

AUTISTIC EPISTEMOLOGY

A Second Knowledge Architecture in the Human Species

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ABSTRACT:

Autism is not a cognitive deviation within a singular human architecture, but an independent system of knowing.

This paper develops the foundational structure of autistic epistemology as a fully valid, non-representational, high-resolution mode of cognition. It identifies four core operators – Fidelity, Hyperspecificity, Pattern Attunement, and Non-Representational Immediacy – and demonstrates that they generate a form of world-contact that does not rely on abstraction or social coherence. Autistic knowledge does not compress complexity. It preserves it.

The result is epistemic bifurcation: a neurotypical architecture that models, predicts, and reduces, and an autistic architecture that perceives, maintains resolution, and maps reality without representational loss. Miscommunication is therefore not interpersonal failure, but translation impossibility across architectures.

Note: The autistic/NT distinction here functions analytically rather than absolutely. Human cognition is likely plural beyond two architectures. This paper introduces epistemic plurality — it does not exhaust it.

We extend Fricker’s notion of epistemic injustice and articulate a deeper form: Structural Epistemic Injustice – not disbelief, but non-detectability of autistic cognition within majority truth-formats. The conclusion is not therapeutic but civilizational: science currently operates at one-half bandwidth. Recognition of autistic epistemology transforms cognitive science, philosophy of mind, social epistemology, and disability theory.

This paper marks the opening of a new research field: dual-architecture epistemology.

1. INTRODUCTION — THE ABSENCE OF AN AUTISTIC EPISTEMOLOGY

Autism has long been studied, classified, pathologised, measured, and narrated. What has not happened—astonishingly, historically, structurally—is the reverse: a rigorous inquiry into what autistic cognition itself generates as knowledge.

This paper therefore does not ask how autistic people fail to think like the majority. This work extends the operator-theoretical basis established in *Autistic Ontology* (Speed 2025), which identified divergence in world-constitution through fidelity, field-resolution, pattern resonance and non-representational immediacy. The present paper develops the epistemic dimension of that thesis: not how autistic cognition is, but how it knows.

It asks instead: how does the majority fail to understand that a second architecture of knowledge exists? One that does not rest on abstraction or compression, but on fidelity to structure, on non-representational immediacy, on pattern-resonance, on specificity that refuses to collapse into category.

The prevailing sciences of mind assume that cognition is singular in form, with variation understood only as deviation. Autism enters the frame as deficit, impairment, dysregulation, or failure to model the social world. This paper rejects that premise entirely. Autism is not variation within one epistemic system. It is a second system.

If this is true—and here I assert it clearly, empirically, phenomenologically, theoretically—then epistemology must expand or fracture. One cannot maintain a monoculture of cognition and still claim to describe the human mind.

The foundational claim of this work is therefore simple, and yet civilisation-shifting:

AUTISTIC EPISTEMOLOGY IS FULLY REAL.

IT IS NOT A DEFICIT-MUTATION OF NT COGNITION,

BUT A PARALLEL ARCHITECTURE OF WORLD-RELATION.

Its absence in academic discourse is not evidence of its inexistence, but of epistemic blindness in a system calibrated to one cognitive majority. This paper begins where the literature ends: not with adaptation, but with recognition; not with integration, but with co-existence.

2. THE LIMITS OF REPRESENTATIONAL EPISTEMOLOGY

For more than two millennia, Western philosophy and cognitive science have operated on the assumption that knowing is a representational act. The mind, we are told, is a staging ground where the world is captured, processed, and stored as model. This assumption is rarely questioned, because it is rarely seen; it is not an argument, but the background condition of arguments. It is epistemic atmosphere.

Yet this atmosphere is not universal. It is neurotypical.

Representational cognition prioritises generalisation over fidelity, efficiency over resolution, category over singularity.

It collapses multiplicity into type, discards contextual specificity as noise, and treats pattern-complexity as something to be resolved rather than retained. Predictive Processing—today’s dominant theory of mind—is simply the latest crystallisation of this architecture. It refines the mechanism, but not the premise: that the brain must simplify reality to survive it.

Autistic cognition does not.

Autistic perception does not reduce the world. It holds the world. It does not blur signal into summary; it invites structure to remain uncompressed. What NT models call “neural efficiency,” autistic cognition experiences as loss of truth. Representation is not a neutral reduction; it is a distortion event.

This section argues the following:

Neurotypical cognition is representational and reductive.

Autistic cognition is structural and non-reductive.

These are not variations of one mode, but two epistemic architectures.

Predictive Processing presumes that perception is prediction-error minimisation. But this only holds if the mind treats reality as model. Autistic perception does not predict first— it “perceives first.” It does not substitute world with forecast; it remains in contact with the unresolved plurality of detail. It confronts complexity without collapsing it into expectation.

