Simon Baron-Cohen, Ph.D.
M.I.N.D. Institute Distinguished Lecturer Series –December 9, 2009

Biographical Information
Simon Baron-Cohen, Ph.D., M.Phil., is professor of developmental psychopathology at Cambridge University, a fellow at Trinity College, Cambridge, and director of the Autism Research Centre (ARC) at Cambridge. He holds degrees in Human Sciences from New College, Oxford, a Ph.D. in Psychology from University College, London, and an M.Phil in Clinical Psychology from the Institute of Psychiatry. He held lecturships in both of these departments in London before moving to Cambridge in 1994.

Baron-Cohen is author of Mindblindness (MIT Press, 1995), The Essential Difference (Penguin Press UK/Basic Books, 2003), and Prenatal Testosterone in Mind (MIT Press, 2005). He has edited a number of scholarly anthologies, including Understanding Other Minds, The Maladapted Mind and Synaesthesia. He has also written books for parents and teachers, such as Autism and Asperger Syndrome: The Facts, and Teaching children with autism to mind read. He is author of the DVD-ROM Mind Reading: an interactive guide to emotions and The Transporters, an animation for preschool children with autism to help them learn emotion recognition. Both of these were nominated for BAFTA awards.

He has received prizes from the American Psychological Association, the British Association for the Advancement of Science (BA), and the British Psychological Society (BPS) for his research into autism. During 2009 Baron-Cohen served as president of the Psychology Section of the BA, vice president of the National Autistic Society, and received the 2006 Presidents’ Award for Distinguished Contributions to Psychological Knowledge from the BPS. During 2009 he is vice president of the International Society for Autism Research (INSAR). He is a fellow of the BPS, the British Academy, and the Association for Psychological Science, and co-editor in chief of the new journal Molecular Autism. His current research involves testing the ‘extreme male brain’ theory of autism at the neural, endocrine and genetic levels.

Presentation Abstract
4:30 p.m.
The Androgen Theory of Autism
Autism affects males much more often than females. The explanation for this must either lie in diagnostic practice, hormones, or genetics, or a mix of all three. In this lecture Baron-Cohen will summarize work from his laboratory arising from three lines of investigation: (1) The role of fetal testosterone (FT) in later social and communication development, and in the development of autistic traits. The study uses amniocentesis, the timing of which coincides with the surge in FT production, and is a longitudinal follow-up of typically developing children. (2) The evidence for hormone dysregulation in autism. This includes evidence from the timing of puberty, and the association with testosterone-linked medical conditions in autism. (3) The association between candidate genes that regulate testosterone, and autism. These three lines of research suggest FT is a key factor underlying social development and may play a part in autism. Converging evidence for the link between testosterone and autistic traits comes from rare medical conditions where FT is elevated (such as Congenital Adrenal Hyperplasia). The presentation will tie these different lines of evidence together.