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CHAPTER 3 / Hans Asperger's theory of autistic psychopathy (2), with a focus on the non-social symptoms of autism

In this chapter, I will address three outstanding issues regarding Asperger's work, which could not yet be answered in the previous chapter. First, I will clarify his debt to other authors, notably George Frankl (see chapter 1), Eugen Bleuler (who coined the term 'autism') and Erich Jaensch (who turns out to be more important than recognized). Second, I will discuss Hans Asperger's relationship to Leo Kanner (see chapters 4 and 5), which was a relationship of similarity, not debt. Finally, I will address the most recent developments in the reception of Asperger's work, especially claims that his conception of autism was tainted by Nazi ideology.

Before I can address these three outstanding issues, my analysis of Asperger's theory of autistic psychopathy must be completed. Having described, in the previous chapter, how he conceptualized the social symptoms of autism, I still need to describe how he conceptualized the *non-social* symptoms of autism, in particular differences in learning, movement, affectivity and perception. The fact that Asperger described these two groups of symptoms poses the question whether he considered them to be distinct parts of the same disorder or two distinct disorders. I will take up this question with a focus on the place he assigns in his theory to the concept of 'contact disorder'.

In section one, I will describe the non-social peculiarities of autistic children, as experienced by Asperger, and the additional problem they posed to him: how can a disorder be described that is *pervasive* in that it involves relations to the *whole* world, not just to the social world? Section two will clarify how Asperger applied to these non-social peculiarities his concept of autistic psychopathy, including the idea of a contact disorder. This clarification will involve an elaborate discussion of his concepts. This level of detail is necessary to shed new light on the three outstanding issues. Section three will clarify the history of Asperger's concepts, addressing his debt to Frankl, Bleuler and

Jaensch. Section four will then map Asperger's marginal relation to Leo Kanner. Section five will discuss how my reading of Asperger's work relates to recent developments in the reception of his work, such as its relation to Nazi ideology. Finally, section six will give my assessment of the contemporary significance of Asperger's theory, followed by an overall conclusion of this and the previous chapter.

3.1 The pervasiveness problem

In the narrative Asperger told about the development of his theory of autistic psychopathy, the fact that it encompassed social and non-social symptoms remained in the background. Nonetheless, his theory of autism clearly had such a wide scope. This suggests that it must have had a broader experiential basis than diagnosing disturbances in *social* interaction. In his clinical work as *Heilpädagoge*, Asperger clearly came across a group of children who not only interacted and communicated differently, but who also had difficulty with such basic everyday practicalities as washing themselves, playing with toys, or even moving about – none of which are primarily social activities.²⁸¹ Similarly, he observed in children with autism not only a superior judgement of other people, but also an enlarged understanding of those aspects of the non-social world that happen to interest them.

Asperger recognized this broad scope of autism from the start. The first time he publicly discussed autistic psychopathy, in 1938, he already observed in this type of children a different relationship to the inanimate world. In particular, he encountered children who on the one hand had “amazingly mature special interests”, especially in science and technology, but who on the other hand, had “clumsiness in motor function” and “a poor practical understanding”.²⁸² In 1977, in his last lecture on the subject, he also described both social and non-social symptoms. Asperger still maintained that the

²⁸¹ That is not to deny that they may also have social aspects. For example, toys are not only used to play alone, but also to play together with other children. Moreover, even when a toy is used in isolation, children may learn its function through social contact with peers or adults.

²⁸² Asperger, "Das psychisch abnorme Kind" (1938), p. 1316: “ungeschicklichkeit im rein Motorischen”, “slechte praktische Verständniss”.

interests of children with autistic psychopathy “are often unusual and impractical” and that their “motor functioning [...] is often on the whole clumsy”.²⁸³ In addition, he still believed that adults with autistic psychopathy may develop their special interests into “highly specialized, scientific, professions, sometimes with skills bordering on genius”.²⁸⁴

Throughout his entire career, then, Asperger believed that his theory of autistic psychopathy had to account not only for social but also for non-social differences. I call this *the pervasiveness problem*: what does it mean for their diagnosis that in a certain group of children *all* interactions with the environment are different, not only their communication with other people but also their interactions with inanimate things? In the remainder of this section, I will introduce the clinical experiences that make this pervasiveness problem concrete: the experience of differences in the domains of learning, movement, affectivity, and perception.

For each of these four domains, I will show how Asperger observed them in children with autistic psychopathy. In the previous chapter, we have seen that autistic psychopathy affects children’s inner personality and their relations to their external environment. Asperger believed that, as children grow up, internal functions such as instinct and intellect become differentiated. However, whereas in most children they are then re-integrated into a whole, they remain differentiated in children with autism. In the same vein, as children grow up, their self is differentiated from the environment. Again, in most children the self is then reintegrated with the environment but not so, or to a limited degree, in children with autistic psychopathy. Thus, Asperger held that the human personality develops dialectically, starting from integration, moving through a stage of differentiation, and culminating in a final stage of re-integration. In his view, autistic children remain stuck at the second stage.

²⁸³ Asperger, "Probleme des kindlichen Autismus" (1977), p. 6: “ihr Denken [...] geht oft eigene Wege [...], scheint auf oft sehr ausgefallene, praktisch wenig brauchbare Sonderinteressen eingengt”, “die Motorik zeigt Stereotypien, ist oft im ganzen ungeschickt”. English translation: p. 48.

²⁸⁴ Asperger, "Probleme des kindlichen Autismus" (1977), p. 7: “die Kinder des Aspergerschen Typs [...] finden oft in abseitige, manchmal in hochspezialisierte, wissenschaftliche Berufe, manchmal mit an Geniale grenzenden Fähigkeiten”. English: "Problems of infantile autism" (1979), p. 49.

We also saw in the previous chapter that this difference in development, i.e. being stuck at the stage of differentiation, resulted in two differences in their relation to the environment. On the one hand, children with autistic psychopathy have an enlarged (overdeveloped) autonomy vis-à-vis their environment, on the other hand they have restricted (underdeveloped) contact with their environment. We will now see that Asperger observed such enlargement and restriction not only in the relations of autistic children *to other people*, but also in their relations to *the inanimate world*.

3.1.1 Restriction and enlargement in learning

Asperger learned indirectly that autistic children have learning difficulties, in school as well as at home. He experienced some of these learning differences directly during intelligence and language tests. As early as 1939, Asperger discussed an eleven-year-old boy who did not do well at school.²⁸⁵ He could not focus and work on a problem for longer periods of time and he was easily distracted. Instead of following the logical and systematic procedures taught by his teachers, his thinking showed unexpected twists. Later, Asperger reported that Fritz had difficulty with calculations and more generally was easily disturbed and could not concentrate on his schoolwork.²⁸⁶ At home, Asperger found, autistic children have “not the slightest interest” in their “practical situation” and have difficulty learning everyday skills that other children pick up automatically.²⁸⁷ For example, Fritz “learned the practical skills of everyday life very late and with great difficulty”.²⁸⁸ Asperger concluded that these children have difficulty learning things that other children learn instinctively, and do not readily accept lessons from adults.

Conversely, Asperger observed enlargements of their conceptual understanding of the non-social world, involving more spontaneous and original

²⁸⁵ Asperger, "Pädagogische Therapie bei abnormen Kinder" (1939), p. 944.

²⁸⁶ "Die 'Autistischen Psychopathen'" (1944), pp. 85, 90, 94. English translation: pp. 39, 45, 48.

²⁸⁷ Asperger, "Autistisches Verhalten im Kindesalter" (1960), p. 58: "sie sind nicht nur begabungsmäßig *in der praktischen Situation* insuffizient, sie haben dafür auch nicht das geringste Interesse".

²⁸⁸ "Die 'Autistischen Psychopathen'" (1944), p. 86: "erlernte die praktischen Verrichtungen des Alltagslebens sehr spät und schwer". English translation: p. 39.

forms of learning. Harro did give the right answer when presented with a calculation problem, but he arrived at his answers in an original way. For example, here is how he calculated 34 minus 12: “34 plus 2 is 36, minus 12 is 24, minus 2 is 22”.²⁸⁹ Asperger observed a similar originality in language. An eleven-year-old (who remains unnamed) used idiosyncratic sentences, such as “mouthwise I can’t, but headwise I can” (I understand it, but can’t express it).²⁹⁰ In general, Asperger found that ‘autistic psychopaths’ may offend their teachers, by arriving at results through self-invented methods and by outright rejecting tasks in areas that do not interest them.²⁹¹

The originality of learning was most pronounced in so-called ‘special interests’: more intense interests in a specific area that form spontaneously without regard for the demands and expectations of other people. The first time Asperger publicly mentioned ‘autistic psychopaths’, he already noted that “very often astonishingly mature special interests are present”, ranging from “properly scientific” to “quite eccentric and absurd”.²⁹² In *Die ‘Autistischen Psychopathen’*, Asperger further observed that “almost all” children with autistic psychopathy have a special interest.²⁹³ Asperger gave examples in several of his case descriptions. In spite of this difficulty with average calculations, Fritz had a “special interest” in numbers.²⁹⁴ Another child (who remains unnamed) had “most of all technical interests”.²⁹⁵

Special interests were also central to a later paper, in which Asperger offered several examples:

²⁸⁹ Asperger, "Die ‘Autistischen Psychopathen’" (1944), p. 100; see his "Autistisches Verhalten im Kindesalter" (1960), p. 58, which also appears to be about Harro.

²⁹⁰ Hans Asperger, "Die ‘Autistischen Psychopathen’" (1944), p. 115: “mündlich kann ich das nicht, aber köpfllich”. English translation: p. 71.

²⁹¹ Asperger, "Autistisches Verhalten im Kindesalter" (1960), p. 58.

²⁹² Asperger, "Das psychisch abnorme Kind" (1938), p. 1316: “sehr oft sind erstaunlich reife Sonderinteressen vorhanden, oft richtig wissenschaftliche (z. B. naturforscherische) oder technische Interessen, die freilich oft wieder recht verschoben sonderlinghaft, abseitig sind”

²⁹³ Asperger, "Die ‘Autistischen Psychopathen’" (1944), p. 90: “Wir sehen hier also, was uns bei fast allen Autistischen begegnen wird, ein Sonderinteresse ausgebildet, das den Knaben auf seinem „Spezialgebiet“ zu ganz ungewöhnlichen Leistungen befähigt.” English translation: p. 45.

²⁹⁴ Asperger, "Die ‘Autistischen Psychopathen’" (1944), p. 90: “Vor allem habe er schon sehr früh besonderes Interesse für Zahlen und Rechnen gezeigt”. English translation: p. 45.

²⁹⁵ Asperger, "Die ‘Autistischen Psychopathen’" (1944), p. 116: “Ein anderes Kind wieder hat vor allem technische Interessen, weiß unglaublich viel vom Aufbau komplizierter Maschinen”. English translation: p. 72.

You will find among this group budding young natural scientists who ask questions at an almost scientific level and who develop their own independent methods to acquire new knowledge and shape their world view. There are also amateur chemists who spend all their money on their experiments – even if it was stolen casually. Yet others become further specialised by focussing on tests that produce a lot of noise and smell. Then there are those who develop a fascination with toxins, and while many of their experiments might be naive and ‘quirky’, many others are clever and in fact not without danger. Some children with autism are focussed exclusively on the world of numbers, achieving amazing mathematical feats (as opposed to simply having the ability to memorise, which is actually not uncommon among people with severe learning disabilities). You will also find engineers with authentic, profound knowledge and boys preoccupied with eccentric and fantastical inventions, far removed from reality. A fair number of children with autism also have an unusually rich and deep understanding of art: whereas the ‘normal’ child tends to favour attractive, bland, even kitschy images, children with autism spectrum disorder have the ability to understand, and enjoy, at the deepest level, artworks which are difficult because of their age or their abstract, artificial representation – to the extent that through presenting works of art to these children one can encourage them and establish a rapport with them.²⁹⁶

²⁹⁶ Adapted from a professional translation. Asperger, "Bild und soziale Wertigkeit der autistischen Psychopathen" (1950), p. 260-1: "Da gibt es kleine Naturforscher von geradezu wissenschaftlichen Fragestellungen, die mit eigenständigen Methoden ihre Erkenntnisse erlangen und zu einem Weltbild ordnen, Chemiker, die ihr ganzes Geld – uns sei es auch unbekümmert gestohlen – auf ihre Experimente aufwenden, da spezialisiert sich einer noch weiter, auf Versuche, bei denen es stark kracht und – riecht, wieder ein anderer hatte sich auf Gifte festgelegt, manches von seinen Versuchen war naiv und verschroben, manches aber gescheit und nicht ungefährlich; anderen ist das Reich der Zahlen das einzige Interesse, sie bringen erstaunliche echte Rechenleistungen zuwege (nicht bloss Gedächtnisleistungen dieser Art, was man ja nicht selten auch bei tiefbestehend Schwachsinnigen findet); dann gibt es Techniker von echtem, tiefgründigem Wissen, aber auch Buben die mit absonderlichen, realitätsfernen Erfindungen beschäftigt sind. Nicht wenige haben ein ungewöhnlich reiches Kunstverständnis; während das 'normale' Kind, das gefällige, weiche, ja kitschige Bild am höchsten schätzt, vermögen sie durch Alter oder abstrakte, naturferne Darstellung schwierige Kunstwerke in ihrem tiefsten Sinn zu verstehen und zu genießen, sodass man solche Kinder gerade durch das Darbieten von Kunstwerken bereichern, an sich binden und fördern kann."

Between 1964 and 1968, 50 children who were inpatients at the *Hp* were diagnosed with autistic psychopathy.²⁹⁷ For 46 of them there are detailed files. Now, in 28 of these well-documented cases (60%), Asperger and his team reported special interests, some of them highly scientific, others obscure or atypical for children that age.

