

From Marginal Cases to Linked Oppressions: Reframing the Conflict between the Autistic Pride and Animal Rights Movements

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Abstract

This paper examines the conflict between the autistic pride movement and the animal rights movement over Peter Singer's use of the "Argument from Marginal Cases." It is written from the perspective of a person who is an autistic and a committed animal rights activist. This paper radically reframes the conflict using an approach which is both non-dualistic and reconciliatory. A "linked oppressions" model builds solidarity and fosters coexistence, thus bridging the divide between the disability and the animal rights movements. A radical reframing of the conflict can lead to a possible truce, if not constructive alliance building between these two disparate movements.

Introduction

Peter Singer and other activist-scholars have established the philosophical legitimacy of discourse regarding animal ethics; thus, animal ethics can no longer be dismissed as sentimentalism by the Western intellectual establishment (Best 2009; Linzey 2000, 2009; Webb 1998). Nonetheless, the framing of animal ethics needs to be critiqued; a neurotypical bias remains implicit in the way animal ethics is typically framed, which keeps intact and perpetuates speciesism.² Neurotypicalism privileges a form of cognitive processing characteristic of peoples who have a neurotypical (non-autistic) brain structure, while at least implicitly finding other forms of cognitive processing to be inferior, such as those natural to autists and nonhuman animals. Specifically,

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² There are many parallels between the autistic critique of animal ethics and the feminist critique of animal ethics especially with respect to intersections between patriarchy and neurotypicalism. Thus, both feminists and autists question many of the same biases in animal ethics literature, either implicitly or explicitly. See Best's article, listed in bibliography, which independently addresses some of the neurotypical biases in critical animal studies literature, without using the term neurotypicalism.

neurotypicalism privileges vermal reasoning (i.e. reasoning that relies heavily on the brain's vermis) over other ways of knowing, being, and experiencing.

According to neurology researchers, the defining difference³ in brain structure between autists and neurotypicals may lie in the development of the vermis in the cerebellum (Courchene et al. 1988; Courchese et al. 2001; Belmonte et al. 2004; Mitchell et al. 2009; Mostofsky et al. 2009). A fully functioning *vermis cerebelli*, found in neurotypicals, allows neurotypicals to develop an “abstract concept of the world” (Grandin 2005: 26).⁴ Much animal ethics discourses precede based on the unquestioned acceptance of this “abstract concept of the world” and that such an “abstract concept of the world” is necessary to advance the animal liberation cause. One possible reason is that autism is listed in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM IV) as a mental disorder, implying that the insights and virtues of autists are suspect. The DSM IV also claims that autists have a “qualitative impairment” in both social interaction and communication. The DSM IV model fails to account for two realities: First, is that autistic characteristics may provide advantages, strengths, and even virtues. Second, personality and character traits of autists, especially those with Asperger's and high-functioning autism, vary significantly from the DSM IV model, with some individuals being significantly more social and communicative than the classic stereotype of an autist.^{5 6}

Both the autist and neurotypical ways of knowing, being, and experiencing have their strengths and weaknesses. The strength of the autist approach is that while the vermis is not as strong, this apparent neurological deficit enables autists to see each entity as

3 The word “difference” is used instead of “maldevelopment,” the actual words of one researcher quoted, to avoid making a nonscientific value judgment when describing scientific evidence. The word “maldevelopment” judges that some brains and nervous systems are better than others, which is non-scientific and demeaning to autists.

4 A disconnect remains between how neurological and behavioral approaches to studying the autism spectrum relate to one another (Belmonte et. al), e.g. vermis differences (neurology research) versus frontal lobe differences (behavioral, as in Grandin) as the defining brain difference between autists and neurotypicals. The purpose of this paper, the author will contend that the neurological data is for all practical purposes consistent with behavioral data, in terms of connecting relevant behavioral findings with relevant neurological findings. It also underscores the strong neurological basis for autism.

