Just out in Trends in Cognitive Sciences, "The social motivation theory of autism," an article (available here) by Coralie Chevallier, Gregor Kohls, Vanessa Troiani, Edward S Brodkin, and Robert T Schultz that challenges the dominant explanation of autism in terms of a Theory-of-Mind deficit. Given the role that the case of autism plays in our understanding of human sociality, this is of high cognition-and-culture relevance.

The first paragraph of the article: "Over the past three decades, a number of theories have been put forward to account for the pervasive social impairments found in Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD). Among the various attempts, the idea of a core deficit in social cognition (theory of mind, or ToM, in particular) has become one of the most prominent accounts of ASD. Concomitantly, the impact of motivational factors on the development of social skills and social cognition has received little attention. Recently, however, social motivation has emerged as a promising research domain at the intersection of social psychology, behavioral economics, social neuroscience and evolutionary biology. In this review, we integrate these diverse strands of research and defend the idea that social motivation is a powerful force guiding human behavior and that disruption of social motivational mechanisms may constitute a primary deficit in autism. In this framework, motivational deficits are thought to have downstream effects on the development of social cognition, and deficits in social cognition are therefore construed as a consequence, rather than a cause, of disrupted social interest."

The concluding remarks: "The social world summons our attention like no other domain: social signals are prioritized by attention, interactions are intrinsically rewarding, and social maintaining permeates interpersonal behaviors. Social motivation is subserved by dedicated biological mechanisms and can be seen as an evolutionary adaptation to humans' highly collaborative environment: by enhancing attention to social information, by rewarding social interactions, and by promoting the desire to effectively maintain social bonds, social motivation smoothes relationships, promotes coordination and ultimately fosters collaboration. In ASD, by contrast, there appears to be an overall decrease in the attentional weight assigned to social information. Diminished social orienting, social reward and social maintaining are all found in autism and can account for a range of behaviors, including cascading effects on the development of mature social cognitive skills. These deficits appear to be rooted in biological disruptions of the orbitofrontal–striatal–amygdala circuitry, as well as in dysregulation of certain neuropeptides and neurotransmitters. ASD can thus be seen as an extreme case of early-onset diminished social motivation and provides a powerful model for understanding humans' intrinsic drive to seek acceptance and avoid rejection."