According to Asperger, special interests in children have the following features. First, these interests are unchildlike and unexpectedly mature.²⁹⁸ Second, they are often impractical and of little use.²⁹⁹ Third, their topic may be unusual³⁰⁰ but can become the basis of a proper career when the child grows up.³⁰¹ Fourth, in pursuing their interests, ‘autistic psychopaths’ come to their results in an unusual way.³⁰² Fifth, special interests often emerge early and remain the same through life.³⁰³ Finally, the topic of interest may be in the natural sciences, technology or mathematics, but also in the visual arts or poetry.³⁰⁴ Asperger believed that such special interests result from an enlargement of inner and outer differentiation, which showed itself in their spontaneous and original nature, their irrelevance to the social expectations, and their focus on conceptual domains such as the sciences and art.

Asperger introduced new compound terms to describe such interests, i.e. “special interests” (*Sonderinteressen*) and “autistic interests” (*autistischen Interessen*).³⁰⁵ Yet, written in German, *Die ‘Autistischen Psychopathen’* could not be read by the general English-language public until Uta Frith published a partial translation in 1991.³⁰⁶ This is probably the main reason that special interests within autism have not been researched as a topic in their own right until

²⁹⁷ Kathrin Hippler and Christian Klicpera, "A retrospective analysis of the clinical case records of ‘autistic psychopaths’ diagnosed by Hans Asperger and his team at the University Children's Hospital, Vienna" (2003), pp. 294, 297.

²⁹⁸ Asperger, "Das psychisch abnorme Kind" (1938), p. 1316; idem, "Pädagogische Therapie bei abnormen Kinder" (1939), p. 944.

²⁹⁹ Asperger, "Probleme des kindlichen Autismus." (1977), p. 6.

³⁰⁰ Asperger, "Das psychisch abnorme Kind" (1938), p. 1316; "Autistisches Verhalten im Kindesalter" (1960), p. 58.

³⁰¹ Asperger, "Bild und sociale Wertigkeit der autistischen Psychopathen" (1950), p. 266.

³⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 260.

³⁰³ Asperger, "Das autistische Kind und seine Probleme" (1963), p. 251.

³⁰⁴ Asperger, "Das psychisch abnorme Kind" (1938), p. 1316; "Das autistische Kind und seine Probleme" (1963), p. 251.

³⁰⁵ Asperger, "Die ‘Autistischen Psychopathen’" (1944), pp. 90, 112, 116.

³⁰⁶ Asperger, "'Autistic psychopathy' in childhood" (1991). Translated by Uta Frith. Lorna Wing already had a translation, made by her husband, in the 1970's, but it was not publicly available. Cf. Sheffer, *Asperger's children: the origins of autism in Nazi Vienna* (2018), p. 241.

the 1990's. Leo Kanner did cite, in his initial paper, observations of special interests by two mothers: Donald was "absorbed in some kind of silly, unrelated subject" and Alfred had a "marked tendency toward developing one special interest which will completely dominate his day's activities".³⁰⁷ However, Kanner did not focus on the phenomenon, and came to consider "circumscribed interest patterns" as a "syndrome" distinct from autism.³⁰⁸

3.1.2 Restriction and enlargement in motor action

Directly, from his own observation at the ward, and indirectly, from talking with their mothers, Asperger learned that children with autistic psychopathy can have difficulty with the "everyday demands of practical life".³⁰⁹ *Die 'Autistischen Psychopathen'* tells us that Harro dealt "with small everyday tasks, such as washing himself" reluctantly and awkwardly.³¹⁰ In the same vein, the mother of Ernst told Asperger that her son was "practically very inept"; for example, as a 7,5 year old, he had "learned to eat independently only recently".³¹¹ Similarly, Fritz was "particularly clumsy and dependent".³¹²

The idea that children with autism are impractical recurs in later papers. For example, we read that "the conquest of the habitat through moving about and handling things" in autistic children tends to be delayed and difficult, "dressing and washing oneself, eating, tying knots" are difficult and children

³⁰⁷ Leo Kanner, "Autistic disturbances of affective contact" (1943), pp. 222, 233.

³⁰⁸ Leo Kanner, "The children haven't read those books: reflections on differential diagnosis" (1969), p. 3; This syndrome was identified in Franklin and Vitale, "Children with circumscribed interest patterns" (1954).

³⁰⁹ Hans Asperger, "Die 'Autistischen Psychopathen'" (1944), p. 121: "eine Insuffizienz gerade den alltäglichen Anforderungen des praktischen Lebens gegenüber". English translation: p. 77. Kanner, in a paper written with two co-authors, later observed in persons with autism in their 20's and 30's "the obsessive rumination of specific topics (music, mathematics, history, chemistry, astronomy, wild life, foreign languages, etc." Leo Kanner, Alejandro Rodriguez and Barbara Ashenden, "How far can autistic children go in matters of social adaptation?" (1972), p. 31.

³¹⁰ Asperger, "Die 'Autistischen Psychopathen'" (1944), p. 102: "Wie alle diese Kinder, war auch Harro gerade bei den alltäglichen kleinen Verrichtungen, z. B. beim Waschen, besonders ungeschickt – und auch widerwillig." English translation: p. 57.

³¹¹ Asperger, "Die 'Autistischen Psychopathen'" (1944), p. 104: "auch selbständig zu essen habe er erst vor kurzem gelernt, immer noch sei er dabei sehr unappetitlich, schmiere mit dem Essen herum". English translation: p. 59.

³¹² Asperger, "Die 'Autistischen Psychopathen'" (1944), p. 86: "war lange besonders ungeschickt und unselbständig, erlernte die praktischen Verrichtungen des Alltagslebens sehr spät und schwer". English translation: p. 39.

with autism tend to have “two left feet”.³¹³ Elsewhere, we find the observation that autistic children promptly become angry when confronted with the practical demands of everyday reality, such as getting a haircut and getting their nails clipped.³¹⁴ In yet another paper, Asperger specified that autistic children are “impractical” both “motorically and ideationally” and that difficulties with everyday demands often lead to conflicts within the family.³¹⁵

Asperger explained such difficulties as restrictions of a child’s motor action, due to a lack of integration of the upper motor neurons (which afford purposeful muscle movement) with more primitive functions such as reflexes.

As the flip side of such restrictions of expected behaviour, Asperger described an enlargement of unexpected behaviour. Asperger found that ‘autistic psychopaths’ often show simple stereotypical movements and handle things in a repetitive way.³¹⁶ Whereas “in normal actions the methods and goals change continuously and are becoming more and more successful”, stereotypic behaviours “have an uncanny mechanical and empty quality”.³¹⁷ For example, autistic children would make the same movement again and again, would spin objects around, would play with the same toy all the time, or would cling to specific habits. A case in point is Fritz who sometimes suddenly began “to beat himself rhythmically on the thighs, or clap loudly on the table, hit the wall, strike another person, or hop around in the hall”.³¹⁸ In sum, Asperger found that autistic children develop behaviours that stand on their own rather than being integrated into a wider purposeful and goal-directed pattern of behaviour.

³¹³ Asperger, "Bild und soziale Wertigkeit der autistischen Psychopaten" (1950), p. 259: “beim An- und Ausziehen, Waschen und Essen, Binden van Knoten und Schleifen, usw.”, “sie haben zwei linke Füße”

³¹⁴ Asperger, "Autistisches Verhalten im Kindesalter" (1960), p. 58.

³¹⁵ Asperger, "Das autitische Kind und seine Probleme" (1963), p. 248: “apraktisch wie es ist (motorisch sowohl wie ideatorisch)”.

³¹⁶ Asperger, "Die ‘Autistischen Psychopaten’" (1944), p. 51.

³¹⁷ Asperger, "Autistisches Verhalten im Kindesalter" (1960), p. 62: “Bei normalem Handeln wandeln sich ununterbrochen Methoden und Ziel, werden standig vollkommener, stereotypes Geschehen aber hat eine unheimliche Automatik und Leere an sich.”

³¹⁸ Asperger, "Die ‘Autistischen Psychopaten’" (1944), p. 88: “plötzlich begann er, sich rhythmisch

auf die Schenkel zu schlagen, oder laut klatschend auf den Tisch, gegen die Wand zu schlagen, oder auf eine andere Person loszuschlagen, oder im Saal herumzuhüpfen, ganz ohne jede Rücksicht auf das Staunen der anderen”. English translation: p. 43.

3.1.3 Restriction and enlargement in affectivity

Asperger sometimes suggested that autistic children were less attached to the objects around them and were less interested in them. For example, he said of Harro that he “seems distant from things and people” and of autistic children in general that they maintain “a distance from concrete things”.³¹⁹ Similarly, he said that autistic children “do not notice the things around them at all, for example, they do not play with toys”.³²⁰ At other times, Asperger proposed that they may actually be *more* attached to things. He often returned to two examples of such hyper affectivity with regard to things.

The first example is what he called *fetishism*: he found that autistic children often have a strong emotional bond to specific objects, e.g. certain toys.³²¹ Asperger saw children who were so attached to a wooden block or a doll that they would not lose sight of it for a moment and could not eat or sleep without it being present.³²² Similarly, Ernst demanded that certain objects were always in the same place.³²³

The second example is homesickness. Usually when children were admitted to the department for weeks, they would get homesick at first, but would then adapt to their new milieu. In contrast, autistic children remained homesick all the time and could not get used to their new environment. They were almost obsessively attached to “the things and habits of their home environment”.³²⁴

All things considered, then, it seems Asperger believed that autistic children may at times appear cool and emotionless, while at other times their emotions rather seem exceptionally strong.

³¹⁹ Asperger, "Die 'Autistischen Psychopathen'" (1944), pp. 98, 117: “den Dingen und Menschen sehr fern scheint”, “Abstand von den konkreten Dingen”. English translation: pp. 52, 74

³²⁰ Asperger, "Die 'Autistischen Psychopathen'" (1944), p. 126: “sie nehmen die Dinge der Umwelt überhaupt nicht zur Kenntnis, nehmen etwa an Spielsachen gar keinen Anteil”. English translation: p. 81.

³²¹ Asperger, "Bild und soziale Wertigkeit der autistischen Psychopathen" (1950), p. 262; idem, "Autistisches Verhalten im Kindesalter" (1960), p. 60; idem, "Zur Differentialdiagnose des kindlichen Autismus" (1968), p. 142; idem, "Formen des Autismus" (1974), p. 1012.

³²² Asperger, "Die 'Autistischen Psychopathen'" (1944), p. 126.

³²³ Ibid., p. 104.

³²⁴ Ibid., p. 127: “eine ans Zwangsneurotische grenzende Bindung an die Dinge und Gewohnheiten des häuslichen Milieus”. English translation: p. 83.

3.1.4 Restriction and enlargement in perception

Asperger did not put much emphasis on sensory differences, but he did acknowledge that they occur in autistic children. For example, he observed in some autistic children a strong aversion to the sensation of “sand, silk, wadding and chalk”; some could not stand “the roughness of new undershirts, or plugged socks”.³²⁵ In addition to such hypersensitivities, he found hyposensitivities. He encountered children who rejected blunt foods, such as milk and vegetables, while being partial to foods with strong tastes, such as sour pickles – as if they needed strong sensation to be pulled into the world.³²⁶ Asperger also described a seven-year-old boy who “would not stop staring at the fat spots in his soup, which highly interested him – he would look at them, move them about, blow at them; clearly the changing forms became lively and significant to him”.³²⁷

3.2 Conceptualizing the non-social symptoms of autistic psychopathy

In the previous section we have seen that Asperger was confronted with children who showed not only social but also non-social peculiarities, especially in four domains: learning, movement, affectivity and perception. In this section, I will take up the question what concepts Asperger used to describe such non-social differences.

To describe the non-social symptoms of autistic psychopathy, Asperger initially used the concept of contact. The strongest indication that Asperger did not restrict his conception of contact to social contact is this sentence from his monograph: “We consider the essential and fundamental disorder a restriction of personal contact to things and persons”.³²⁸ Hence, the object of contact – who

³²⁵ Asperger, "Die 'Autistischen Psychopathen'" (1944), p. 124-5: “viele dieser Kinder haben eine bis zu abnormen Graden gehende Abneigung gegen bestimmte Berührungsempfindungen, etwa für Samt, Seide, Watte, Kreide, sie vertragen nicht die Rauigkeit neuer Hemden, gestopfter Strümpfe”. English translation: p. 80.

³²⁶ Asperger, "Autistisches Verhalten im Kindesalter" (1960), p. 59; idem, "Die 'Autistischen Psychopathen'" (1944), p. 124.

³²⁷ Asperger, "Die 'Autistischen Psychopathen'" (1944), p. 122: “Ein 7jähriger autistischer Knabe hatte schwere Konflikte beim Essen, weil er nicht aufhörte, die Fettaggen seiner Suppe, die ihn so sehr interessierten, zu betrachten, hin- und herzuschieben oder – zu blasen – sichtlich wurden ihm die wechselnden Formen lebendig und bedeutsam”. English translation: p. 78.

³²⁸ Asperger, *Heilpädagogik: Einführung in die Psychopathologie des Kindes für Ärzte, Lehrer, Psychologen, Richter und Fürsorgerinnen* (1952), p. 166: “Für die wesentliche Grundstörung

or what a person does or does not make contact with – need not be other persons but may equally be other kinds of animals and even inanimate things. Then, after a colon, follows the definition which Asperger already offered in his post-doctoral thesis: “While humans normally live in uninterrupted interactions with the environment [Umwelt], constantly reacting to it, in ‘autistics’ such relationships are severely disturbed, restricted”.³²⁹ This suggests that Asperger did not use the term ‘environment’ in a narrowly social sense, but in its broader biological sense of all that surrounds an animal and is relevant to it.

That does not mean that Asperger considered social and non-social contact as being equally affected by autistic psychopathy. On the contrary, he stated that the autistic contact disorder mostly affects children’s contact with people and not so much their contact with things:

[E]ven autistics, whose relationships to other people are so disturbed, have often, even in severe cases, relatively intact relationships to things [...]: while they are not concerned with the people around them, one can definitely interest them in toys [...]; in autistic children, even those whose are most

halten wir eine Einschränkung des persönlichen Kontaktes zu Dingen und Menschen”. Third edition: p. 177.

