quoted lines above, will serve us to begin to outline some proposals for understanding the problem of imbalance. The author states that, in child, memory and conduct have not yet been sympathized. In this case, neither the action is subject to the precise indications of memory, nor memory is limited to the "needs of action". Judging Bergson's theory as a whole (1979; 1989; 1999), every child, being first "in things", or in "objects", in terms of perception, would gradually move on to differentiation of "parts" of the world, and the very differentiation of oneself, from the process of constituting a balance between memory and perception. This characterizes people taken as a model of a well-constituted self. The normal tendency would thus be the emergence of the process of gradual harmonization between organic (perceptual) and metapsychological (mnemonic) functions.

In early childhood, the balance to which we refer here is not yet clearly established, and the child can often allow his memory to develop from a relationship less closely tied to pragmatic action. This is because the intermediate components – habit-memory and image-memory (mainly associated with 'practical life') – are not yet "solidified", in the sense of constituting, for example, automatisms and semi-conscious habits. Let us see now how we could bring this complex discussion to the universe of approach to autism.

We believe that this balance, which would gradually tend to become 'stable', occurs in an absolutely unique way in autistic child: instead of this initial stage being overcome, the harmonization between practical action and memory does not seem to evolve normally, generating, as a consequence, some of the main symptoms seen in this condition (because of the non-development of spontaneous habits, since, as we said, habit memory seems to us to function as one of the intermediate elements in the constitution of balance). That is why we believe that in no way can repetitive attitudes be seen as something of the order of neural automatism: on the contrary, there seems to be a lack of automatisms

in this search for permanence (which we interpret precisely as a corollary of the reduced repertoire of habits and automatisms). Then, what would explain the stereotypes, the echolalia, the insistence on sameness, the apparent privileged memory? This will become clear as we unfold our arguments.

Now rethinking in terms of the idea of disequilibrium that we are proposing – if we only consider the spatial dimension (the cells, tissues, and structures of the cortex), we will speak of disequilibrium of the memory concerning what? Returning objectively to our initial hypothesis, what we really intend is to deny the possibility of talking about a disconnection between perception and memory: what Rimland (1964) called disconnection (in terms of neurological damage), we will call imbalance, in the terms described above, being clear that, for Rimland (1964), memory and perception are reduced to a spatial dimension. In our case, other studies on memory should be developed in which its temporal dimension can be observed in addition to a spatial dimension. We understand that getting out of the "stage of imbalance" would be the only possibility to act creatively, metaphorically, to make conscious of the irreducible fusion between space and time.

Let us now turn to the second symptom proposed and included in the last question we raised: what would the insistence on sameness reveal to us? We can say that, without exception, all human beings ritualize since, to live in society, they are forced to develop a whole series of habits that allow the maintenance of life: ritualization generates a feeling of security. But what would happen if we could not overcome the "stage of disequilibrium"? We know that any child has a series of insecurities about the world, and these insecurities are precisely linked to the lack of a balance between organic habits and memory, which, gradually, is being changed by what, in general, we describe as 'life experience'. In the autistic condition, the successful experiences of "habit manufacturing" are shown to be quite reduced: even if for us, they often do not make sense, we believe that, for those who experience the problem, they reveal themselves as milestones, fundamental steps of overcoming what we proposed to call the

"stage of disequilibrium." Thus, what should be developed 'spontaneously' becomes something dependent on effort, often generating anguish that intensifies the idiosyncratic body movements. Here it becomes more apparent that symptoms of 'insistence on sameness', and we can only conclude that, in our case, they express an evident attempt to overcome precisely the problem of the lack of automatisms. Most people have a much more extensive repertoire of automatisms and semiconscious habits than autistics. This enables them to establish a successful relationship between memory and present perception. If we reduce the 'insistence on sameness' to something on the order of the irrational, the biologically determined, the biochemical disconnection between neural systems, and exclude the time component (the diverse nature of memory concerning perception), at the current stage of research, this would leave us without sense or possible intervention.

Once again, we will turn to Bergson (1897/1999), with a clear hypothesis of imbalance, to discuss the unique memory-related ability. Citing Kay's study, *"The memory and how to improve it"*, he says as intelligence develops, the apparent diminution of memory is due to the increasing organization of memories with acts. Conscious memory thus loses in extent what it gains in penetrating power: at first, it had the facility of dream memory, but this is because it dreamed.

