



# Is it ethical to heal a young white elephant from his physiological autism?



Otto E. Rossler<sup>a,\*</sup>, Cony Theis<sup>b</sup>, Jürgen Heiter<sup>a</sup>, Werner Fleischer<sup>a</sup>, Anonymous Student<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup> University of Tübingen, Auf der Morgenstelle 8, 72076 Tübingen, Germany

<sup>b</sup> University of Applied Sciences and Arts, Im Wiestebruch 68, 28870 Ottersberg, Germany

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## ABSTRACT

Forty years ago a causal therapy of autism was offered which has never been tried out by the therapeutic profession. It predictably is so effective that even members of other mirror-competent bonding species can be healed from their “physiological autism.” Niklas Luhmann belonged to the therapy’s supporters and Leo Szilard had anticipated it in fiction 30 years earlier. The Ottersberg Lectures on Philosophy revived it through the enthusiasm and cooperation of the youthful audience.

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## 1. Introduction

Autism is a widespread scourge of humankind. Only in Sweden are the human rights of the affected individuals optimally preserved as far as jurisdiction and infrastructure are concerned.

In 1975, a causal therapy applicable at a young age was proposed (Rossler, 1975). Gregory Bateson (personal communication 1975) and Niklas Luhmann (Luhmann, 1977, 1984) supported it. Jürgen Habermas’ only criticism concerned the fact that an illegally printed edition of his book had been quoted. Noam Chomsky showed interest in a long phone conversation. Konrad Lorenz said he appreciated it but it was “too difficult” for him to fully understand. No professional ever tried the therapy out or quoted it. For a review, cf. Ref. (Rossler, 2004).

In the recent Ottersberg lectures on philosophy, one of the incredibly motivated and bright students in the audience brought-

in a previously lacking empirical fact: the bonding signal of a mother elephant consists of an infrasound rumble (Payne, 1998; Payne, 2008). With this added piece of information about an inaudible bonding signal waiting to be employed, now a young (preferably white) elephant can predictably be healed interactively from her or his physiological autism by the adopted human caretaker.

This by now suddenly operational proposal is sketched in the following and its ethical motivation discussed.

## 2. Physiological autism

Physiological or natural autism is a reflection of the quadruple-A (AAAA) rule: “All Animals Are Autistic” (Rössler, 1977). The explanation has to do with the fact that evolution is controlled by natural selection as its only driving force. *Nonautism*, by contrast, introduces a further agent – personal responsibility – which competes with natural selection. Hence nonautism cannot have arisen through a selection pressure of its own in nature. Nonautism can only have come about through an evolutionary accident that

\* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: [oeross00@yahoo.com](mailto:oeross00@yahoo.com) (O.E. Rossler).

enabled an interactional function change to occur on the epigenetic level. The latter amounts to a “jump” right up to Point Omega in Teilhard’s picture (Rossler, 2004). This “accident” can now be understood causally and therefore also be evoked deliberately in the ontogenesis of an individual.

### 3. An evolutionary accident

The evolutionary accident which biologically speaking underlies and enables the *nonautism* of human beings consists in a convergence of two originally distinct fixed biological expressions, those of happiness and of bonding, respectively, which occurred in one particular mirror-competent species. The convergence was an accidental consequence of evolutionary *Ritualization* in the sense of Julian Huxley (Huxley, 1942).

In the evolution of highly sophisticated animals like mammals, the slowly time-varying ecological niche sometimes favors, and then disfavors again, bonding between adult individuals on a fairly “short” time scale of a few million years (Huxley, 1942). By contrast, bonding between offspring and parent is an older, much more stable trait. Whenever bonding between adults gets favored by natural selection next time around, some pre-existing behavioral trait (motion pattern) gets “ritualized” for the new purpose of bonding (Huxley, 1942). In this way, frequently a mating gesture – “mounting” – gets usurped for the new function. Every TV viewer knows this from baboons, for example: even the females are mounting for this purpose. The selection pressure is so strong that in another highly social species, the African wild dog (*Lycaon pictus*), the females developed a long pseudopenis for the new purpose of bonding. Also in the *Bonobo* – humankind’s closest relative –, a form of noisy mounting has become the bonding signal of the species’ adults (“laughing with the lower parts of the body”). In other cases, other pre-existing motion patterns got ritualized for bonding. In the *wolf*, for example, a submissive gesture derived from submissive crouching – tail-wagging – was chosen for the bonding display of the young towards the adults and eventually also between adults.