The inclusive phrase “contact to things” did not yet occur in *Die „Autistischen Psychopathen”* (1944). Asperger added it when he reworked this thesis to a shorter chapter in the 1952 edition of his monograph – and he retained it in the 1956 and 1961 editions. However, even in *Die „Autistischen Psychopathen”* Asperger did write about “relationships with things, animals and other people”, suggesting that they are forms of contact similar in kind: through these forms of contact a child expresses higher feelings (at p. 125: “Beziehungen zu Dingen, Tieren und anderen Menschen”. English translation: p. 80). In other words, Asperger already suggested that children ordinarily do not only develop affective relations with people but also with non-human animals and inanimate things. In addition, he suggested that children with autism not only affectively but also rationally relate differently to both living and inanimate beings. For example, when he claimed that autistic children are better in abstraction he did not confine this claim to their contact with persons, but used the more generic term ‘things’: they have a greater “distance from concrete things [Dingen]”, that is, a greater “distance from the individual thing [Einzelding]”; in contrast, non-autistic children are better in “sticking to a singular thing [einzelne Ding]” (“Die ‘Autistischen Psychopathen’”, p. 107-108; English translation: p. 74). At the end of his career, Asperger described such behaviour as “shutting oneself off from the external world, from people and things, and withdrawing in one’s self”. (“Probleme des kindlichen Autismus”, p. 10: “er muß sich weitgehend gegen die äußere Welt, gegen Menschen und Dinge abschirmen, abschließen, muß in sich gehen”)

³²⁹ Hans Asperger, “Die ‘Autistischen Psychopathen’” (1944), p. 84: “Während der Mensch normalerweise in ununterbrochenen Wechselbeziehungen mit der Umwelt lebt, ständig auf sie reagierend, sind diese bei den ‘Autistischen’ beträchtlich gestört, eingeengt”. English translation: p. 38.

abnormal, 'objects relations' are not nearly so disturbed as their relations to other human beings [...].³³⁰

Asperger suggested that this is so because relationships with things merely requires contact with the emotional-instinctive layer of *your own* personality, as things do not have emotions. In contrast, in relating to other persons it is essential to make contact to your own emotional-instinctive layer as well as to those of *others*: there are emotions involved on both sides.

When Asperger introduced the concept of 'activity', in 1952, he found that most non-social symptoms were better described in terms of activity. However, even then, certain non-social symptoms could still be described as differences in contact.

A case in point is gazing. Observing the gaze of autistic children, he saw that they not only refrained from eye contact with people, but also had peripheral vision when looking at inanimate things. For example, he said of Fritz: "He only seems to brush people and things with short, 'peripheral' looks".³³¹ Like Fritz, Harro often stared into the void as if he was not really there and this affected not only his contact with other people but also his contact with things. Similarly, Asperger said of Ernst's gaze: "[it] looks completely lost, attached to nothing, does not hold on to things, is usually directed far into the distance".³³² In the discussion, he concluded: "Hardly ever does the gaze hold on to a particular thing, to a particular human being".³³³

³³⁰ Asperger, "Autistisches Verhalten im Kindesalter" (1960), p. 61: "Und gerade die Autistischen mit ihren so gestörten menschlichen Beziehungen haben oft, auch in hochgradig abnormen Fällen, relative intakte Beziehungen zu Dingen, nun wirklich 'Objekten' erhalten: während sie sich um die Menschen ihrer Umgebung überhaupt nicht kümmern, sind sie für Spielzeug, besonders solches mit starkem 'Aufforderungscharakter', durchaus zu interessieren; ja sind von da aus in gewissem Grade zu gewinnen. [...] bei autistischen Kindern, auch bei den abnormsten, sind die 'Objektbeziehungen' lange nicht so hochgradig gestört wie die von Thymopsyche zu Thymopsyche gehenden mitmenschlichen beziehungen."

³³¹ Asperger, "Die 'Autistischen Psychopathen'" (1944), p. 87: "Menschen und Dinge scheint er nur mit kurzen, 'peripheren' Blicken zu streifen." English translation: p. 42.

³³² Asperger, "Die 'Autistischen Psychopathen'" (1944), p. 105: "Wieder ist der Blick sehr charakteristisch, der ganz verloren wirkt, an nichts haftet, die Dinge nicht packt, meist weit in die Ferne gerichtet ist." English translation: p. 60.

³³³ Asperger, "Die 'Autistischen Psychopathen'" (1944), p. 112: "Kaum je haftet der Blick wach auf einem bestimmten' Ding, auf einem bestimmten Menschen". In keeping with his dualistic view of autism, Asperger added that in spite of this children with autism "perceive and process so much

Other symptoms that could still be described in terms of contact were fetishism, homesickness, and special interests. They do not involve purposeful motor activity, but rather involve being open only and more intensely to a specific part of the world. Apparently, Asperger would only call *acting on* an interest ‘activity’.

Asperger’s take on the non-social symptoms of autism changed around 1952 – it is unclear why. Three years earlier, he had already proposed that for autistic children not merely contact, but also purposeful behaviour is difficult. However, at that time he did not yet use the term ‘activity’ to describe such behaviour: He said that “[f]inding a relation to the environing situation, being effective in the world, involves motor action” – he added that this is “very difficult for autistic children, due to who they are”.³³⁴ In 1952 he introduced for such motor action the term *activity*. He distinguished between behaviour through which children merely relate to the world (contact) and behaviour through which they intervene in the world, changing their environment, in reaction to stimuli or spontaneously (activity). He began to find the latter term more fitting for several non-social symptoms. For example, difficulties with dressing oneself clearly involves purposeful and conscious motor control and would therefore fall in the domain of activity, not contact. Here is how Asperger described this activity disorder:

We are convinced that there is a connection between the thymic disorder in these children, as described by observers, and their aberrant activity, at both the reactive and the spontaneous level. In normal children, their skills are gradually further perfected as soon as their pyramidal tract is fully developed, with each step being at a higher level than the last; in this way not only the requirements of the particular situation are answered, also the spontaneous activity [...] of [such] human beings, who are open-to-the-

of the world” (p. 113: “und daß sie dann doch, wie bei majachen Gelegenheiten zutage kommt, soviel von der Welt wahrnehmen und verarbeiten”.

³³⁴ Asperger, "Bild und soziale wertigkeit der autistischen Psychopaten" (1950), p. 259: “Beziehung finden zur Umweltsituation, Wirken in der Welt geht über die motorische Aktion. Even das aber ist den autistischen Kindern durch ihr Wesen sehr erschwert”,

world, makes them establish ever firmer roots in reality [...] – how different is the behaviour of autistic children.³³⁵

In the previous chapter we have seen that in Asperger's view the personality develops dialectically, starting from integration, moving through a stage of differentiation and ideally culminating in re-integration. Autistic children remain 'stuck' at the second stage, leaving them with an enlargement of differentiation and a restriction of (re)-integration. Now, because most non-social symptoms are disturbances of activity, it is important to add that a child's motor development follows these same stages. Older patterns of motor activity are not discarded but retained and integrated into ever more complex functions. Personality disorders arise when a child remains stuck at one of these three dialectical stages. In autistic children, there is an excess of differentiation: functions differentiate (which is a good thing in itself) but fail to re-integrate into a new seamless whole, of a higher order. Specifically, their upper motor neurons (muscle movement) and their epicritic neurons (skin sensibility) are not properly integrated with more primitive functions, such as reflexes.

3.3 The history of Asperger's conception of autistic contact disorders

We have seen that Hans Asperger developed his theory of autistic psychopathy in response to social as well as non-social differences, particularly in learning, movement, affectivity and perception. It remains to be seen how in making sense of these clinical experiences Asperger made use of conceptual tools developed by other scholars. Thus, I will now discuss the conceptual history of his theory, focussing on his idea of an autistic *contact disorder*.

³³⁵ Adapted from a professional translation. Asperger, "Autistisches Verhalten im Kindesalter" (1960), p. 62: "Mit dieser Störung der thymischen Qualitäten dieser Kinder steht unserer Überzeugung nach auch die von allen Beobachtern als besonders beschriebene *Abartigkeit der Aktivität* in Zusammenhang, sowohl der reaktiven wie der spontanen. Ganz anders als beim normalen Kind, bei dem sich, sobald nur die Pyramidenbahn ausgereift ist, das Handeln stufe für Stufe zu immer größerer Vollkommenheit entfaltet, wobei jeder folgende Moment schon um ein Stück höher steht als der vergangene, wobei sowohl die die Anforderungen der jeweiligen Situation durch Leistung beantwortet werden, wie auch das spontane urhebende gerade beim jungen Kind unerschöpflich quellende Handeln dieses 'weltoffene' Wesen Mensch immer fester in der Wirklichkeit Wurzeln schlagen läßt und es zugleich über die Welt erhebt – ganz anders ist es um die Aktivität der Autistischen bestellt."

3.3.1 Eugen Bleuler: the source of the term 'autism'

In the previous chapter, we have seen that Asperger could not derive his concept of 'contact' from child and developmental psychology but had to borrow concepts from adult psychiatry. Because Asperger borrowed the term 'autism' from Eugen Bleuler, who introduced it to describe a symptom of schizophrenia in adolescents and adults, one might think that Bleuler was the most important source of his conception of contact. I do not think that is the case, however. Then again, Asperger did see some similarities between his and Bleuler's idea, and that is why he decided to use Bleuler's term.

Bleuler coined the noun 'autism' and the adjective 'autistic' while writing *Dementia preacox oder Gruppe der Schizophrenien*, his now famous book on the schizophrenia's. However, as this book did not appear until the summer of 1911, the first time he made the terms public was on 6 August 1910, in his paper on the theory of schizophrenic negativism. He described a group of patients with schizophrenia who were "highly autistic", i.e. turned away from reality".³³⁶

Central to this idea of turning away was Bleuler's proposal that autistic patients want to protect certain complexes, i.e. (unconscious) parts of the self that are split off from the ego, from being brought into contact with reality. In this state of isolation, any influence from outside, even the very idea of reality, would feel like an intrusion. "They want to be with themselves without being disturbed, and it can annoy them a lot even when the attendant just comes into the room to bring food."³³⁷ They evade questions relating to their complexes. In addition to this passive isolation, they also avoid influencing the external world through their own actions. They avoid at all cost being drawn back to the external world or establishing a relation to the world. Taken together, this passive and active withdrawal forms the first aspect of Bleuler's autism. I will call it the *isolational* aspect, a term not used by Bleuler.

³³⁶ Eugen Bleuler, "Zur Theorie des schizophrenen Negativismus" (1910). p. 185-186: "Alle diese Kranken sind hochgradig autistisch,**) d. h. der Wirklichkeit abgewandt; sie haben sich in ein Traumleben zurückgezogen, oder der wesentliche Teil ihres zerspaltenen Ich wenigstens lebt in einer Welt subjektiver Vorstellungen und Wünsche, so daß die Wirklichkeit ihnen nur Störungen bringen kann".

³³⁷ Ibid., p. 185: "Sie wollen ungestört mit sich selbst sein, und da kann es sie im höchsten Grade ärgern, wenn nur der Wärter ins Zimmer kommt, um das Essen zu bringen."

In his negativism paper, Bleuler already hinted that autistic isolation need not be total or even pathological. He pointed out that in patients with paranoia “the autism is not complete” so that they “feel the obstacles to their desires and convert them into paranoia.”³³⁸ In these patients, relations to reality are not completely absent, but are merely *reduced*. In the same vein, he pointed out that even healthy people “have the tendency to withdraw, when in their dealings with other people, there are too many things that stir up their pain, i.e. are connected to their complex”.³³⁹

In addition to the isolational aspect, Bleuler’s concept of autism involved what I will dub its *orientational* aspect – again a term not used by Bleuler.³⁴⁰ Bleuler first described it in his schizophrenia book, arguing that the thinking of autistic patients is not realistic but is oriented by wishes and fears. More precisely, he said that their thinking becomes unrealistic only insofar it deals with realities that threaten to contradict their split-off complexes.³⁴¹ Thus, autistic patients may use objects, navigate spaces, and talk to people without any problem, taking into account the constraints and demands of reality, but when they encounter something that threatens to interfere with their complexes they begin to project the ideas and emotions related to those complexes onto the reality they cannot face. Such projection is really just isolation with other means: it protects their complexes from coming into contact with realities that may disturb them. Now there is a relationship to the ‘external’ world, but only because it has been transformed into what the patients want or fear. This distorted and partial relationship to the external world is clear in the following example offered by Bleuler:

³³⁸ Ibid., p. 186, footnote: “und bei Paranoiden, die, weil der Autismus kein vollständiger ist, die Hindernisse ihrer Wünsche empfinden und in Verfolgungswahn umsetzen und demgemäß reagieren”.

³³⁹ Ibid., p. 186: “Auch Gesunde sorgen dafür, daß ihre Lebenswunde nicht berührt wird, und auch sie haben im Unglück vielfach die Tendenz, sich zurückzuziehen, weil es in der Berührung mit andern Menschen zu vielerlei gibt, was die Schmerzen aufwühlt, d. h. Assoziationen zum Komplex hat.”

³⁴⁰ On this distinction, see Adolf Friedemann’s remark in response to Asperger’s paper “Autistisches Verhalten im Kindesalter”, reported in Rolf Castell et. al, *Geschichte der Kinder- und Jugendpsychiatrie in Deutschland in den Jahren 1937 bis 1961* (2003), p. 138: “Bleuler’s original concept of autism not only included a turning away from reality, an alienation from the environment, but also a form of thinking that was not oriented by reality and logic”.

³⁴¹ p. 52, note 1: “Der *Sens de la realite* fehlt dem Schizophrenen nicht ganz, er versagt nur für diejenigen Dinge, die sich gerade in Widerspruch gestellt haben zu seinen Komplexen.”