The above argument about the "contraction" of memory helps us to establish an adequate understanding of the question of special abilities since it is precisely an absence of the "organization of memories with acts" that appears as the most striking factor in those for whom, in the French language, they are described by the term *idiot savant* – that is, those who "remember more" than ordinary people, but are shown to be considerably disconnected from utilitarian action. There is, for example, the case of those who manage to memorize colossal lists of numbers, names, and dates from childhood and through adulthood without missing any detail. From the theoretical framework outlined, we reflect here that there would be no "special ability" to be studied in these

cases because the memory of any person would be preserved in the same way as that of autistic people possessing such mnemonic characteristics. However, in the latter, memory would lack the "force of penetration" to which Bergson draws attention. Thus, the *extent of* memory used would remain as it was at the beginning of life, with the difference that the "accumulation of the past" would have expanded immensely, making the ability to retain data increasingly intriguing. In other words, we suggest that there would be a discontinuity in the trajectory required by the action, in the face of which it is impossible for the subject to align his body schema with environmental and/or psychic demands. As we have already explained, the problem is not in the body's memory but in the impossibility of inhibiting specific useless memories to achieve action in the present.

Therefore, this accumulation, consequent to the absence of a cut in the flow of cognitive experience, requires the subject to fix himself at some point of existence/thought to maintain the connection between the self-experience and the demands placed by the perceived objects. Consequently, the islands of interest become the structuring of the subject's individuality since they become a point where the subject can anchor the experience, creating an arc between the past, the present, and the future. Thus, we begin to realize that this dimension of the problem is also linked to the issue of perception/memory imbalance. To elucidate this connection, let us take the following consideration from Bergson:

> *"[...] If our past remains almost entirely hidden from us, it is because it is inhibited by the necessities of present action, it will regain the strength to cross the threshold of consciousness whenever we lose interest in effective action in order to relocate ourselves in some way to the dream life."* (Bergson, 1897/1999, p.180).

Would the autistic person live like this in this "dream life"? Obviously not. However, once one agrees with the 'imbalance hypothesis' we have put forward, one will surely admit that such 'needs of present action' do not play a memory-inhibiting role in the case of autistic conditions, as they do in other people. On the other hand, taking mechanical memory as a special ability, we

would mistakenly follow the idea that the child would be a kind of "candidate for genius that didn't work out." In fact, Bergsonian theory allows us to look at these cases without seeing a wide distance between them and those in which there is muteness since it seems to be the same imbalance at the root of the problems. Thus, when the symptoms such as *samenesses* and mechanical memory are put into perspective, based on the Bergsonian reading adopted, we visualize more proximity between apparently distinct cases of autism. Obviously, both differences in life history and in the organic picture (in the terms in which we believe the latter should be considered) must also be considered to understand the diversity of "characteristic" phenomena. Within the scope of this study, we consider that, even though the equilibrium/imbalance hypothesis is still a partial construction, it opens a path to an understanding of non-social symptoms in autism.

In fact, our theoretical reflections have led us to conclude that there is a need for re-elaboration for specific symptoms that have already become commonplace. Therefore, we will take here the "stereotyped movements" and the "echolalia," which must be understood. In this way, we will try to redefine ourselves. In the context of autism, this type of discussion is highly relevant since it has implications for the diagnosis and therapeutic strategies. Moreover, a large part of their training involves contradictions between clinical observation and the formation of concepts.

The term "stereotyped movements," which already appears in Kanner's work (1943) and is still widely used today, appears to us as highly committed to the point of view opposed to the understanding we have proposed about autism. This designation refers to specific movements that children have developed involuntarily, like a Parkinson's patient has the characteristic tremor of the hands, as proposed by Damasio e Maurer (1978). However, its use encompassed facial expressions, body movements, etc. Here, we have a clear example of the proposition of a term guided by a reductionist point of view since aspects of the "updating of memory" are read as muscle spasms. "Stereotyped movements" are

often precisely the idiosyncratic but expressive way of establishing relationships with one's surroundings. In this way, we consider the body's movements as metaphorical projections – especially regarding the most severe cases – of subjective experience. In our reading, they indicate an attempt to overcome the impossibilities arising from the perception/memory imbalance and, consequently, develop activities with symbolic content. The repetition of activities related to the so-called memory-habit marks the life of every human being. The big issue is that, for a "pragmatic" use of this memory, it is necessary to gradually expand the repertoire of introjected habits (the autistic person only "seems" to want to reduce this repertoire, distancing himself from a utilitarian action). Therefore, we believe that the term "stereotyped" does not figure as an adequate epithet to encompass the multiplicity of movements (repertoires) that children with autism can develop.