An analogous convergence happens to have taken place in the evolution of the human species. Here, the happy facial expression of the satiated infant got chosen for the bonding display of the adult individuals. That is, the smile and laughter of happiness became the smile of bonding (see van Hoof for many more details (van Hoof, 1972)). Much as in the wolf, an originally submissive gesture (a grin in the face) became, first the rewarding gesture for successful parenting and then the universal bonding gesture also between adults.

While in the wolf and dog, the convergence of the two displays of happiness and bonding cannot lead to any major epigenetic side effects, such a side effect regularly occurs in the human species. The wolf is protected from the same fate by the fact that it is not mirror-competent. In this way, the domesticated wolf only became humankind’s best friend but not its partner. So notwithstanding the anecdotal fact that in one case, the owner of a giant dog divorced his wife in order to be able to care till the end for his cancer-stricken animal friend.

By contrast, the functionally analogous “cross caring coupling” (Rossler, 1975) between a human toddler and his caretaker (mediated by laugh-smiling rather than tail-wagging) is compounded by the mirror-competence of the two human bonding partners. The mirror competence arises in the toddler around the age of 18 months as most parents know. It is a great experience for an onlooker to watch a young child’s joy in the discovery of her or his perfectly controllable twin in a mirror.

But other highly brained mirror-competent bonding species exist as well – elephants being amongst them (Plotnik et al., 2006).

### 4. The epigenetic transformation

Evolution is helpless on a short-term basis whenever an *epigenetic accident* occurs regularly in a species. In the wolf and dog, the mentioned bonding structure which involves both partners’ state of happiness (“cross caring”) is innocuous in the sense that it does not trigger a major epigenetic consequence. Only the human partner of a dog can sometimes get carried away in his heart as we saw with the divorcing dog owner (a professor of theology whom the first author knew as a child). Konrad Lorenz said that there is “no greater love on earth” than that of a dog (Lorenz, 1949a). King Salomo and Saint Francis also come to mind (Lorenz, 1949b).

But now imagine what is going to happen when the loved, bonding offspring is mirror-competent. Sigmund Freud spoke here of the “dark continent” of female sexuality (Freud, 1926) while having the playroom in mind. He did not know yet of the existence of bonding as an even stronger drive than sexuality. George Herbert Mead was wiser in his famous book (which he never wrote himself since his pupils loved him so much that they wrote it exclusively under his name after he had passed away), “Mind, Self and Society” (Mead, 1934).

Even in the dog, the joy of the adult will predictably *sometimes* cause a pup to renounce a piece of food if the adult is too happily excited in the anticipation of getting it – so one can predict (this is a question for field studies). But such an evolutionarily counterproductive “sacrifice” brought by an offspring is bound to be rare in the wolf.

By contrast, such “feeding-an-adult behavior” is typical of young human beings. A 1 ½ year old toddler was once accidentally observed by one of us (while standing in a zoo in front of the wolves’ den of all things) putting a sweetie into his father’s mouth, asking: “good?!” If this is a typical behavioral trait of the human species, as it no doubt is, the latter species deserves the distinguishing systematic biological name *Pongo goneotrophicus* (“parent-feeding great ape” (Rossler, 2004)).

As a consequence of the *cross-caring coupling* (CCC) described, the *playroom* is the theater for a radical transformation occurring in a young human being who is not smile-blind while being in the company of the mother (or more rarely the father or a nurse or a grandparent). A *functional instability* predictably arises in the interaction between the two “autonomous optimizers” in question (see (Rossler, 1987) for a more formal description). This instability is so strong that it causes a *function change*, to use the general terminology introduced by Bob Rosen (Rosen, 1967). That is, nothing is changed in the hardware of the two dynamical systems in question, but nonetheless a radical change occurs in the way they are functioning. An alternative technical term for function change is “hard bifurcation.” The functioning of the toddler, in the presence of his mirror-competence, gets irreversibly transformed by the symmetric emotional coupling present.

Specifically, the “suspicion of benevolence” – of an intentional well-meaning existing on the other side – arises in the toddler. In the course of a “give-and-take game” – or more correctly speaking: in the course of an *almost-give-and-not-quite-take-game* – between the two, the toddler will suddenly “switch”. A transition occurs in play: from merely “almost giving” and just in time taking back what had seemed to develop into a genuine giving act (with heavy tears flowing when the partner misinterprets the not yet fully developed intention), towards suddenly *insisting* on the naïve gift being accepted and kept and enjoyed and, for example, eaten so that it is gone for good.

Both partners then plunge into a positive feedback of hilarious laughter and happiness and benevolence shown. This is the famous “playroom nonsense.” But behind it stands the mutually confirmed

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