For ten years a patient has from time to time been giving me notes, with always the same four words that mean that he has been illegally interned; he doesn't mind giving me half a dozen pieces of paper at once; when you confront him, he does not understand how useless this is. At the same time, this patient has a good judgment of others and works independently in the department.³⁴²

To describe this split orientation, Bleuler introduced the distinction between 'realistic thinking' and 'autistic thinking'.³⁴³ In schizophrenic patients, both forms co-exist: when their complexes are not threatened their thinking is oriented by the constraints and demands of reality, but when their complexes are threatened their thinking becomes oriented by the wishes and fears related to their complex. Like with autistic isolation, Bleuler believed that autistic thinking was not necessarily pathological.

Bleuler returned to the topic of autism in his textbook, which had its first edition in 1916, and its fifth edition in 1930. This fifth edition is the text Asperger used: when he borrowed the term 'autism' he referred to the schizophrenias section (IX) of the fifth edition of Bleuler's handbook.³⁴⁴ Here is how Bleuler described 'autism' there:

Schizophrenics loose contact with reality, in mild cases inconspicuously, here and there, in extreme cases completely. One patient believes that

³⁴² Eugen Bleuler, *Dementia praecox or the group of schizophrenias* (1911), p. 25: "Ein Patient gibt mir seit zehn Jahren von Zeit zu Zeit Zettel, auf denen immer die gleichen vier Worte stehen, die bedeuten, daß er unrechtmäßig interniert ist; es macht ihm nichts aus, mir gleich ein halbes Dutzend der Zettel ugleich zu geben; das Unsinnige begreift er nicht, wenn man ihn zur Rede stellt. Dabei hat dieser Kranke ein gutes Urteil über die anderen und arbeitet selbständig auf der Abteilung."

³⁴³ Eugen Bleuler, *Dementia praecox or the group of schizophrenias* (1911), p. 55: "Wir haben also ein realistisches und ein autistisches Denken zu unterscheiden, und zwar beim gleichen Patienten nebeneinander. Im realistischen Denken orientiert sich der Kranke ganz gut in Zeit und Raum der Wirklichkeit; er richtet danach seine Handlungen, so weit sie uns normal erscheinen. Dem autistischen Denken entspringen die Wahnideen, die groben Verstöße gegen Logik und Anstand u. dgl. krankhafte Symptome."

³⁴⁴ Bleuler spoke of a group of multiple schizophrenias. Recall that George Frankl took up Eugen Bleuler's term 'affective rapport'. Bleuler used this very term in the schizophrenias section of his handbook, just two pages before he introduced the term autism (p. 285). In spite of this, Asperger used Bleuler's term 'autism' not 'rapport'. This is a significant choice, but I can only speculate as to its motivation. A possible reason is that autism was the more general term, as 'affective rapport' was used specifically for therapeutic contact.

the doctor will marry her. Every day he tells her the opposite; that has no effect, however. Another patient sings in a concert but carries on far too long. She does not mind when the audience becomes noisy and when she is finally finished, she returns to her seat satisfied.³⁴⁵

These examples, again, illustrate that Bleuler was not simply talking about a complete isolation from contact with the environment. The patient who believes that the doctor will marry her, is still in contact with her doctor, in the sense that she talks and listens to him, but has lost contact with him, in the sense that she projects onto him her own, unrealistic, fantasy and does not take into account the real content of what he says. Similarly, the patient who sings during a concert, is well aware of the existence of her audience but carries on far too long because she projects her wishes onto the audience; her thinking is not oriented by the real content of the audience's preferences.

That Asperger used Bleuler's *term* autism, does not necessarily mean that he simply took over Bleuler's *concept* of autism.³⁴⁶ In Asperger's

³⁴⁵ Eugen Bleuler, *Lehrbuch der Psychiatrie*, 5th edition (1930), p. 287: ““Die Schizophrenen verlieren den Kontakt mit der Wirklichkeit, die leichten Fälle ganz unauffällig da und dort, die schwereren vollständig. Eine Patientin glaubt, der Arzt wolle sie heiraten. Er sagt ihr täglich das Gegenteil; das ist aber ganz wirkungslos. Eine andere singt in einem Anstaltkonzert, aber viel zu lange. Das Publikum lärmt; das ficht sie nicht an, und da sie endlich fertig ist, geht sie sehr befriedigt an ihren Platz. Die Kranken stellen uns schweiflich und mündlich unzählige Begehren, auf die sie überhaupt keine Antwort erwarten, obgleich es sich oft um die nächstliegenden Bedürfnisse handelt, wie die Entlassung. Sie verlangen hinaus, drücken täglich hunderte von Malen die Türklinke, und wenn man die Tür aufmacht, fällt es ihnen nicht ein, fortzugehen. Sie verlangen dringend einen bestimmten Besuch; wenn er da ist, kümmern sie sich nicht um ihn.” This passage is unaltered since the first edition, see *Lehrbuch der Psychiatrie*, 1st edition (1916), p. 286.

³⁴⁶ It seems that in adopting the term ‘autistic’ Asperger actually thought of a more general range of symptoms of schizophrenia than what Bleuler called autism. This is suggested by the way Asperger introduced the term ‘autism’, both in *Die „Autistischen Psychopathen“* and later in all editions of his textbook. To see this, it is essential to know that Bleuler distinguished between schizophrenic disturbances of ‘simple’ functions (e.g. Association and affect), and schizophrenic disturbances of composite functions (resulting from the combined effect of the disturbances of several simple functions). For Bleuler ‘autism’ meant a disturbance of only one of the composite functions, but when Asperger introduced the term ‘autism’ he quoted phrases pertaining to disturbances of several functions, i.e. attention, the will, and action. For example, Asperger quoted Bleuler’s phrase “the intensity and extensity of attention are disturbed”, as well as his term “passive attention” – ideas which Bleuler introduced in his description of attention, a different composite function than autism. Cf. Asperger, “Die ‘Autistischen Psychopathen’” (1944), pp. 84, 95, 106; Eugen Bleuler, *Lehrbuch der Psychiatrie*, 5th edition (1930), pp. 287, 288: “Um so auffallender ist, daß die passive Aufmerksamkeit meist nicht nur ungestört os, sonder tätiger scheint als normal”, “Im letzteren Falle sind sowohl Intensität als Extensität der Aufmerksamkeit gestört”.

interpretation, Bleuler most of all showed that the personality of adults with schizophrenia is organized through and through by “a progressive process of losing contact” and a “blocking of relations between ego and external world”.³⁴⁷ These verbs ‘loosing’ and ‘blocking’ both indicate a progressive loss of contact, after an initial state of good contact. In contrast, In Asperger’s children there was no such progressive process, to the contrary: if there was a progression it was towards more (or rather, better) contact not less. Thus, Asperger took up the isolational aspect of Bleuler’s concept.

Then again, Asperger developed a different idea of autistic isolation: he called children ‘autistic’ when *their whole self* was isolated, not just certain split-off complexes. Moreover, in describing what these children were isolated from, Asperger did not use the epistemic concept of reality, but rather used biological concepts: he said that they are not part of a larger organism or environment.³⁴⁸ This signals that he was talking about a functional rather than an epistemic isolation.

Neither did Asperger take over the orientational aspect of Bleuler’s concept of autism. He did not suggest that autistic children are oriented by wishes and fears but by original experiences as opposed to social constraints and expectations. Indeed, he thought that their distance from other people allowed them to develop an original and conceptually advanced understanding of the external world.

3.3.2 Personality typologies: the source of Asperger’s pervasive conception of contact

Recall that understanding children with autism for Asperger was a special case of understanding the human personality in general. This suggests the possibility that personality theories of his time were also important to Asperger.

Other quotes came from Bleuler’s description of the will, and action – also different functions than autism. Asperger quoted these phrases *as if they were part of Bleuler’s definition of autism*. This suggests that when Asperger talked about autism, he had in mind not Bleuler’s concept of autism specifically, but more generally all the composite symptoms of schizophrenia described in his handbook. Bleuler did not include these other symptoms in his conception of ‘autism’.

³⁴⁷ Asperger, "Die ‘Autistischen Psychopathen’" (1944), p. 85: prozeßhaft fortschreitenden Kontaktverlust; “der Absperrung der Beziehungen zwischen Ich und Außenwelt”.

³⁴⁸ Asperger, "Die ‘Autistischen Psychopathen’" (1944), p. 84

Indeed, his writings offer several indications that personality theories were the most important source for developing the idea of contact with the environment.

In 1942, Asperger mentioned his intention “to expound the usefulness of the concept of the type, especially for certain forms of contact disorders, i.e. for Autistic Psychopaths”.³⁴⁹ This confirms that his work on autism was part of a broader project of diagnosing personality types. Moreover, Asperger’s presentation of the autistic type in *Die „Autistischen Psychopathen”* was framed by a discussion of the proper form of personality typologies. This is obscured to English readers by Uta Frith’s unfortunate decision not to translate the introduction. For including the introduction would have shown that Asperger started with a critique of existing personality typologies, arguing that they are lifeless systems that do not do justice to the living human being.

Despite this critique, Asperger’s thesis ended with pointing to a similarity between autistic psychopathy and several existing personality types. In particular, Asperger proposed that “there are definite similarities” between “the schizothymics of Kretschmer, certain forms of disintegration of E. R. Jaensch and above all with Jung’s ‘introverted thinking type’”.³⁵⁰ Important in this proposal is not that Asperger referred to these three scholars in particular, for he did not take over the specifics of their typologies³⁵¹ and emphasized that they were developed for adults rather than for children.³⁵² To Asperger, not the specifics of these three types were most important but the general feature they have in common: they differ from their opposites in involving a lack or distortion *of relations to the environment*.³⁵³ Indeed, a similar observation was made

³⁴⁹ Asperger, “‘Jugendpsychiatrie’ und ‘Heilpädagogik’” (1942), p. 354; here, Asperger specifically speaks of *interpersonal* contact.

³⁵⁰ Asperger, “Die ‘Autistischen Psychopathen’” (1944), p. 64: “Da finden sieh gewisse Ähnlichkeiten zwischen den Autistischen Psychopathen und den Schizothymen Kretschmers, weiter mit gewissen Formen der Desintegrierten von E. R. Jaensch und vor allem mit dem ‘introvertierten Denktypus’ von Jung.”

³⁵¹ In the case of Jung, these specifics include the ideas (which he shared with Freud and Abraham) that (1) extraversion and introversion involve the conscious withdrawal from or investment of libido in ‘objects’ and (2) that this conscious attitude is normally compensated for by the opposite movement of the libido in the unconsciousness. Specific to Jaensch’s theory were the ideas that (1) integration involves the interpenetration of perception and representation, and (2) that their disintegration is characteristic of Jews and foreigners. Specific to Kretschmer was the idea that a certain physique (constitutional type) is associated with a certain personality and with certain mental disorders (psychopathological types). None of these ideas were taken up by Asperger.

³⁵² Asperger, “Bild und soziale wertigkeit der autistischen Psychopaten” (1950), p. 257.

³⁵³ Asperger, “Autistisches Verhalten im Kindesalter” (1960), p. 53

in 1928 by Otto Tumlirz; he concluded that the basis of these three typologies is “the position of the ego vis-à-vis the external world”, which, like Asperger, he considered to be “one of the most general and important characteristics of the personality”.³⁵⁴

The most direct influence that does show up in Asperger’s work is Erich Jaensch’s opposition between the inner integration of psychological functions and the external integration or ‘coherence’ of the self with the environment.³⁵⁵ To elaborate, by inner ‘integration’ Jaensch meant the mutual interpenetration of perception and representation, allowing the person to function as a whole; isolation of these functions Jaensch called ‘desintegration’.³⁵⁶ By ‘coherence’, Jaensch meant that the organism forms a unity with the environment; the opposite is withdrawal (*Abspaltung*) from such relations, leading to isolation from the world.³⁵⁷

Asperger first mentioned Jaensch’s opposition of integrated and unintegrated types in 1942, criticizing such one-dimensional oppositions; he argued that although they have heuristic value they are forced and unconvincing,

³⁵⁴ Otto Tumlirz, *Probleme der Charakterologie* (1928), p. 20.

³⁵⁵ This opposition developed out of Jaensch early empirical research on ‘eidetic images’ (*Anschauungsbilder*): the re-occurrence of a previously seen image, in such a way that it is actually seen (not imagined), but from memory, with one’s eyes closed. For a good contemporary discussion of this phenomenon, and Jaensch’ early work, see Gordon W. Allport, “Eidetic imagery” (1924). After experimentally establishing their presence in some people but not in others, Jaensch explained such images as resulting from a high level of integration between perception and representation. The presence and absence of such integration later became the basis for his typology, which went through several stages and reformulations.

Jaensch initially distinguished between a B-type (for Basewoid), which was highly integrated and capable of experiencing eidetic images, and a T-type (for Tetanoid) which was not. See Erich R. Jaensch, “Die Eidetik und die typologische Forschungsmethode in ihrer Bedeutung für die Jugendpsychologie und Pädagogik, für die allgemeine Psychologie und die Psychophysiologie der menschlichen Persönlichkeit”, part I - III (1925).

Apparently under influence of Carl Jung’s distinction between introvert and extravert, Jaensch began to distinguish between inner integration (*Integration*) and outer integration (*Kohärenz*). Cf. Maria Anastasia Strauhal, *Kritische Untersuchung zur Jaensch’schen Integrationstypologie* (1941), p. 9. On this basis Jaensch developed a more complex typology, discerning 5 types differing in inner and outer integration. See Erich Jaensch et. al., *Über den Aufbau des Bewusstseins*, part 1 (1930).

³⁵⁶ He placed this opposition within the biological debate over ‘organism’ versus ‘mechanism’; this is where Asperger comes closest to Jaensch. Cf. Jaensch, “Die Eidetik und die typologische Forschungsmethode”, part III, p. 238.