On the other hand, the term "echolalia", also proposed by Kanner (1943), seems highly inadequate since it signals a kind of prejudice, according to which a good part of autistic people who communicate verbally would speak like a kind of parrot because they would always engage the words in the way they were heard for the first time and would not be able to concatenate the intricacies of grammatical structures (changing, e.g., the pronoun "I" for "you" and vice versa). The fact is that, since Kanner (1943), this point of view has given rise to a whole series of readings that even go against the descriptions of clinical cases. For example, the author considers that no meaning is expressed in the children's speech. At the same time, he alleges that a boy established that the word 'yes' expressed his desire to climb on his father's shoulders (since, the first time his father had put him on his shoulders, he had stated that he would put him back whenever he answered 'yes' to the question: "Want to go on Daddy's shoulders?"). Wouldn't there be a semantic agreement? We believe so. It is evident that there is a persistence of prejudice since many people diagnosed with autism can speak, construct representations of the world, etc. Moreover, the term

echolalia needs to help us understand subjects' communicative effort in social interactions.

We propose establishing *idiosyncratic semantic agreements* to qualify verbal language in autism. Let us consider the permanence in the "stage of disequilibrium" that we propose in our theoretical reflections as the basis for this "temperamental disposition" that leads to personal relationships. We realize that the term is much more flexible and appropriate to a non-reductionist point of view of reading the condition. Finally, the reflections on the physical/mental relations introduced here guide us to a change of perspective on understanding how samenesses become part of self-experience. This is an investigative path to be followed in studies on autism, particularly when the temporal dimension of the experience is placed in the theoretical framework of the investigation.

Conclusions

The conclusion of this paper integrates the contrasting understanding of autism as proposed by Henri Bergson's philosophical insights with the clinical and cognitive perspectives that have traditionally shaped the study of the condition. Through Bergson's lens, we are encouraged to view autistic behaviors not as malfunctions or simple repetitions but as manifestations of a deeper global change in the experience of being in the world, which challenges the conventional segregation of physical and subjective states in autism research.

Considering the existence of an imbalance between perception and memory, it is proposed an understanding of the autistic child as having a subjective life as rich as that of any other child. Furthermore, it is possible to place "silent" cases and those called "special skills" of memory in the same approach register. This last aspect constitutes an unresolved problem, especially for cognitive psychology. Starting from Bergson, understanding that the balance between memory, neural automatisms and habits lies at the basis of carrying out the everyday pragmatics of life, we believe we have been able to provide at least

the basis for approaching this issue of the processes of consciousness and some of the symptoms non-social aspects of autism.

In light of Bergson's propositions, the study suggests that motor and speech stereotypies in autism should be viewed as creative efforts by individuals to reconcile their unique perception and memory dynamics (Amy, 2001; Aubin, 1976). This perspective aligns with the concept that cognition is not an exclusively brain-based process but also involves motor schema and environmental interactions, emphasizing the importance of considering the brain's role as a pantomime organ, which imitates rather than generates mental life (Bergson, 1897/1999).

Furthermore, the paper critically addresses the assumptions underlying the etiology of autism, highlighting the need to move beyond a narrow focus on organic causes and impairments in social interaction (Kanner, 1943; Rimland, 1964). It suggests that what has been described as 'mindblindness' or a lack of theory of mind may be an overly simplistic interpretation of the complex cognitive landscape of autistic individuals (Baron-Cohen, 1995).

Future research should continue to explore the phenomenological experience of autism, employing a holistic approach that integrates philosophical, psychiatric, and cognitivist perspectives. This could include examining how individuals with autism negotiate their lived experiences and how interventions might be tailored to support their unique ways of perceiving and acting in the world. Studies could also investigate the implications of Bergson's dualism on the therapeutic approaches to autism, emphasizing the fluid interplay between perception, memory, and action instead of rigid brain-behavior correlations. By advancing this phenomenological approach, we can foster a more empathetic understanding of autism that recognizes the intricate interplay between the brain, the body, and the environment and appreciates the full humanity of individuals with autism.

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