

Autism and the predictive mind

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Many ideas about the autistic brain are based on conceptions about the human brain that are outdated. The computer as a metaphor for the brain, with its input, processing and output, has been very useful in the past, but seems to be incorrect in the light of recent discoveries in brain science. The brain is not a computer: the brain is guessing more than it is computing. The brain does not just receive information from the senses, it is actually using the senses to check its own guesses. Recent discoveries about the brain have led to a Copernican revolution, replacing the old idea of a receptive mind with the new idea of a predictive mind. That new idea invites us to take a different look at the autistic brain, but – more importantly – also to rethink some of the strategies we have been using in autism for decades. We will illustrate this in the areas of sensory issues, communication and emotion recognition, three areas known to be difficult for people with ASD.

What will be covered:

- The Copernican revolution in thinking about the human brain: why the brain is not a computer
- The predictive mind: what is it and how does it work
- Autism as a disorder of prediction
- Consequences of this new idea for some well-known autism strategies:
 - Coping with hypersensitivity (why eliminating stimuli is not a good idea and why hypersensitivity is not the right word!)
 - Understanding language (how to make your language more predictable?)
 - Recognizing emotions (why we don't read emotions from faces!)
- If autism is a disorder of prediction, then the number one strategy is: offering predictability