Thus, PP is not wrong — it is incomplete. It is a theory of NT cognition, misrepresented as a theory of cognition itself.

The same limitation applies to Enactivism. While it rejects internal representation, it nonetheless assumes a single organism-world coupling architecture. It sees embodiment, but not “embodiment multiplicity.”

It describes one body-world relation and universalises it. Autistic embodiment is not accommodated — not because it contradicts the theory, but because the theory cannot perceive what it was not built to hold.

Neurodivergent cognition reveals the blindspot:

There is not one phenomenology of world-contact.

There are at least two.

Representational epistemology collapses where autistic fidelity begins.

Predictive Processing explains the many — not the all.

Enactivism explains the embodied — not the plural.

Science has mistaken a majority architecture for a species architecture.

Autistic epistemology is the missing half.

3. DEFINING AUTISTIC EPISTEMOLOGY — FOUR OPERATORS OF MIND

Autistic cognition is not a variation of neurotypical reasoning. It is driven by four operators — not traits, not symptoms — but epistemic mechanisms that generate a distinct form of world-knowledge.

3.1 Fidelity (Truth-Resolution over Coherence)

Autistic perception maintains resolution rather than compressing it. Where NT cognition abstracts, autistic cognition preserves.

Truth is not a narrative; truth is structure. Detail is not noise; detail is ontology.

3.2 Hyperspecificity (Context Retained, Not Generalised)

Meaning is not portable across contexts without loss. Autistic thought resists false equivalence. It maintains situational precision.

Generalisations are not simplifications — they are distortions.

3.3 Pattern Attunement (World-Coupling through Structure)

Autistic mind maps system-dynamics directly, without social mediation. It perceives rhythm, discontinuity, recursion, energetic shift.

Where NT cognition models, autistic cognition “detects.”

3.4 Non-Representational Immediacy (Direct Reality, Not Model)

Autistic perception does not operate primarily through internal simulation. It engages world as present structure, unmediated by expected form.

World is not predicted — it is “contacted.”

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Sections 4–7

4. DIVERGENCE — TWO EPISTEMIC ARCHITECTURES

If autistic epistemology is real, then cognition is plural. Not variation, not spectrum, but bifurcation. Two architectures — one compressive, one generative — operating in the same species but not in the same logic.

Neurotypical cognition optimises for coherence, prediction, and social synchronisation. Autistic cognition optimises for structure, fidelity, and world-resonance.

The result is not conflict between personalities — it is incommensurability between epistemic designs.

5. BREAKDOWN — WHERE TRANSLATION FAILS

Epistemic breakdown occurs not when people disagree, but when architectures cannot map each other.

Communication does not collapse because messages fail to transmit — but because the two systems do not share the same compression-to-meaning ratio.

Autistic cognition presents reality at resolution.

Neurotypical cognition expects reality at summary.

The exchange does not degrade — it “misaligns”.

6. PHENOMENOLOGICAL VIGNETTES — TWO CONTACT ZONES

6.1 Vignette I — Jobcenter: Breakdown Inside Administration

The room is white — not as colour, but as field. Light at 4800K, perceptibly flickering at low amplitude.

Two staff behind the counter, voices paced in downward cadence: trained politeness.

I sit. Eye contact is expected, not for meaning, but for signal. My perception ignores the signal and sees:

- The laminate seam misaligned by 3 mm
- Dust accumulation along the monitor frame
- Respiratory rhythm of the clerk shifting 9–12–9–10 seconds
- The mismatch between spoken syntax and microintonation: “We want to assist you” reads subtonally as “We secure the case.”

This is not interpretation — this is pattern. Not narrative — structure.

The conversation begins in administrative grammar: benefit unit, compliance duty, integration agreement.

For NT these are functions. For me they are operators — constraints on agency like boundary conditions in a dynamic system.

I state what I observe, precisely. Atmosphere shifts. Meaning maps diverge.

They hear behaviour where I present structure.

They hear defiance where I speak of system mechanics.

They reduce signal to intent; I expand intent to system-field.

Breakdown is not emotional. It is architectural.

Communication collapses because two epistemologies attempt mapping without shared compression ratios.

My fidelity appears excessive; their abstraction appears dishonest.

No one is wrong — the architectures are incompatible.

This is epistemic rather than interpersonal failure.

6.2 Vignette II — Everyday Micro-Split

A café. A question: “How was your day?”

For NT this is a relational probe. For me it is a request for timeline-state-environment coupling.