5 For one autist's argument that neurotypical diagnosticians oversimplify when contending that autists have a relative lack of empathy, see “Some Thoughts About Empathy” by Jim Sinclair (<http://web.archive.org/web/2008062500027/web.syr.edu/~jsincla/empathy.htm>) 1988.

6 Boundy (2008) offers another critique of the medical definition of autism.

a separate reality, resulting in greater awareness of the details of the world-around-them (Grandin 2005: 26, 30-31, 50-52, and 293-297). Grandin (2005, 6-7,) contends that nonhuman animals also have this same capability of seeing concrete reality with limited conceptual bias. By contrast, neurotypicals miss precise details of the world due to an “inattentional blindness,” in which sensory inputs are structured by “an entire set of social-symbolic conventions, form, and expectations” divorced from nature, but instead imbedded in human culture (Wolfe 2008: 113). In other words, “inattentional blindness” produces a certain worldview and phenomenology, which is culturally constructed, and thus open to critique.

For the purposes of this paper, neurotypicalism (Sinclair 1998) or vermal reasoning can also be construed as conceptualism (McKim 1996; Lonergan, 1957 1971) which is present in Hellenistic philosophy (Greaves et al. 1997; Lonergan 1957 1971) and more recently in some parts of Enlightenment philosophy (Lonergan 1957 1971). Vermal reasoning is internally generated logic (Grandin 2005; Houston and Frith 2000; Rachels 1999) which by nature is consistent (Linzey 2009; Rachels 1999), coherent (Linzey 2009; Rachels 1999), conceptually hierarchical (Lakoff 2003; Johnson 2003), binary (Boole 1779-1848), dualistic (McKim 1996), abstract (Grandin 2005) (Nussbaum 2006), simplified (Grandin 2005), generalized (Grandin 2005), homogenized (Grandin 2005), and artificially compartmentalized (Prince-Hughes 2004), developed devoid of experiential reality (Linzey 2009; Rachels 1999; Houston and Firth 2000). This privileging of vermal reasoning over other forms of reasoning not only invalidates and makes suspect autistic insights, but neurotypicalism also invalidates and makes suspect animal intelligence.

The neurotypical bias can be removed from animal ethics discourse by focusing critical attention on the lived experiences of nonhuman animals themselves. In other words, neurotypicalism is fundamentally speciesist because neurotypicalism conceptually both insulates and inoculates one from the lived reality and hence the needs of nonhuman animals, making empathy for and meaningful improvement in the quality of life for nonhuman animals difficult. A neurotypical approach to animal ethics makes the correct usage of certain thought processes, ideologies, and

methodologies more important than how one actually treats nonhuman animals (Best 2009: 19-33; Webb 1998: 58-60,).⁷

One such example is the philosophical thought experiment known as the ‘Argument from Marginal Cases’ (AMC) which has been effectively used by Singer and others animal ethicists to provide a philosophical foundation for animal rights; nonetheless, it retains a neurotypical bias toward the reasoning characteristic of neurotypical brain structures (Singer 1999: 326-327). This argument rests on three incorrect assumptions about people with mental disabilities: First, infants and people with mental disabilities lack understanding (Singer 1999: 326). Second, verbally rational life is more valuable than non-verbally rational life (Singer 1999: 326). Third, infants and those with mental disabilities are incapable of reciprocity (Singer 1999: 328). By using the AMC to frame the cause of animal liberation, Singer privileges verbal reasoning over other forms of reasoning, such as visual reasoning (Grandin 2005: 26), which allows these other classes of beings to understand, to reason, and even to reciprocate, albeit differently. Singer’s use of the AMC thus keep intact the speciesist assumption that the rational capacities of neurotypical⁸ humans beings is the standard by which nonhuman animals are judged and given moral consideration (de Waal 1996; Armstrong and Botlzer 2004, 312).

