

‘The Pattern Seekers’: What autism can tell us about the evolutionary tipping point that made us human

[In “[The Pattern Seekers: How Autism Drives Human Invention](#),” psychologist Simon] Baron-Cohen argues that humans split off from all other animals to become the “scientific and technological masters of our planet” because we evolved a unique piece of mental equipment that he calls the Systemizing Mechanism... While everyone has a Systemizing Mechanism, it’s tuned especially high in people who are inventors and in those drawn to fields like science, engineering, music, competitive sports, high-level business and often, too, in people with autism.

...

Here’s how the mechanism works: Humans alone observe the world and ask questions that demand why, how and what... They use those patterns to build theories, which they then repeatedly test, looking always for systems to further employ and exploit.

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As Baron-Cohen describes it, the Systemizing Mechanism is so all-powerful, it explains evolutionary change, historic progress and individual excellence — including, for example, the ancient shift from simple to complex tool use, the invention of the light bulb and the late Kobe Bryant’s highly regimented training schedule. It’s true, all these scenarios can be described as looping sequences of if-and-then reasoning. But it’s a much greater leap to show that this is the main engine of evolution, or that it demonstrates how human brains work in real time, or that the two things have much in common.

[Editor’s note: [Find “The Patter Seekers: How Autism Drives Human Invention” here.](#)]

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