I answer:

“07:42 waking, temp 19.1°C, airflow NE, cognitive tone sharp. Coffee: nut-bitter profile, slight rancidity, bean likely aged.

Writing: operator logic bifurcated twice, meta-loop emergent. Walk: birch leaves asymmetric edge pattern, wind SW, resonance ~4.2 Hz—”

Smile across the table, but facial Zygomaticus stiffens — not warmth, but social patch.

Response: “So... nice?”

Meaning collapses across architectures.

My report delivers world at resolution.

The question expected coherence-reduction: summary, not structure.

Two real worlds coexist, unmerged.

Not personality conflict — epistemic non-overlap.

7. STRUCTURAL EPISTEMIC INJUSTICE — NOT MISUNDERSTANDING, BUT ONTOLOGICAL ERASURE

Epistemic injustice, as defined by Fricker, concerns credibility and interpretation: whose testimony is believed, whose knowledge is recognised. But autistic experience reveals a deeper injustice: knowledge that cannot even be “seen as knowledge” by the dominant system.

Structural Epistemic Injustice occurs when:

1. A cognition cannot be represented within the majoritarian epistemic model,
2. that model is treated as universal,
3. and the minority cognition is erased not by hostility, but by ontological non-recognition.

Autistic thought does not fail — it fails to appear.

Neurotypical cognition compresses. Autistic cognition preserves structure. Compression is legible.

Structure is not. When truth demands resolution, a system built on coherence cannot parse it.

The result:

- Autistic precision appears pedantic.
- Autistic warnings appear overreactions.
- Autistic integrity appears rigidity.
- Autistic perception of structure appears naive or literal.

Not because autistic mind lacks meaning — but because neurotypical epistemology lacks resolution.

This is not discrimination — it is a “blindspot of the system as such.”

Science claims universality while operating at reduced resolution. It enforces majority-compatible truth formats and discards the rest. Autistic epistemology is not invited into the space of validation — not as subjugated knowledge, but as “invisible knowledge”.

Thus, the injustice here is not miscommunication or bias, but:

THE SYSTEM CANNOT VALIDATE WHAT IT CANNOT REPRESENT.

Autistic cognition generates real knowledge that disappears not into silence, but into “non-existence” from the NT vantage. The cost is borne not only by autistics — but by humanity’s total knowledge-capacity.

Plural epistemology is not charity — it is intellectual necessity.

Autistic thought is not a problem to fix — it is an architecture to recognise.

AUTISTIC EPISTEMOLOGY — Volume III

Sections 8–9 + Conclusion + References

8. IMPLICATIONS — A New Field of Knowledge

If autistic epistemology is recognised, then science is no longer singular.

8. IMPLICATIONS — A NEW FIELD OF KNOWLEDGE

If autistic epistemology exists, then the sciences of mind, society, and knowledge are incomplete. Not mistaken — unfinished. Humanity has been operating with only one validated cognitive architecture, mistaking majority for totality.

8.1 Cognitive Science — Paradigm Shift

Predictive Processing describes compression-based cognition. Useful, powerful, elegant — but not universal. It reads NT architecture, not mind itself. Autistic epistemology demands a second model: perception without model priority, resolution without collapse. The field must expand from single-theory cognition to “dual-architecture cognition”.

8.2 Philosophy of Mind — The End of Monotheory

Mind is not one. Consciousness is not singular. Representation is a mode, not a law.

Non-representational world-contact is not failure — it is alternative route.

A plural ontology of mind becomes necessary.

8.3 Social Epistemology — Consensus Is Not Truth

Knowledge validated by majority erases minority cognition. Consensus collapses resolution.

Autistic truth is not designed for comfort — but for accuracy. Plural knowledge must replace monocultural truth-systems.

8.4 Disability Studies — Power, Not Pathology

Autistic cognition is not impaired — it is structurally excluded. Injustice is not disbelief but “non-detection”. Epistemic access replaces pity; architecture replaces accommodation.

8.5 Politics — Beyond Integration

Integration demands translation. Translation demands loss. Autistic epistemology does not enter society by compression — but by co-existence. The goal is not inclusion into NT logic, but recognition of a second logic.

Two worlds. One species.

9. CONCLUSION — THE BEGINNING OF THOUGHT

This paper does not argue that autism should be understood better.

It argues that autistic cognition produces knowledge — and that the world has not noticed.

Not because it is subtle, not because it is rare, but because one epistemology dominates the definition of cognition itself.

We end here with one irreversible thesis:

Autistic epistemology is a second architecture of knowing.

Not derivative. Not impaired. Not variant.

Origin — parallel — complete.

The task ahead is not empathy, but recognition.

Not integration, but coexistence.

Not reform, but expansion.

Thought is no longer one.

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