Autists have been oppressed by many of the same persons and institutions as nonhuman animals. For example, biomedicine has a history of applying Skinner-like animal experiments in the development of invasive and sometimes traumatic behavioral modification programs for autistic children (Grandin 2005: 13). Autists know firsthand what it feels like to be treated like a nonhuman animal; to have their full capacities ignored, devalued, dismissed, trivialized, marginalized; and to have their subsequent needs and wants not addressed or taken seriously. Thus, this paper contends that autists are uniquely positioned to contribute constructively to the cause of animal liberation. Autists can articulate what is like to be treated like a nonhuman animal, can articulate what it is like to be a non-neurotypical (a category which

⁷ These are more feminine ways of knowing, too.

⁸ Singer (e.g., 326) uses the word “normal” multiple times in his work.

encompasses nonhuman animals as well), are able to profoundly empathize with the plight and needs of nonhuman animals, and can provide unique insights into animal intelligence.

The ‘Argument from Marginal Cases’

The primary foundation of the contemporary ‘Argument from Marginal Cases’ as used in animal ethics comes from utilitarianism, an Enlightenment philosophy which can be traced back to the philosopher Jeremy Bentham. A working definition of utilitarianism is “that the morally right action is the action that produces the most good” (Driver 2009). Singer (1999: 324-325,) attempts to answer Bentham’s question about the moral standing of non-human animals: “the question is not, Can they reason? Nor Can they talk? but, Can they suffer?” (Bentham 1988: 26). Singer (1999: 327) contends that the fact that non-human animals can suffer is a sufficient basis for giving non-human animals moral consideration. Nonetheless, by arguing that only rational beings can suffer, Singer (1999: 326) keeps intact the notion that reason is an important criterion for giving non-human beings moral consideration.

Bentham (1988: 26) employs the AMC when writing: “But a full grown horse or dog is beyond comparison a more rational, as well as a more conversable animal, than an infant of a day, or a week, or even a month, old.” Bentham goes on to say that suffering is the most important criteria for giving a being moral consideration. Singer picks up on this speculation, synergizing it with what Bentham dismisses as a less important ethical criterion: capacity for reason. Singer (1999: 326, 328-329) then proceeds to use Bentham’s comparison between certain non-human animals and newborn human infants, expanding it to include those with mental disabilities and arguing that certain non-human animals are more rational than certain classes of human beings. Other animal ethicists, such as Tom Regan (1983, 2006), have also adapted the AMC to their own work.

The AMC has both strong and weak forms (Dombrowski 1997: 179-181). Singer (1999: 326, 327.), Regan (1983: 315, 316.),⁹ Dombrowski (1997, 3-4, 189-193) and Patton (1988: 231-235,) subscribe to the strong form, which contends that humanists need to defend “*why* marginal cases have rights” (Dombrowski 1997: 179). (Singer would say “moral consideration” since, as a strict utilitarian, he is ideologically opposed to rights.)¹⁰ Wolfe (2009: 121-123), Linzey (2009: 5, 30-37, 151-155, 165-167), and Nussbaum (2006: 359-366,) subscribe to its weak form, which contends that “[if] marginal cases [can] have rights, we can then argue that animals, too, [can] have rights” (Dombrowski 1997: 179).

Figure 1: Differences between Strong and Weak versions of AMC

	Strong AMC	Weak AMC
Compare	Argues From Marginal Cases, e.g., infants and those with mental disabilities.	Argues From Marginal Cases, e.g., infants and those with mental disabilities.
Contrast	Either/Or, Dualistic, Hierarchical, To Choose Between, e.g., peoples with mental disabilities <i>or</i> certain nonhuman animals.	Both/And, Holistic, Balanced, To Choose Both, e.g., peoples with mental disabilities <i>and</i> certain nonhuman animals.

Linzey and Nussbaum critique the strong form of the AMC. Linzey (2009, 154-155) disagrees with Singer on three points. First, Singer does not account for the history of the animal movements, which has seen the animal rights cause and the children rights cause as inseparable. Second, Singer pits human rights against animal rights, which provides bad witness to a highly speciesist society that sees animal rights in opposition to human rights. Third, Singer grants nonhuman animals moral consideration based on their demonstrating a certain standard of self-awareness—a criterion that many nonhuman animals cannot meet. Thus, rejecting as immoral any

9 The author notes Dombrowski’s observation that there are subtle differences between Singer’s and Regan’s use of the AMC. The author still classifies Singer and Regan together in terms of the “strong” position, which is consistent with Dombrowski’s observations, while acknowledging that both philosophers do not recognize the intrinsic value of peoples with mental disabilities.