³⁵⁷ Erich R. Jaensch, *Grundformen menschlichen Seins: mit Berücksichtigung ihrer Beziehungen zu Biologie und Medizin, zu Kulturphilosophie und Pädagogik* (1929), pp. 14, 16.

especially in children who are still developing.³⁵⁸ He repeated this critique in *Die 'Autistischen Psychopathen'*.³⁵⁹ This had changed in the 1952 edition of *Heilpädagogik*, where Asperger began to use Jaensch' opposition to describe his own ideas. In the section on contact, Asperger said that to describe "too much" contact – the opposite type of autistic psychopathy – "the term 'integration', introduced by E. R. Jaensch, seems fruitful".³⁶⁰ He elaborated by discussing the difference between Jaensch's terms (inner) integration and (external) integration or 'coherence'. Although Asperger certainly found something of value in Jaensch's work, it is also clear that Asperger gave the terms integration and coherence a more general meaning and developed the idea of 'integrated' and 'unintegrated' types as it suited his own theory.

More significant than his reference to specific authors is the geographical fact that Asperger situated his work on psychopathies within German, Austrian and Swiss personality typologies. His publications suggest that in the 1940's, Asperger worked through a whole range of personality typologies, i.e. those of Paul Schröder, Kurt Schneider, Ludwig Klages, Ernst Kretschmer, Carl Jung and Erich Jaensch. The approach of these German language authors was very different from the American approach.³⁶¹ Americans would approach the personality through standardized tests. They believed that a controlled, standardized, test could isolate a universal behavioural tendency. The strength of this behavioural tendency could then be determined by measuring the aggregate frequency of a person's reaction to the test. In contrast, European authors favoured qualitative methods. They focussed on complex behaviour in natural situations, which revealed a wide variety of factors, all of which had to be considered. Rather than statistical patterns they developed logical generalizations that reduced a wide range of phenomena to a single formula, which they called *types*.

³⁵⁸ Asperger, "'Jugendpsychiatrie' und 'Heilpädagogik'" (1942), p. 235: "So fruchtbar sich diese Einteilungsprinzipien als heuristisches Prinzip erwiesen habe [...] wirken solche Einteilungsversuche oft recht krampfhaft und nicht überzeuge."

³⁵⁹ pp. 77-78

³⁶⁰ (1952), p. 66: "Zur Beschreibung dieses Verhaltens erscheint uns der von E. R. JAENSCH eingeführte Begriff der 'Integriertheit' fruchtbar." Specifically, he referred to Erich R. Jaensch, *Grundformen menschlichen Seins* (1932).

³⁶¹ Philip E. Vernon, "The American v. the German methods of approach to the study of temperaments and personality" (1933).

In addition to this geographical difference, there was a disciplinary difference: almost all great typologists of the 20th century were psychiatrists (Jaensch being the exception).³⁶² The typologies they developed were not based on experimental research (nor aspired to be), but derived from clinical experience. Most of these typologists were practicing physicians, who in their medical work were confronted with a diversity of patients, who they then tried to classify in the service of diagnosis and treatment. In so doing, psychiatrists followed the footsteps of Emil Kraepelin, but whereas he classified disorders, they would classify personalities.

To properly understand Asperger's typological approach to development it is important to see what a personality type is and is not.³⁶³

First, personality types describe *the stable biological structure of individuals* as it persists through time, in relation to but relatively independent of environmental influences. This is clear in the autistic type as envisioned by Asperger: although relations to the environment are essential to it (contact and activity), Asperger believed that in the autistic type these relations are disturbed *in any environment*, and are more determined by the biological structure of the organism than by environmental influences. The underlying idea is that although an organism always interacts with its environment, some aspects of its structure are more dependent on and constituted by that interaction than others.

Second, a personality type does not describe a stable biological structure unique to a single individual, but a structure that is *shared among a group of individuals*. It is assumed that the members of a given species will not develop an infinite but rather a limited number of biological structures, so that highly similar structures will develop in different individuals. Indeed, underlying Asperger's idea of autistic psychopathy was the assumption that human personalities develop into a limited number of ways, depending on the kind and degree of harmony between integration and differentiation.

³⁶² See Herbert Shuey, "The fundamental principles of typology" (1937).

³⁶³ In doing so, I will follow Hebert Shuey, who in my view makes the most clear and convincing case for the use of personality typologies in psychiatry. See Herbert Shuey, *A typological approach to the study of human behavior* (1934); idem, "Recent trends in science and the development of modern typology" (1934); idem, "The fundamental principles of typology" (1937).

Third, a personality type is not a behavioural type: it does not mean to describe a uniform and stable set of behaviour, but rather *the underlying biological structure that forms the totality of the organism*. This structure can give rise to different, even opposite, behaviours, at different points in time. This last point was difficult to grasp for American psychologists, because they would mistakenly apply their idea of universal behavioural tendencies to the types proposed by European authors, assuming that the behavioural reaction of a given type must be the same all the time – of course it is then not difficult to discredit such ‘types’. Asperger was well aware of the diversity between and within autistic children, but his claim was that opposite behaviours can be two sides of the same coin. His proposal was that the various enlargements and restrictions characteristic of autistic behaviour result from a particular ‘autistic’ type of disbalance in the development of their personality, namely a disharmony in which the newer differentiated personality functions overshadow the older functions and are not reintegrated into a new whole.

3.3.3 Viennese influences

Vienna is, of course, the city of Freud and the birthplace of psychoanalysis. When the *Heilpädagogische Abteilung (Hp)* was founded, in 1913, Freud had already delivered and published his lectures on sexual theory and psychoanalysis. When Asperger joined the *Hp* in 1932, Freud was still living and working in Vienna and had published his best-known works. More generally, the *Wiener Psychoanalytische Vereinigung* had been around for 24 years. However, Neither Asperger nor his colleagues found psychoanalysis particularly helpful in their clinical work with children.

The first, most direct, source of influence on Asperger’s concept of autistic psychopathy were ideas developed at the *Heilpädagogische Abteilung*. I will turn to another of his colleagues later, but first consider the parallels between Asperger’s idea of contact and the ideas of his older colleague George Frankl (discussed in chapter 1), who published on the concept of ‘contact disorders’ prior to Asperger. It is unclear who influenced who and in what way precisely, but either way it is important to see how Asperger’s ideas compared to Frankl’s.

Recall that for Frankl, contact meant *communicative* contact: the exchange of feelings and ideas mediated by symbols. He emphasized that such symbols encode not only the factual content of what is communicated – what he called ‘logical speech. Non-verbal symbols, in particular, also encode the people that are involved and their feelings, as well as the wider contact situation in which any communication is always embedded –what Frankl called ‘affective speech’. Asperger’s conception of contact was broader than Frankl’s conception of contact, in several ways.

First, instead of Frankl’s concept of ‘affective speech’ Asperger used the broader concept of ‘expressive phenomena’, which he borrowed from Ludwig Klages. Whereas affective speech is not present in ‘opaque’ children (as they do not express emotion), expressive phenomena *are* present in such children. Asperger would say that even when children do not express emotion, they do express *something*. Moreover, Klages’ concept of ‘expressive phenomena’ not only included the symbols recognized by Frankl (mimicry, gestures, intonation and vegetative reactions) but also a person’s gaze, gait and handwriting. This broader idea allowed Asperger to also analyse expressive phenomena that are not merely communicative, but that are also present in the absence of communicative intent: a child who feels no need to communicate with another person, still looks and moves in a certain way.

Second, whereas Frankl focussed on what children with autism *lack*, Asperger also included their *strength*: an exceptionally good conceptual understanding of other people, things, and themselves. It is not just that Asperger considered to be a strength the logical speech which autistic children in Frankl’s view lacked; Asperger rather offered a different concept. Whereas Frankl was concerned with ‘logical speech’, which involves the communication of *facts* only, Asperger was concerned with ‘intelligence’, which can be used to analyse facts, but also to analyse feelings. Asperger defined intelligence by its abstraction from concrete particulars, not by a certain type of content. This is why Asperger *could* think the possibility that children with autism may be exceptionally good at describing their own feelings and the feelings of others. Asperger recognized this duality of autism, whereas Frankl did not.

Third, even though Frankl criticized crude stimulus-response behaviourism by emphasizing that autistic children are capable of intentional and

communicative acts, he was only concerned with overt behaviour, i.e. communicative exchanges through exterior signs. In contrast, Asperger stressed the interiority of autism, arguing that differences in contact are rooted in differences of the inner personality. In this way he embedded contact disorders within larger developmental types.

These differences in the conceptual frameworks of Frankl and Asperger were motivated by the different problems they addressed. Recall that Frankl tried to understand ‘false reactions’: the unusual response of some children to the commands of adults. Asperger discussed something similar but his framing of the problem was different.³⁶⁴ Whereas for Frankl the very point was to show that false reactions need not result from mischief, Asperger saw no contradiction in pointing to an autistic boy who had “malicious pleasure” in not following instructions, and did so with the intention “to irritate other people”.³⁶⁵ For Asperger, the point was rather to show the duality of autistic responses. To make this point, it was as important for him to show that certain responses of autistic children were bad, as it was to show that others are good.

Frankl’s other problem was that in ‘opaque’ children he could not deduce from their mimicry and intonation how they felt. This opacity problem is unique to a limited group of children, including children with autism. In contrast, Asperger felt that *all* human children are an enigma: unlike animals, human beings are difficult to understand, because each human personality is unique. Understanding *autistic* children is merely a special case of this general epistemological problem. Moreover, Asperger saw ‘opacity’ not as the absence of affective symbols, but as *a different class* of expressive phenomena, which no less reveal a person’s underlying personality as communicative expressions. He reinterpreted the problem on a higher level of abstraction: the problem is not how to understand the way children feel, but how to understand their personality. If autistic children seemed opaque to professionals (and here he suggests, but

³⁶⁴ Like Frankl, Asperger maintained that what allows small children to respond in the right way to adults is not that they consciously understand the *content* of their speech, but rather that they understand “what expresses itself in [their] intonation, mimicry and gestures” (“weil Sie instinktiv verstehen was sich im Ton der Worte, in Mimik und Gestik des Erziehers ausdrückt”). Like Frankl, Asperger found that in children with autism this understanding is disturbed, and he described the resulting behaviour in similar terms, as “abnormal responses” (“*abnorme Reaktionweisen*”). Asperger, *Das psychisch abnorme Kind* (1938), pp. 1315-16.

³⁶⁵ Asperger, “Das psychisch abnorme Kind”, p. 1315: “er hat eine boshafte Freude daran nicht zu folgen und anderen Menschen damit zu ärgern”.

never quite states, a critique of Frankl), this was only because they were insufficiently attuned to subtle differences in expressive phenomena.

In the first chapter we have seen that Frankl, in the 1950's, described a solitary state, opposed to the state of being-in-contact with other people. Towards the end of his career, Asperger began to make a similar distinction. Asperger began to say that all human beings can and sometimes do act in an 'autistic' way, most prominently in certain developmental stages (e.g. terrible twos) and under certain conditions (e.g. suffering). To distance oneself from one's environment is not just a disorder, but a basic "possibility of human existence": it is deeply rooted in human nature that any healthy person can both be "a self" and be "with other people".³⁶⁶ Similarly, any healthy human being "is not just part of the world, resonating with people and things, but is also a self, separating itself from the world and existing on itself".³⁶⁷ There is an essential difference, however. While in Frankl's work, the false reaction and opacity problems only came to the fore when autistic children were *among other people*, Hans Asperger found that autistic children relate differently to the non-social environment as well, and act differently even when they are solitary. On this expanded view, contact disorders do not just affect communication but, more fundamentally, a person's *contact with the world*.

In developing his positive understanding of Jaensch' conceptual opposition, a possible influence at the *Heilpädagogische Abteilung* is Asperger's colleague Josef Feldner. In 1955, Feldner's book on the developmental psychiatry of children came out, and in the 1956 edition of *Heilpädagogik* Asperger added a reference to this book.³⁶⁸ Asperger referred specifically to Feldner's opposition between 'homotomy' (*Homothomie*) and 'dichotomy' (*Dichotomie*)³⁶⁹ in which he found parallels to what Jaensch called 'integrated' and 'unintegrated'.³⁷⁰

³⁶⁶ Asperger, "Probleme des kindlichen Autismus" (1977), p. 9: "es lieft tief in Menschen begründet 'mitmenschlich' zu sein"; "Er is auch ein 'Selbst'".

³⁶⁷ Asperger, "Frühkindlicher Autismus" (1974), p. 2026; "Aber der Mensch ist nicht nur Teil der Welt, mitschwingend mit Menschen und Dingen, sondern er ist auch ein „Selbst“, in sich beruhend, sich abgrenzend von der Welt um ihn."

³⁶⁸ Josef Felnder, *Entwicklungspsychiatrie des Kindes: Aufbau und Zerfall der Persönlichkeit* (1955)

³⁶⁹ Asperger, *Heilpädagogik: Einführung in die Psychopathologie des Kindes für Ärzte, Lehrer, Psychologen, Richter und Fürsorgerinnen* (1952), pp. 55- 56.

³⁷⁰ Even though Feldner did not mention Jaensch by name, by he did refer to the idea of 'Eidetik' (a certain kind of image), which was central to Jaensch and his school. Moreover, he took over Jaensch' related idea that inner integration is a blending of perceptions and representations.

Although Feldner's book appeared three years after the first edition of *Heilpädagogik*, he and Asperger had been long-standing colleagues. Recall that they had co-authored a book review of Charlotte Bühler back in 1938.³⁷¹ Indeed, in the preface to his book, Josef Feldner thanked Asperger for his "years-long cooperation and many valuable suggestions". Asperger may have worked together with Feldner on Jaensch' typology, he may have found in Jaensch' work a convenient terminology to express ideas developed in his own department, or he may have gotten the idea directly from Jaensch himself. Either way, it is clear to me that a distinction similar to the ones used by Jaensch and Feldner became central to Asperger's conception of autistic psychopathy from 1952 onwards. It is also clear that he used these distinctions to develop his own ideas about what 'contact with' and 'relation to' the environment entail.³⁷²

3.4 The relationship of Hans Asperger to Leo Kanner's work

In the previous chapter, I already discussed Asperger's relationship to Georg Frankl, and in this chapter, I have added a comparison of their conceptions of contact. Now, in this section, I will discuss Asperger's relationship to Leo Kanner (see chapters 4 and 5), the other so-called 'founding father' of autism studies, postponing a comparison of their ideas to the next chapter, when we have developed an understanding of Kanner's work.

