

# Funding the Future

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I was shocked and dismayed by what President Trump had to say on the subject of autism yesterday. As [the Guardian reported](#):

*The Trump administration unveiled highly contentious conclusions about the causes of autism, together with a push for research purporting to find a possible “cure” for the condition on Monday.*

*After months of widely trumpeted investigations spearheaded by the health secretary, Robert F Kennedy Jr, Donald Trump announced that pregnant women should limit their use of acetaminophen, usually branded as Tylenol in the US or paracetamol elsewhere, which he claimed heightens the risk of autism in children when it is used by pregnant women, an assertion hotly contested by scientists internationally and contradicted by studies.*

They added:

*Speaking from the White House, flanked by Kennedy, the president said he had “waited for 20 years for this meeting” and added: “It’s not that everything’s 100% understood or known, but I think we’ve made a lot of strides.”*

Autism, and the broader issue of neurodivergence, is something in which I have taken an interest for a long time: as a member of my extended family, as a one-time school governor with an interest in special educational needs, as a parent, and simply because of the impact that the issue has on people that I know.

Autism, and the related issues of ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder) and AuDHD (the situation where a person has both autism and ADHD) - all of which might be described as neurodivergent conditions - are issues about which I have read a lot as a result. That, I suspect, is obvious from what I have had to say on this issue and my concerns about it over time.

As a result, [I have criticised](#) Kemi Badenoch and the current Conservative Party leadership for their appalling comments and atrocious attitude towards those with special educational needs arising from these conditions.

I have [similarly condemned](#) comments made by Nigel Farage in his various political incarnations on the issue. His attitude to those whose educational needs differ from the norm is utterly unacceptable and a denial of the basic human rights of those with these conditions.

And now we have Trump and Kennedy, who have noticed some correlations or associations in the world around them but admit they have no proof of anything, but have jumped to massive and unjustified conclusions. All they seemed to say was:

- \* Women give birth to autistic children, so women have something to do with this.
- \* Most women take paracetamol during pregnancy as it is the only painkiller they are recommended to use, and fever in pregnancy is dangerous to a fetus, so many, if not most, women will take it whilst pregnant.
- \* There is, therefore, a correlation between taking paracetamol and having an autistic or neurodivergent child.

What they are forgetting is that there is a strong correlation between those who carry cigarette lighters and those who have lung cancer, but that does not prove that cigarette lighters cause that form of cancer. Yesterday's claims by Trump are as absurd as that.

In my opinion — and very clearly that of many medical experts (which might matter rather more) — these claims are total nonsense. These neurodivergent conditions are inherited and persist throughout a person's lifetime. There is no 'cure'. They are how a person is.

In this context, please note [the separate blog](#) that I will be posting simultaneously to this one, which discusses what the three currently recognised forms of autism are, together with descriptions of ADHD and AuDHD, with an emphasis upon the fact that it is now widely recognised that these conditions did not first appear in the 1940s (when autism was first described), or as late as 2013 in the case of AuDHD (when it was first accepted as existing), but have instead existed for many millennia (or more), precisely because they conferred evolutionary advantage on some groups in society — with which claim I would agree, at least in the case of less severe forms.

This being said, I think it is only appropriate that I lay my own cards on the table, which I have long resisted doing. I do not have a diagnosis for any of these conditions. I am, however, aware of the process involved in getting such a diagnosis. I also know some people who know me well, and who are familiar with these conditions — most especially in the special educational field — who think that I might well have AuDHD. This, they suggest, would explain my passionate and dedicated commitment to a limited range of interests throughout my life.

I am not able to comment for sure, but what I do know from my experience of others who have these diagnoses is that the one thing you can guarantee about their behaviour is that they refuse to comply with the norms that society lays down, because

their brains are simply wired differently from the majority in the population. Some in that majority - and most especially those on the far-right of the political spectrum - are, as a result, apparently threatened by the ability of people with these conditions to think of both questions and answers about what is happening in the world around them that are fundamentally different to those which neurotypical people might seek to pose and address. Hardly surprisingly, in that case, those who seek uniformity of behaviour in the population at large — which those on the political far right always seem to do — do, as a consequence, feel particularly frightened by those who have these conditions.

It's a fact that neurodivergent people are just not wired to think as others do, but that does not mean there is anything wrong with them. They are different in the way that men and women are different, adults and children are different, people who are gay and people who are straight are different, and those who are left- and right-handed are different. All of these things come down to our wiring, and every one of them adds to the necessary diversity within the human population that has helped ensure our survival as a human race.

And now we have Trump and Kennedy — no doubt to be followed in short order by Badenoch, Jenrick and Farage — each suggesting that autism is a recent, drug-created disorder that can be cured, when the likelihood that either of these claims is true is statistically very little different from zero.

Let me contextualise this. Trump [said this weekend](#) that he hates those who oppose him. He thinks them to be his enemies. Amongst those who are much more likely than average to oppose Trump are those who have these neurodivergent conditions, or a combination of them.

His announcement yesterday does not in any way represent a medical breakthrough. It is simply an extension of his campaign of hate against those whom he thinks differ from him. That is what this is all about, and it is not hard to imagine where this goes next.

I am genuinely very worried for the very large numbers of people whose lives are going to be thrown into turmoil as a consequence of the fear that Trump will accelerate, and which those who follow him will generate on this issue. Maybe one in six people might be affected by these conditions, although not all will realise it, but the chance is that many of them are now facing considerably increased risk as a result, simply for being who they are.

Day after day, the world we live in gets ever more toxic for everyone, including those who wish to fuel hate and who are driving this process of discrimination.

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