10 Unlike the others, Patton (233) acknowledges the gifts of some disabilities.

argument asserting the tyranny of the strong over those who lack certain morally irrelevant capacities, Linzey argues for a weaker version of the AMC. Beings that lack certain capacities—beings such as nonhuman animals, infants, and children, who are at the mercy of the strong—must be given special moral consideration on just these same grounds.

Nussbaum's critique of the AMC is that it does not recognize legitimate ontological differences between those with mental disabilities and nonhuman animals. Most importantly, those with mental disabilities are dependent on human society for their survival and subsequent flourishing, while nonhuman animals—with the exception of those under human dominion, e.g., on factory farms—are not. In other words, nonhuman animals, in natural settings, would be able to rely on other members of their species to help them survive and flourish. Those with mental disabilities, if exiled from the rest of human society, have nowhere else to go. Thus, Nussbaum (2006: 359-366) argues, human society has moral obligations to those with mental disabilities.

Under the force of these two critiques, the strong form of the AMC is an inadequate basis for framing animal liberation. It can be argued that the weak form of the AMC is also inadequate, and for this we turn to the voices of autists (and caregivers) themselves. These voices provide additional critiques of the strong form, as well as introducing a critique of the weak form.

'Marginal Cases' Create Marginalized Peoples

Autists (part of the mostly grassroots online, autist pride movement, usually those with high functioning autism and Asperger's, see www.wrongplanet.net for an example, and Boundy [2008] and Sinclair [1988] for more analysis) and their caregivers (include those who have low-functioning autism) object to the 'Argument from Marginal Cases' in both its strong and weak forms (e.g., Ari Ne-eman 2008). Both forms have a stigmatizing history and work from incorrect assumptions about the nature of the autism spectrum. Animal ethics scholars employing the AMC make

negative value judgments, not only about autism itself but also about the worth of persons who fit this category of beings. These judgments are based on assumptions that do not hold empirically, as more autists and others with developmental disabilities reveal their inner lives, including Temple Grandin, Dawn Prince-Hughes, Donna Williams, and Steven Shore. These individuals reveal that autists have vibrant, though different, inner lives.

Before animal ethicists employed the AMC, others used a similar argument to deny rights to certain people because of a perceived lack of humanity. For example, Hugh Blair, a Scottish nobleman of the eighteenth century, was denied proclamation of his marriage because the Church of Scotland believed he was “stupid” (Houston and Frith 2000:45). These two contemporary scholars—a psychologist and a historian—contend Blair had autism. More recent examples include the programs to euthanize or sterilize people with disabilities. A quarter million people with disabilities were murdered during the Holocaust, through gassing, even starvation, even weeks after the war ended in Germany. In United States, programs involving sterilization of individuals with disabilities, which were even widespread as late as the 1970s. (Disability Social History Project) At the time of writing, the United States Congress is debating whether or not to pass legislation which would restrict harmful restraining and seclusion of children in public schools. This proposed legislation responds to allegations from a government report which examined ten cases, involving children with disabilities, which involved both psychological and physical abuse, which required both civil and criminal legal action. One case even involved the death of a 7-year-old-girl. (Disability Scoop 2009, 2010) Examples like this suggest too many in the autistic community that the AMC in its strong form is fundamentally oppressive.

Contrary to Singer, Shore (2004: 58), who has Asperger’s, argues one should not assume that “marginal cases” do not have the “same needs, wants and potential for a fulfilling life as everyone else.” The ideology of identifying certain people as “marginal cases” leads to the stigmatization of entire groups of people.¹¹

¹¹ For a discussion and critique of the social science concept of stigmatization in relationship to the question of disability see Nancy Eiland, *The Disabled God*, 57-66.