The first thing to note is that here is an asymmetry in their relationship, since Leo Kanner referred to Asperger's work just once, in passing in a book review, whereas Asperger consistently referred to Kanner's work after 1952.

Asperger's post-doctoral thesis was written in 1943, prior to Leo Kanner's first publication on autism and therefore could not have referred to Kanner's ideas. Neither did Asperger refer to Kanner in 1949 – the first occasion he read

Now, the opposition of homotomy and dichotomy was central to Feldner's first chapter, entitled *Relations to the environment*. He defined homotomy as the early developmental stage in which perception and representation are not yet separated and in which a child's *thymos* (instinct) "still forms a unity with the world of objects" (p. 2). Dichotomy, in contrast, is the stage in which conceptual representations are formed, separate from perceptions, and in which the subject separates itself from the object world. This is the same distinction that became central to Asperger's post-1952 theory of psychopathy.

³⁷¹ Hans Asperger and Josef Felnder, "Bemerkungen zu dem Buche 'Praktische Kinderpsychologie' von Prof. Charlotte Bühler" (1938).

³⁷² Asperger, *Heilpädagogik: Einführung in die Psychopathologie des Kindes für Ärzte, Lehrer, Psychologen, Richter und Fürsorgerinnen* (1952), pp. 66, 69.

a paper about ‘autistic psychopaths’ after 1944.³⁷³ Asperger first mentioned Leo Kanner’s in the first, 1952, edition of *Heilpädagogik*. Here, Asperger introduced Kanner at the end of his discussion of autism, in a section entitled ‘discussion with the literature’ – the same place where he referred (and did so already in his thesis) to other authors, such as Jaensch and Jung. Asperger did not yet mention Kanner’s term ‘infantile autism’.

In the first edition of *Heilpädagogik* Asperger spoke of “extensive agreement” between his and Kanner’s description (p. 191), in the second edition he found “much that is related” (p. 191), and in the third he found “many similarities” (p. 205). In the first two editions of *Heilpädagogik*, Asperger did not include a specific reference. He certainly could have. When the first edition came out (1952), Kanner had published six papers on early infantile autism, in American journals³⁷⁴, and had described the disorder in the second edition of his handbook *Child Psychiatry* (1948). At the time of the second edition of *Heilpädagogik* (1956) three more papers had followed.³⁷⁵ Even so, it was not until the third edition (1961) that Asperger would refer to a specific publication by Kanner. He referred to the same publication in an article from around that time.³⁷⁶ The publication in question was Kanner’s short paper *The Specificity of early infantile autism*. Kanner read this paper in September 1957 at the 2nd International Congress for Psychiatry in Zürich.³⁷⁷ The reason that Asperger referred to this paper must have been that it was printed with a German summary in the European journal *Acta Paedopsychiatrica*, in 1958.³⁷⁸ The paper has only four pages, and is thus an odd choice to cite as representative of Kanner’s views on autism, that is, if Asperger had read Kanner’s longer and more original papers. This poses the question how much of Kanner’s work Asperger had read at

³⁷³ The paper was published in 1950 as Asperger, "Bild und soziale Wertigkeit der Autistischen.

³⁷⁴ Leo Kanner, "Autistic disturbances of affective contact" (1943); idem, "early infantile autism" (1944); idem, "Irrelevant and metaphorical language in early infantile autism" (1946); idem, "Problems of nosology and psychodynamics of early infantile autism" (1949); idem, "A Discussion of early infantile autism" (1951); idem, "The conception of wholes and parts in early infantile autism" (1951).

³⁷⁵ Leo Kanner, "To what extent is early infantile autism determined by constitutional inadequacies" (1954); idem, "early infantile autism, 1943-1955" (1956); Leo Kanner and Leon Eisenberg, "Notes on follow-up Studies of Autistic Children" (1955).

³⁷⁶ Asperger, "Autistisches Verhalten im Kindesalter" (1960).

³⁷⁷ Werner Arthur Stoll, *2nd International Congress for Psychiatry, Zurich, Switzerland, September 1st to 7th* (1957), vol. 3, p. 445.

³⁷⁸ Leo Kanner, "The specificity of early infantile autism" (1958).

this time. It seems likely that he had only read the German summary of that single short article.

In all editions of *Heilpädagogik*, Asperger criticized the view that autism is an exogenic disorder due to upbringing, which he attributed to Kanner. For example, in the first edition he wrote that Leo Kanner “conform the general attitude of American psychotherapeutic schools, regards this [autistic] disorder as purely exogenous”.³⁷⁹ In later editions, Asperger similarly ascribed to Kanner the view that the social relation of children with ‘infantile autism’ are disturbed due to a lack of “maternal tenderness” and “emotional warmth”.³⁸⁰

In the 1958 paper cited by Asperger, Kanner clearly defined early infantile autism as “an inability to relate to people and situations *from the beginning of life*”, suggesting that it has constitutional rather than environmental causes.³⁸¹ There is no mention of maternal influence at all in the paper, and neither was there in Kanner’s first and best known article on autism.³⁸² The idea that Leo Kanner regarded early infantile autism as due to upbringing must rather stem from a 1949 paper, where he observed in parents of children with ‘infantile autism’ a “mechanization of human relationships”, resulting in “unemotional objectivity” and “lack of genuine warmth”.³⁸³ This idea was not specific to autism, but was part of the more general theory Kanner developed at that time that the emotional climate in the “homes in which [such children] grow up can be pleasantly air-conditioned places, ovens, or refrigerators” (see §5.1).³⁸⁴ All this means that Asperger must have learned about Kanner’s ideas between 1949 and 1952, just at the time Kanner put forward a new exogenic view of early infantile autism, and mostly likely learned about it indirectly, via secondary sources.

In *Heilpädagogik*, Asperger did not yet elaborate on the similarities between his ideas and Kanner’s. He first did so in 1963, when he wrote that they described ‘their’ disorders “[a]t the same time [...] of course both independent

³⁷⁹ Asperger, *Heilpädagogik: Einführung in die Psychopathologie des Kindes für Ärzte, Lehrer, Psychologen, Richter und Fürsorgerinnen* (1952), p. 191.

³⁸⁰ “mütterlichen Zärtlichkeit” and “Gefühlswarme”

³⁸¹ Leo Kanner, "The specificity of early infantile autism" (1958), p. 108.

³⁸² Leo Kanner, "Autistic Disturbances of Affective Contact" (1943).

³⁸³ Leo Kanner, "Problems of Nosology and Psychodynamics of early infantile autism" (1949), p. 422.

³⁸⁴ Leo Kanner, "Round Table Discussion: Psychiatric Problems of Adolescence" (1948), p. 672.

from each other, since at that time there was no scientific communication” (that is, between the USA and Austria, due to the Second World War).³⁸⁵ In this description, he disregarded that he already spoke about autism on four occasions before Kanner’s first article, I assume because his 1944 thesis was his first substantial discussion of autistic psychopathy.

Asperger mentioned Kanner in all his papers on autism after 1952. Even so, his first substantial engagement with Kanner’s idea was in a paper published in 1974 in the German medical journal *Deutsche Ärzteblatt* – forty years after Kanner’s first article on autism. Here Asperger said that Kanner defined ‘infantile autism’ as an “encapsulation of the child in himself”, affecting his “affective contact” with other people and, to a lesser degree, his “relations to things”.³⁸⁶ In this paper, Asperger did not offer any specific references, but he did do so in another paper from the same year. Here he referred, for the first time, to Kanner’s best known papers *Autistic disturbances of affective contact* (1943) and *Early infantile autism* (1944).³⁸⁷

3.5 The changing reception of Hans Asperger’s theory of autism

In recent years, the reception of Hans Asperger and his work has changed in two ways. The first, positive, change is that although there obviously has been basic knowledge of Asperger’s work before, especially since Lorna Wing’s paper from 1981³⁸⁸, only in the last decade or so³⁸⁹ his work has really become a topic

³⁸⁵ Asperger, "Das autistische Kind und seine Probleme" (1963), p. 247: "Zu gleicher Zeit [...] natürlich beide unabhängig voneinander, da es zu dieser Zeit ja keine wissenschaftliche Kommunikation gab". Asperger repeated this claim of independence in his "Formen des Autismus bei Kindern" (1974), p. 1010.

³⁸⁶ Asperger, "Formen des Autismus bei Kindern" (1974), p. 1010.

³⁸⁷ It is unsurprising that Asperger did not recognize “affective contact” in the first of these titles as a term of Georg Frankl’s. Frankl had first used this term in an American article in 1943 and there is no indication that Hans Asperger knew this article.³⁸⁷ Prior to his emigration to the United States Frankl had rather used the term “affektive Sprache” (*affective speech*), see Georg Frankl, "Über postenzephalitischen Parkinsonismus und verwandte Störungen im Kindesalter" (1937).

³⁸⁸ Lorna Wing, "Asperger's syndrome: a clinical account" (1981).

³⁸⁹ Before that, Kathrin Hippler and Christian Klicpera did publish historical research on Asperger’s patients. See their "A retrospective analysis of the clinical case records of ‘autistic psychopaths’ diagnosed by Hans Asperger and his team at the University Children's Hospital, Vienna" (2003) and "Hans Asperger and his patients--a retrospective examination of the spectrum of autistic disorders" (2005).

of investigation by historians, notably Helmuth Gröger³⁹⁰, Herwig Czech³⁹¹, Stephen Haswell Todd³⁹² and Edith Sheffer.³⁹³ This historical work has given us a better and wider view of Asperger's ideas. The second, negative, change, is that some of these historians now claim that Asperger's concept of autistic psychopathy was influenced by Nazi ideology. In what follows, I will reflect on these two changes in the reception of Asperger's work, focussing on his concept of contact.

3.5.1 *The emergence of historical investigations of Hans Asperger's work*

In the English-speaking world, Kanner was long considered the first to have described autism. His paper *Autistic disturbances of affective contact* was published in June 1943 in *The Nervous Child* and is the most cited paper on autism.³⁹⁴ In contrast, Asperger's work only became generally known to English audiences after 1981, when Lorna Wing published her influential article on 'Asperger's Syndrome', as she renamed autistic psychopathy. Asperger's last lecture was published in English translation in 1979, but his post-doctoral thesis did not become available in English until Uta Frith translated part of it in 1991. Together, Asperger's thesis (*Die 'Autistischen Psychopathen' im Kindesalter*) and its English translation (*'Autistic psychopathy' in childhood*) are still cited three times less often than Kanner's.

One reason for the different reception of Asperger and Kanner is the language barrier. Asperger wrote in German and only published in European journals such as *Wiener Klinische Wochenschrift*, *Archiv für Psychiatrie und Nervenkrankheiten*, *Oesterreichische Aerztezeitung*, *Deutsches Ärzteblatt* and *Medizinische Klinik*. While he was neglected in the English-speaking world, he was not in mainland Europe: in the 1950's and 1960's there already appeared

³⁹⁰ Helmuth Gröger, "Das Syndrom des 'Autistischen Psychopathen': Hans Asperger zwischen Pädiatrie, Kinderpsychiatrie und Heilpädagogik" (2008); idem, "Zur Ideengeschichte der medizinischen Heilpädagogik–Hans Asperger und das Syndrom des 'Autistischen Psychopathen'" (2015).

³⁹¹ Herwig Czech, "Hans Asperger und die » Kindereuthanasie «in Wien–mögliche Verbindungen" (2015); idem, "Hans Asperger, national socialism, and "race hygiene" in Nazi-era Vienna" (2018).

³⁹² Stephen Haswell Todd, *The turn to the self: a history of autism, 1910-1944* (2015).

³⁹³ Edith Sheffer, *Asperger's Children: The Origins of Autism in Nazi Vienna* (2018).

³⁹⁴ It has been reprinted twice, in *Acta Paedopsychiatrica* (1968) 35:100-136 and in J.G. Howell (Ed.), *Modern perspectives in International Child Psychiatry* (1969), Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 617-468.

several articles in German, French and Dutch discussing Asperger's concept of autistic psychopathy.³⁹⁵ Another factor may be the difference in volume of Kanner and Asperger's publications. I have been able to obtain 110 journal articles by Kanner on child psychiatry, 1047 pages in total (and there are a few more), compared to only 29 articles on *Heilpädagogik* by Asperger, 270 pages in total, and that seem to be all there are. Both men published a textbook, but Kanner's first edition had 510 pages, compared to 275 pages in the first edition of Asperger's textbook. Finally, Kanner published four more books.

Even in the three decades or so after Asperger became well-known beyond the continent, *Die 'Autistische Psychopathen'* was considered his first work, and Kanner was still deemed the first to have described autism as a distinct disorder. Asperger's early works are rarely cited, and neither are his later papers on autism. In this and the previous chapter, I have presented evidence that Asperger started working on autism at least for years earlier than Kanner and I have included his work between 1938 and 1944 in my analysis.³⁹⁶ I have also included later papers, written between 1944 and 1977. I am not the first historian to have done so. In fact, it is a general result of the new historical interest in Hans Asperger that his earlier and later publications on autistic psychopathy have been rediscovered.

Now that his previous and later works have been identified, the reception of Asperger's work is still complicated by the fact that almost all of his writings are only available in German. Moreover, even the German publications are not easily to access. I found that most of them were not available in any of the Dutch university libraries, and I expect this will be the same for other European countries.