Stigmatization, in turn, can lead to discrimination, persecution, oppression, bigotry, and, in its most extreme cases, genocide as the above examples have demonstrated.

Some autists contend that the weak form of the AMC is also problematic because it does not honor the gifts and virtues which one's so-called "disability" brings (Neeman 2008; Boundy 2009). The weak form can be used to justify discrimination and exclusion out-of-hand because autists are seen as liabilities rather than assets to an organization, e.g., prospective employers. In addition, the weak form can be used to justify "curing" or "fixing" autists, rather than accepting them the way they are. Finally, while some animal ethicists liken autists to nonhuman animals, viewing them as 'moral patients' (incapable of conscious moral action) rather than 'moral agents' (Regan 2004, 314), autists see themselves as full human beings who are moral agents, though perhaps in ways that differ from neurotypicals. Nonetheless, the autist objection to the contentions of Singer-esque animal ethics is not based in bigotry toward nonhuman animals, but in a need to defend their identity and existence in the context of an unsympathetic neurotypical society (Ari Ne-eman 2008).

Why Does Animal Ethics Still Remain So Insular?

Despite new evidence demonstrating that autists and others with intellectual disabilities are full human beings, some animal ethicists continue to defend the AMC in both its strong and weak forms (DeGraza 2006, 40-41; Linzey 2009 5, 30-37, 151-155, 165-167; Matheny 2006, 18-19; Regan 2006, 13; Singer 2006). The AMC is also implicit in activist literature, as indicated by several recent PETA campaigns, including "Milk Causes Autism" (PETA 2009b) and "Fishing Hurts" (PETA 2009a). In the latter campaign, a sub-heading—"PCBs Will Make You Stupid"—alluded to the connection between PCB consumption in fish and an increase in intellectual disabilities. Another example is drawn from the AskCarla.com column (Ask Carla 2009) in which Carla gives a loaded and judgmental interpretation, which is far from objective or factual, about the worth of peoples with developmental disabilities: "There are animals who are unquestionably more intelligent, creative, aware, communicative, and able to use language than some humans, as in the case of a chimpanzee, compared to a human infant or a person with a severe developmental

disability, for example.” When one holds onto an argument, despite significant contrary evidence, it is no longer a matter of ignorance; it is a matter of ideology based in disinformation (Lakoff 2004). Neurotypicalism is such an ideology, indicated by the way use of the AMC transforms the animal rights movement from a life-affirming movement into a life-denying movement, in the sense that certain beings are now sometimes excluded.

Drawing on the analysis presented by Wolfe, I offer four hypotheses for the continued support of the AMC. First, disability studies literature has historically not addressed the relationship between disability studies and animal studies, making it fundamentally anthropocentric and speciesist from the animal ethicist’s point-of-view. This is evident in Wolfe’s comment that a recent conference on disability studies lacked any paper referencing “the relationship between disability and trans-species affinity” (Wolfe 2009: 119-121). Second, animal ethicists perceive that nonhuman animals are being used by autists and others with disabilities as a ticket to a neurotypical, ablest society, with the nonhuman animals not getting sufficient libratory benefits in return. On this point, consider Wolfe’s (2009: 122) discussion of the animal rights movement’s objections to Temple Grandin’s advocacy for welfare instead of rights. Third, assuming limited resources, compassion, and goodwill, there is the identity politics factor of “my constituents are more marginalized and unrecognized than yours” (Wolfe 2009: 121). Although, Wolfe does not endorse this position, many other animal ethicists and activists do. Fourth and finally, animal ethicists still fundamentally contend that autists and others with disabilities are “useless,” that they cannot reciprocate, and that they are moral patients who are completely dependent on moral agents for their survival (Wolfe 2009: 122-123). These sentiments, as revealed by Wolfe, continue to pervade animal ethics and activism.

These objections to autistic animal ethics are not cogent for a number of reasons. First, connections can be made between disability studies and animal studies. For example, Wolfe talks about the shift in the disability movement from what he calls “fetishization of agency,” which is a more civil rights and legalistic approach, to an awareness by some people in the movement that “we now ‘need to find a new way of talking about the place of disabled people in the universe and to find the place of

disability in some universal,”” which is a more cosmological and anthropological approach (Wolfe 2009: 119-120). This cosmological-anthropological approach can open up room to encompass the nonhuman world because this approach is more outward than inward, more communitarian than individualistic, and yet it does not deny ecological individualism—the value of each individual animal, whether human or nonhuman.

Second, nonhuman animals do in fact get significant libratory benefits from autists reaching out to animalkind. Consider Dawn Prince-Hughes’s lifework with gorillas; her work might not have happened, if she were not an autist. I am another example. I identify myself as an animal rights activist and have published books which constructively address and sympathetically engage animal issues. I am a vegetarian, have recently started an animal ministry with www.allcreatures.org, and have been militantly against hunting for population control and the ethical hunting position since I was a youth. I do not attend circuses, rodeos, or bullfights; I avoid wearing animal products when possible; and I do not hunt, fish, or trap. My practices reflect not only my principles, but also a fundamental difference in my mindset: I do not get pleasure from these activities. Unquestioningly, nonhuman animals receive at least some libratory benefits from my existence.

The third issue, the identity politics argument, implicitly assumes that there are “deserving and undeserving poor,” revealing an acceptance of the implicit paternalism of the oppressor, and holding that some group’s issues are categorically more important than others, e.g., consider the conflicts between African-Americans and Latinos, between illegal and legal immigrants, between earlier and newer immigrants, and between the working poor and those on welfare. This argument quantifies suffering, e.g., physical suffering is greater suffering than psychological suffering or more of this group died in a genocide than that group, rather than embracing everyone’s suffering as legitimate, e.g., both physical and psychological suffering both qualifies as suffering, or the fact that members of any group died in a genocide is a serious justice problem. It is fundamentally dualistic, e.g., one group getting justice, while another does not. This line of thinking also enables oppressors to get two or more oppressed groups fighting among themselves, as the above examples imply, rather than uniting against their common oppressor, e.g., classism, xenophobia,

poverty, unjust barriers, and unlivable wages. Also, it assumes a scarcity of resources, compassion, and good-will that is available to help the marginalized, e.g., the unquestioned paradigm in economics of a presumed scarcity or an unquestioned cynicism in the power for individuals and societies to change. The alternative is to negotiate with the oppressors to more equitably distribute goods and services, e.g., activism and moral suasion, now disproportionately controlled by the dominant group in society, e.g., neurotypical, speciesist power holders.

Finally, it has already been shown that the fourth argument, that autists and others with disabilities are “useless” and lack moral agency, is contrary to fact. Grandin is an autist, and also a Ph.D. professor of animal science at Colorado State University, who has published over three hundred scientific papers as of 2005, gives thirty-five lectures on animal management a year, another twenty-five on autism per year, and half the cattle in the United States are handled in more benign slaughter systems she has designed (Grandin 2005: 7).¹² Sinclair, another autist activist, counters the moral patient argument, by arguing that in his struggle toward acquiring “certain expressive and receptive communication skills, possibly including some basic instincts that make communication a natural process for most people, combined with any cognitive or perceptual differences” (Sinclair 1988: 1) takes the posture of “I don’t mind that I have to do this work...I am interested in learning about how people’s minds work...But I *do* mind when in spite of so much effort I still miss cues, and someone who has much better inherent communication ability than I do but has not even taken a close enough look at my perspective to notice the enormity of the chasm between us tells me that my failure to understand is because *I* lack ‘empathy.’ If I know that I do not understand people and I devote all this energy and effort to figuring them out, do I have more or less empathy than people who not only do not understand, but who do

12 A benign slaughter system is not necessarily the logical conclusion of autist animal ethics, nor is Grandin’s welfare approach unanimously defended by all in the autist community. For example, Sinclair who is also an autist and a vegan, argues forcefully against Grandin’s approach, instead arguing for a hard-line animal liberationist position, in his short essay, “If you love something, you don’t kill it” <http://web.archive.org/web/20080330071836/web.syr.edu/~jisincla/killing.htm>, 1998.