The limited knowledge of Asperger's work as a whole has had two effects on its reception. First, recognition of the non-social symptoms proposed by

³⁹⁵ Lucas Nicolaas Johannes Kamp, "Les psychoses chez l'enfant" (1953); J.J. Prick, "Het autistische kind" (1954); Dirk Arnold van Krevelen, "Zur problematik des Autismus" (1958); Dirk Arnold van Krevelen, "Zur Ätiologie des Kannerschen Autismus und der Aspergerschen autistischen Psychopathie" (1963); Gerhard Bosch, *Der Frühkindliche Autismus: eine klinische und phänomenologisch-anthropologische Untersuchung am Leitfaden der Sprache* (1962); I.B.M. Frye, *Fremde unter uns: autisten, ihre erziehung, ihre lebenslauf* (1968).

³⁹⁶ Asperger, "Das psychisch abnorme Kind" (1938); idem, "Pädagogische Therapie bei abnormen Kinder" (1939); idem, "Zur Erziehungstherapie in der Jugendfürsorge" (1941); idem, "'Jugendpsychiatrie' und 'Heilpädagogik'" (1942).

Asperger but not by Kanner has been delayed. Especially, his idea of special interests – a core symptom of autistic psychopathy – has been taken up much later than symptoms of autism that were also observed by Kanner. Second, Asperger’s conceptual framework as a whole remains largely unknown. In this and the previous chapters I have offered one of the first thorough discussions of his conceptual framework as a whole.

Stephen Haswell Todd’s chapter on Asperger³⁹⁷ comes closest to a broad understanding of his ideas, as the other historians I mentioned have focussed on social rather than conceptual history. There is much to commend in his chapter, certainly compared to earlier readings of Asperger. With regard to the intellectual context of Asperger’s work, he offers a wide-ranging discussion of Asperger’s relation to Eugen Bleuler and Ludwig Klages. With regard to Asperger’s conceptual framework, he offers an excellent discussion of the opposition between intellect and affect (inner) and the opposition between distance and contact (external) – but he still lacked the general framework of psychopathy that ties them together. Todd was also one of the first to recognize the possible influence of Frankl on Asperger.

That being said, Todd’s interpretation needs to be corrected on one central point: he overestimates the importance of Eugen Bleuler’s concept of autism, and the discourse on autism following Bleuler, as a source of Asperger’s concept of autistic psychopathy. Todd devotes a whole chapter to Bleuler and suggests that Bleuler’s concept of autism is essential to the history of Autistic Spectrum Disorders, albeit in an unexpected way: Todd neither claims that Bleuler’s concept of autism is the same as Asperger’s (and Kanner’s), nor that it “has nothing to do” with their concepts; he rather claims that Bleuler’s autism “was a kind of reverse of ours”. In his view, Bleuler’s influence on Asperger was mediated by a later discourse which involved a polarity switch “from an autism characterized mainly by irrational thoughts and behaviours to [an autism] primarily identified with the hyperrational”.³⁹⁸ However, although it seems that there did indeed occur such a reversal in the meaning of autism, its existence does not yet show that Asperger was influenced by it. I have seen no convincing

³⁹⁷ Stephen Haswell Todd, *The turn to the self: a history of autism, 1910-1944* (2015), chapter three.

³⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 114

evidence to support this further claim. What clearly speaks against it is the definition of ‘autism’ Asperger offered in the glossary at the end of *Heilpädagogik*: “Limitation to one’s own self; especially thinking that follows affective rather than logical connections, to which is related a closing-oneself-off from reality with withdrawal in phantasy”. In this definition there is no polarity switch, but the original Bleulerian concept of autism.

My own analysis shows that Asperger was influenced by Bleuler directly, that he was not just influenced by the concept of autism but by Bleuler’s wider ideas about schizophrenia, and that the German discourse on personality typologies was a much more important influence than the post-Bleulerian discourse on autism (which was only a part of that discourse).

3.5.2 Suspicions of Nazi-influences on Asperger’s conceptual framework

The second change in the reception of Asperger’s work is that some historians have recently claimed that Asperger’s concept of autistic psychopathy was influenced by Nazi ideology.

This is a break with earlier readings of Asperger’s work.³⁹⁹ In 2002, Brita Schirmer maintained that Asperger defended autistic children against the race ‘hygiene’ of the Nazi’s.⁴⁰⁰ Similarly, in 2008, Helmuth Gröger wrote that “Asperger takes a critical stance towards [National Socialist] race ideology”.⁴⁰¹

Public opinion has now shifted. In 2015, Herwig Czech concluded that Asperger was “openly loyal to [National Socialist] race hygiene”.⁴⁰² In a longer article he argued that Asperger was willing to cooperate with the Nazi’s and to accept, as a final resort, the killing of ‘hopeless’ children.⁴⁰³ Nonetheless, Czech concluded “[r]egarding Asperger’s contributions to autism research, [that] there

³⁹⁹ For a more detailed discussion of the earlier view and the emergence of the later view, see Herwig Czech, "Hans Asperger, national socialism, and ‘race hygiene’ in Nazi-era Vienna" (2018).

⁴⁰⁰ Brita Schirmer, "Autismus und NS-Rassengesetze in Österreich 1938: Hans Aspergers Verteidigung der ‘autistischen Psychopathen’ gegen die NS-Eugenik" (2002).

⁴⁰¹ Helmuth Gröger, "Das Syndrom des ‘Autistischen Psychopathen’: Hans Asperger zwischen Pädiatrie, Kinderpsychiatrie und Heilpädagogik" (2008).

⁴⁰² Herwig Czech, "Hans Asperger und die » Kindereuthanasie «in Wien–mögliche Verbindungen" (2015), p. 26

⁴⁰³ Herwig Czech, "Hans Asperger, national socialism, and “race hygiene” in Nazi-era Vienna" (2018).

is no evidence to consider them tainted by his problematic role during National Socialism”.⁴⁰⁴

The final blow to Asperger’s reputation has been dealt by Edith Sheffer, in her book *Asperger’s children* (2018), which has attracted wide attention in the press. She argues that Asperger in his post-doctoral thesis defined autism primarily as a lack or poverty of *Gemüt* (community spirit), and did so to align himself with Nazi ideology.⁴⁰⁵ Unlike Czech, she believes that Asperger’s very idea of autism was influenced by the Nazi context in which he worked.

Sheffer argues, first, that Asperger defined autism in terms of a lack of *Gemüt*, meaning “one’s fundamental capacity to form deep bonds with other people”.⁴⁰⁶ She argues, in particular, that Asperger drew on the conception of *Gemüt* of Paul Schröder and Hans Heinze, who he both met in Leipzig in 1934, and who he both cites in his thesis.⁴⁰⁷ They proposed that certain types of children are “emotionally impoverished” (*gemütsarm*) and lack a sense of community.⁴⁰⁸

Second, Sheffer claims that when Asperger proposed the concept of ‘autistic psychopathy’, he merely gave a new name to an idea widely shared in Nazi psychiatry. On this view, Asperger’s concept of autism was part and parcel of a wider discourse on defective *Gemüt* in Nazi psychiatry that served to legitimize the separation of children in children with and children without social prospects. Children who had *Gemüt* were thought to have good social prospects and were deemed eligible for education. Children lacking in *Gemüt* were thought to have poor social prospects and should be killed. This would mean that Asperger’s extension of the concept of contact disorders to the interior personality had sinister motives and fatal consequences.

⁴⁰⁴ Herwig Czech, "Hans Asperger und die 'Kindereuthanasie' in Wien—mögliche Verbindungen" (2015), p. 32.

⁴⁰⁵ Edith Sheffer, *Asperger's Children: The Origins of Autism in Nazi Vienna* (2018), p. 67-74, p. 215.

⁴⁰⁶ *Ibid*, p. 69.

⁴⁰⁷ Asperger seems to cite with approval Paul Schröder’s definition of *Gemüt* as “the ability to participate in other people’s lives, to empathize with them, to be with them”; that is, the ability that allows one to form “relations to other people”. Hans Asperger, "Die 'Autistischen Psychopathen' im Kindesalter" (1944), pp. 77n2, 78n1, p. 80n1, p. 136.

⁴⁰⁸ Edith Sheffer, *Asperger's Children: The Origins of Autism in Nazi Vienna*, p. 72-74.

I believe Sheffer is right that the discourse on *Gemüt* in Nazi psychiatry would have influenced the reception of Asperger's thesis, but in my view, she overestimates the importance of the idea of a lack of *Gemüt* to Asperger's theory.

First, the reason that Asperger cited Schröder and Heinze was not that he shared their approach to *Gemüt*. To the contrary, he criticized their approach, arguing that children with autism do not simply have *less Gemüt*, but rather have *a different kind of Gemüt*.⁴⁰⁹ Asperger outright rejected the possibility that autistic children only have 'impoverished emotions' (*gemütsarm*). To begin with, he argued that they display both enlargement (more emotion) and restriction (less emotion). In section 3.1.3 we have seen his finding that these children often have an intense affective connection to a restricted part of the world: to an animal, a particular thing, or a single person.⁴¹⁰ Asperger therefore concluded that they show an "apparently unfathomable contradiction between an endearing attachment to things and animals and a crass lovelessness and even cruelty towards people, especially those closest to them".⁴¹¹

More fundamentally, Asperger criticized the approach of Schröder and Heinze for being overly quantitative. Asperger rejected the idea that autistic children differ in their *amount* of *Gemüt*. In his view, they only *seemed* to have less and more *Gemüt*, but this was really due to a qualitative difference, namely a general disharmony between the differentiating and integrative tendencies in their development. In sum, Asperger's concept of autistic psychopathy cannot be reduced to the Nazi idea that certain children have less *Gemüt* and that their life therefore has no value.

Second, the fact that Asperger retained the term *Gemüt* after the war speaks against Sheffer's suggestion that Asperger elevated the role of the

⁴⁰⁹ Asperger, "'Jugendpsychiatrie' und 'Heilpädagogik'" (1942), p. 354; idem, *Heilpädagogik: Einführung in die Psychopathologie des Kindes für Ärzte, Lehrer, Psychologen, Richter und Fürsorgerinnen* (1952), p. 10. Sheffer is well aware of this critique (she discusses it on p. 219) but argues that Asperger later contradicted this view. Michael Haswell Tod offers a similar rejoinder to Sheffer's argument in *The turn to the self: a history of autism, 1910-1944* (2015), p. 166-174.

⁴¹⁰ Asperger, "Diagnostische und heilpädagogische Probleme bei autistischen Kindern" (1946), p. 207; idem, "Bild und soziale Wertigkeit der autistischen Psychopaten" (1950), p. 262.

⁴¹¹ Asperger, "Die „Autistischen Psychopaten“ im Kindesalter" (1944), p. 81: "scheinbar undurchschaubaren Widersprüchen zwischen rührender Anhänglichkeit etwa an Tiere oder Dinge und krasser Lieblosigkeit und Grausamkeit Menschen, besonders den nächsten Menschen gegenüber"; omitted from the English translation.

concept of *Gemüt* in his 1944 thesis just to align himself with Nazi ideology.⁴¹² For example, in his 1977 he said (talking about himself in the third person) that “Asperger speaks of a defect in the ‘thymic’, that is, the emotional layer [*Gemütsbereich*] of the personality” and suggested that this was basically the same as what Kanner called “affective contacts”.⁴¹³ Asperger said this in an address to the *Swiss association of Parents of Autistic Children* – not an audience where associating himself with Nazi ideas would be prudent.

Third, Sheffer fails to acknowledge that for Asperger the term *Gemüt* was merely another term to describe the instinctive layer of the personality, which he had described in 1938 as ‘instinctive function’.⁴¹⁴ In his 1944 thesis, Asperger continued to use the term ‘instinctive function’, but also introduced *Gemüt*, as a synonym.⁴¹⁵ This reflected his idea that autistic differences in *Gemüt* are based in a lack of reintegration – this lack of reintegration, not a lack of *Gemüt*, was the real backbone of his concept of autistic psychopathy.

This sheds new light on the relation of Asperger’s ideas to Nazi ideology. For his source of the idea of inner and external integration was Erich Jaensch, who started out as an empirical scientist with high stature, but became a proponent of Nazi-ideology in the 1930’s, and developed increasingly erratic views without empirical basis.⁴¹⁶ Jaensch developed the opposition between inner integration and outer coherence in the 1920’s, at which time Jaensch had “strong national conservative tendencies” but harboured no antisemitism or racism.⁴¹⁷ In contrast, between 1933 and 1940, in the period that Asperger started writing on typologies, Jaensch was a convinced defender of National Socialism and used his typology to discredit Jews and foreigners. Asperger began to give a more prominent place to Jaensch’s opposition after the war, in the 1950’s, when there would have been no political reason to align himself with a Nazi ideologist. He did not take over Jaensch’ antisemitism, but neither did he distance himself

⁴¹² Edith Sheffer, *Asperger's Children*, chapter 3

⁴¹³ Asperger, "Probleme des kindlichen Autismus" (1977), p. 7: “*Asperger spricht von einem Defekt im ‘thymischen’, im Gemütsbereich der Persönlichkeit*”. In the English edition this was translated rather imprecisely as “We, in this country, speak of a defect in the ‘thymic’, the mind of the personality.” Asperger, "Problems of infantile autism" (1979), p. 49

⁴¹⁴ Asperger, "Das psychisch abnorme Kind" (1938), p. 1316: “der Instinktfunktionen”.

⁴¹⁵ Asperger, "Die „Autistische Psychopathen“ im Kindesalter" (1944), p. 87: “Instinktfunktionen”.

⁴¹⁶ Helmut E. Lück and Uwe Wolfradt, "Erich Rudolf Jaensch: Von der experimentellen Wahrnehmungspsychologie zu NS-Ideologie" (2012).

⁴¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 30

from Jaensch's National Socialist convictions. He was not alone in this, as his colleague Josef Feldner (who saved a Jew from the Nazi's by hiding him in his apartment during the war) did essentially the same in his 1955 book.⁴¹⁸

More generally, it is significant to note that after Hitler's rise to power, in 1933, the study of the human character or personality became the dominant topic in German psychology.⁴¹⁹ Typologies allowed German psychologists to distinguish between good and bad types and to evaluate people accordingly. Asperger's work certainly fits within this context, but only to some extent: he only talked about gender types, claiming that autistic children are 'extremes' of the male type⁴²⁰, but Asperger never followed his Nazi colleagues in developing racial types, nor did he use his typology to claim that Jews or foreigners are inferior. It seems to me that his interest in typologies was not so much motivated by a pragmatic decision to align himself with the Nazi's but by his identification with a more general cultural conservatism, which he had cultivated since the 1920's, when he became active in the German youth movement.

3.6 The contemporary significance of Asperger's theory of autism

Today, Asperger is known as one of the 'founding fathers' of autism studies and as the first to have described 'Asperger's Syndrome'. Now that in the DSM-5 Asperger's Syndrome has been dissolved in the category of autism spectrum disorders, he is remembered as the paediatrician who contributed significantly to the breadth of this spectrum. Without his pioneering work many so-called 'high functioning' persons might not have been diagnosed with autism today.

After Kanner's first publication, it took 37 years for early infantile autism to become included in the DSM, but it took 50 years for autistic psychopathy, renamed Asperger's Syndrome, to be included in the DSM. This finally happened in the DSM-IV, which was published in 1994. The main reason for this seems to be that the work on the DSM-IV started in 1988, seven years after Lorna Wing's article on Asperger's Syndrome.

⁴¹⁸ Anna Goldenberg, *Versteckte Jahre: der Mann, der meinen Grossvater rettete* (2018).

⁴¹⁹ Frederick Wyatt and Hans-Lukas Teuber, "German psychology under the Nazi system: 1933-1940" (1944).

⁴²⁰ Asperger, "Die 'Autistischen Psychopathen'" (1944), p. 129.

The DSM-IV criteria for Asperger's Syndrome were the same as for "autistic disorder" (which was based on Kanner's idea) with minor differences: there should be no clinically significant delays in language, in "cognitive development or in the development of age-appropriate self-help skills, adaptive behavior" and in "curiosity about the environment" in childhood.⁴²¹ This gives the impression that Asperger's own work has not been consulted. According to Asperger, children with autistic psychopathy are superior in abstract thinking, which was not mentioned at all in the DSM-IV, and had difficulty with everyday practicalities, which was explicitly excluded. Similarly, while Asperger emphasized originality and independence of thinking, the DSM-IV only included special interests.

This re-interpretation of autistic psychopathy already started in Lorna Wing's article on Asperger's Syndrome: although she claimed to give a description "based on Asperger's accounts", she did not mention the overdevelopment of intellect and the underdevelopment of instinct that were so central to Asperger's account.⁴²² Instead, she wrote about intellectual (and social) impairments. She described the deficits that were part of autistic psychopathy, without discussing the underlying idea, and without describing the strengths Asperger had described.

This re-interpretation has created the idea that autistic psychopathy was the same as 'high-functioning' early infantile autism. Both before and after the inclusion of Asperger's Syndrome in the DSM there have been concerns that there is too much overlap between the two disorders for the difference to be clinically significant. In my view, part of this overlap is due to a watering down of Asperger's ideas, leaving out what he considered most important: a disharmonious development of the personality, which has positive and negative sides.

In the DSM-5, Asperger's syndrome has been dissolved into autism spectrum disorder and diagnosticians have been instructed that "individuals with a well-established DSM-IV diagnosis of [...] Asperger's disorder [...] should be given the diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder".⁴²³ Just as the DSM-IV, the

⁴²¹ American Psychiatric association, *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders: DSM-IV* (1994)., p. 75.

⁴²² Lorna Wing, "Asperger's syndrome: a clinical account" (1981), p. 116

⁴²³ American Psychiatric association, *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders: DSM-5* (2013).

DSM-5 has not included the strengths Hans Asperger ascribed to children with autistic psychopathy or his idea of a disharmonious development of the personality. This means that is not the idea of a spectrum that has watered down autistic psychopathy, but that this is due to its earlier re-interpretation as ‘Asperger’s syndrome’.

This is unfortunate, as the main strength of Asperger’s theory is that he already offered a description of the wide-ranging phenotypic heterogeneity of autism: he already recognized social differences ranging from non-verbal contact to verbal speech, as well as non-social differences ranging from sensorimotor integration to learning and affectivity. Moreover, while present-day theories of autism typically explain only some of these symptoms, Asperger proposed a single explanation for all of them: in his view they are all behavioural manifestations of a single underlying structural difference in the way autistic children develop. In other words, he had a clear idea about both the phenotypic heterogeneity and the structural homogeneity of autism and balanced both in his approach to diagnosis.

Some of what Asperger described in terms of the integration and differentiation of personality functions is addressed by recent research on the connectivity between brain regions in autism. While many studies have reported alterations in functional connectivity in autism, there is disagreement as to the nature of these alterations, as overconnectivity, underconnectivity and a combination of both have all been found.⁴²⁴ These findings have led to the disrupted connectivity theory, which postulates that at least some symptoms of autism can be explained by differences in how neural activity is coordinated between different brain regions.⁴²⁵ It seems that Asperger anticipated some of these findings, but his position different from them in that he was as much concerned with the wider nervous system as with the brain.

Other aspects of Asperger’s theory are clearly not supported by the facts we have today. This is particularly so for Asperger’s prediction that children with autism will not develop and behave differently before the age of 3, when

⁴²⁴ Jose O Maximo, Elyse J. Cadena and Rajesh K. Kana, "The implications of brain connectivity in the neuropsychology of autism" (2014).

⁴²⁵ Roma A. Vasa, Stewart H. Mostofsky and Joshua B. Ewen, "The disrupted connectivity hypothesis of autism spectrum disorders: time for the next phase in research" (2016).

he believed the stage of inner and external differentiation began. It is true that the clinical phenotype of developmental disorders in general is not fully present at birth, but manifests when development progresses.⁴²⁶ It is also true that in the 20th century, children were rarely diagnosed with autism before the age of 3.⁴²⁷ However, recent evidence suggests that the behavioural manifestations of autism may begin to present between 6 and 12 months of age⁴²⁸ and that diagnosis is already stable between 14 and 18 months.⁴²⁹ Focussing on development, one functional connectivity study found that connectivity is increased in children with autism but is reduced after adolescence.⁴³⁰ This suggests a much later turning point than predicted by Asperger. In light of all this, Asperger may have been wrong about either the importance of the stage of differentiation or the age of its onset.

Another prediction of Asperger (and Kanner) that is now called into question is that in autism, in contrast to schizophrenia, there would be no development from good to poor contact; some recent studies report that regression, in this sense, is actually more common in autism than previously thought.⁴³¹

Asperger was in general disagreement with the cognitive theories of autism: he criticized their attempt to identify a specific module of function (*Einzelfuntion*) that is impaired in autism, and argued that “the defect is much more central”, namely in the structure of the personality.⁴³²

⁴²⁶ Elizabeth C. Bacon et al., "Rethinking the idea of late autism spectrum disorder onset" (2018); Rebecca J. Landa et al., "Latent class analysis of early developmental trajectory in baby siblings of children with autism" (2012) .

⁴²⁷ Sven Bölte et al., "Infants at risk for autism: a European perspective on current status, challenges and opportunities" (2013).

⁴²⁸ Lonnie Zwaigenbaum, Susan Bryson and Nancy Garon, "Early identification of autism spectrum disorders" (2013); Jed T. Elison et al., "Repetitive behavior in 12-month-olds later classified with autism spectrum disorder" (2014); Peter Szatmari et al., "Prospective longitudinal studies of infant siblings of children with autism: lessons learned and future directions" (2016).

⁴²⁹ Sally Ozonoff et al., "Diagnostic stability in young children at risk for autism spectrum disorder: a baby siblings research consortium study" (2015); Karen Pierce et al., "Evaluation of the diagnostic stability of the early autism spectrum disorder phenotype in the general population starting at 12 months" (2019)

⁴³⁰ Lucina Q. Uddin, Kaustubh Supekar, and Vinod Menon, "Reconceptualizing functional brain connectivity in autism from a developmental perspective" (2013).

⁴³¹ Sally Ozonoff et al., "Onset patterns in autism: Variation across informants, methods, and timing" (2018); Niamh Pearson et al., "Regression in autism spectrum disorder: Reconciling findings from retrospective and prospective research" (2018).

⁴³² Asperger, "Probleme des kindlichen Autismus" (1977), p. 9.

At first sight, his theory may appear to have anticipated two of Baron-Cohen's ideas. Baron-Cohen's extreme male brain theory⁴³³ seems to be a modern restatement of Asperger's idea that "the autistic psychopath is an extreme variation of male intelligence".⁴³⁴ Similarly, the Empathizing-Systemizing theory⁴³⁵ seems to reiterate Asperger's idea that there is a specifically autistic intelligence.⁴³⁶ These similarities are only superficial, however. Baron-Cohen predicts that in autism there is a specific deficit in empathy, i.e. "the drive to identify and respond to agents' mental states, in order to understand and predict [their ...] behavior". In contrast, Asperger predicted a much more general underdevelopment of instinct and feeling.⁴³⁷ Asperger found that autistic children are less instinctive not only in their dealing with other people but *equally* in their practical dealings with objects and in formal learning, for example in their development of such exact skills as mathematics. Baron-Cohen predicts that autistic children excel in systemizing, i.e. "the drive to analyze and build systems in order to understand and predict the behavior of non-agentive events".⁴³⁸ Instead, Asperger predicted that autistic children excel in abstract conceptual thinking about any domain, not only about technical and natural scientific fields, but *equally* about art and the motives and emotions of other people.

Similarly, Asperger diverges from Uta Frith and Francesca Happé's theory that autism involves a detail-focussed cognitive style⁴³⁹. He rather claimed that autistic children excel in abstraction from concrete particulars. Few studies have addressed abstraction abilities in Asperger's Syndrome, but one study that did suggests that children with Asperger's may indeed have superior abstract reasoning ability as Hans Asperger believed.⁴⁴⁰

⁴³³ Simon Baron-Cohen, "The extreme male brain theory of autism" (2002).

⁴³⁴ Asperger, "Die 'Autistischen Psychopathen'" (1944), p. 129.

⁴³⁵ Simon Baron-Cohen et al., "The exact mind: empathising and systemising in autism spectrum conditions" (2002).

⁴³⁶ Asperger, "Die 'Autistischen Psychopathen'" (1944), p. 114.

⁴³⁷ Simon Baron-Cohen et al., "The exact mind", p. 495

⁴³⁸ Ibid.

⁴³⁹ Uta Frith, *Autism: Explaining the enigma* (1991); Francesca Happé and Uta Frith, "The weak coherence account: detail-focussed cognitive style in autism spectrum disorders" (2006)

⁴⁴⁰ Mika Hayashi et al., "Superior fluid intelligence in children with Asperger's disorder" (2008).

3.7 Conclusion

Asperger metaphorically described autistic children as ‘machines’. He did so because he believed that the intellect of autistic children is overdeveloped while their emotions and instincts are underdeveloped. However, we have seen that this is only part of his theory of autism. He also believed that autistic children are more original and have a greater distance to their environment. More importantly, he did not see being only a self or being only intellectual as only a negative thing: he thought that some degree of autism is actually a gift that can result in high achievements.

Asperger’s theory of autism involves three layers. While trying to understand children with autism he first encountered a diversity of surface behaviours that can be observed from the outside. These are the behaviours that we know today as the symptoms of autism. Second, Asperger used his total impression of these behaviours to grasp the underlying depth structure. That is, he inferred that these children have an autistic type of personality, defined as a personality in which the differentiation of inner functions and of the self is overdeveloped, while their integration is underdeveloped. Third, to explain this autistic type he pointed to a developmental process, in which the child is stuck at the stage of differentiation that starts around three years of age.

Did Asperger develop a convergence between the term ‘autistic’, the concept of contact disorders and all the symptoms of autism? Not exactly. Asperger used the term autism in two ways; he conceptualized autism as the opposite of contact, but also as a pervasive disorder that involves the whole personality.

On the narrow conception, Asperger meant by ‘autistic’ the opposite of contact, especially the opposite of instinctive and reactive contact. Asperger conceptualized contact as integration of the self and its environment. Autistic psychopathy, in his view, entailed the opposite: being original and spontaneous and having a greater distance from the social and inanimate environment.

On the broad conception, Asperger envisioned autistic psychopathy as a more general disorder. This new disease entity included both disturbances of contact *and* disturbances of activity. Further, in addition to these disturbances of a person’s relation to the environment, it included a disturbance of the inner personality. These three disturbances have in common that they all involve a form differentiation and are therefore opposite to integration.

Asperger gave 'autistic' the place of a modifying adjective and 'psychopathy' the place of the head noun because he considered *autistic* development one type of psychopathic development, alongside other types, such as hysterical psychopathy. We have seen that in Asperger's view the 'autistic' type was defined by a particular type of development, i.e. an enlargement of differentiation and a restriction of integration. Hence, by extension, 'autistic' came to mean to Asperger a *personality type* characterized by a highly differentiated personality organization, in which the integration of inner and outer functions that can be seen in typical development is disturbed. This disturbance of (re)integration expresses itself in range of diverse and even conflicting behaviours.

All in all, then, Asperger's autism is *not only* a contact disorder. Rather, he suggests that psychiatrists must be careful not to *reduce* autism to a contact disorder. In his view, not all aspects of autism are best conceptualized in terms of contact: he found that symptoms such as motor and learning differences are better described as 'activity', while symptoms such as 'autistic intelligence' are best described as an inner personality disorder. Autism, in this view, does not affect a single function: in typical human functioning all parts are integrated into a seamless whole; being a disturbance of this integration process, autism affects the whole personality, giving rise to both strengths and weaknesses.

The convergence that I have found in Asperger's work, then is between (1) the term 'autistic psychopathy', (2) the twin concepts of an overdevelopment of differentiation and an underdevelopment of integration, and (3) the social and non-social symptoms of autism.