Note also that Grandin does not have a monopoly on confusing love with killing, e.g., Just War Theory and Ethical Hunting. Both examples are nonautistic in origin. This illustrates autist productivity and contributions; it does not imply Grandin’s approach is a universally accepted autist animal ethic.

not even notice that they do not understand me?” (Sinclair 1988: 2-3) Sinclair is an example of an autistic, making conscious moral decisions in his interactions with other people, thus clearly meeting Regan’s definition of a moral agent, while Grandin is just one of many autistic examples as productive, contributing members of society. Thus the animal ethics argument that non-neurotypicals are useless moral patients is not cogent.

There is a much more persuasive way of framing animal ethics, which is also nonanthropocentric and non-speciesist, as well as mutually liberating, uniting, and empowering to both autists and nonhuman animals.

The Linked Oppression Model—Its Power and Promise

Steven-Bouma Prediger describes “linked oppressions” as it relates to both the ecofeminist argument and the ecojustice argument: “One might call [it] the fourth argument [in his typology for environmentalism] ‘poor and oppressed unite’ since it posits a link between various forms of oppression” (Prediger 2001: 168). Prediger (2001:168-169) continues, “Given that sexism and racism and the exploitation of the earth are connected, concern for one should entail concern for the others. The ecology movement and the various movements for human liberation, which have for too long been separate and at times antagonistic projects, must see themselves as allies in a common quest. There is, happily, growing recognition of this fact.”

I propose a variation of the linked oppression model, namely that there is a correlation between how autists are treated by neurotypical society and how neurotypical society, as a whole, treats nonhuman animals, and that the causes of autistic pride and animal liberation are intricately linked, interdependent on one another. Both oppressions have the same primary cause: the ideology of neurotypicalism. When those without a fully functioning vermis, including autists and nonhuman animals, do not conform to the wishes of neurotypical society, neurotypical society starts to “interfere with, censor, and control” (Houston and Frith 2000: 43) those understandings or behaviors which do not conform to neurotypical standards or desires.

This model is consistent with reality and it helps resolve the conflict between animal rights and disability rights which is manifested in some religious, ethical, and public policy debates. It also has the power to break down another powerful false dualism: the choice between preserving human dignity at all costs and giving the nonhuman world significant moral consideration. This is a false choice, between being for Peter Singer's "argument for marginal cases" or being for Pope John Paul's "dignity of man" argument. Each of these two approaches is inadequate.

Singer's use of the AMC has already been dealt with. The other extreme is just as destructive and must also be rejected by autists and other peoples with disabilities. The "dignity of man argument" espoused by people like Pope John Paul II holds that the unique value of human beings must be preserved at all costs, in order to prevent such practices as abortion and euthanasia. The dogmatic contention that humans are both unique and superior forces Singer and others to embrace the AMC in an attempt to deconstruct specieism.

The animal rights and the disability movements need a framework and strategy that draws on a synthesis of the thesis and antithesis of the "dignity of man" argument and the argument from "marginal cases." Both extremes are harmful and counterproductive. The AMC is fundamentally oppressive to autists, while the "dignity of man" argument is fundamentally oppressive to nonhuman animals. Both positions are fundamentally inadequate. Yet, these two positions are also fundamentally true. There is something intrinsically valuable about all human life. And, it is equally true that there is something intrinsically valuable about nonhuman life. In essence, what needs to be preserved at all costs is the dignity of all life, human and nonhuman. Once it is recognized that choosing between the rights of nonhuman animals and the rights of persons with disabilities is a false dichotomy, it is possible to see that both groups are oppressed because they are not neurotypical. To this we turn.

The Autist-Animal Connection

A fully functioning vermis does not make a neurotypical person superior to autists and nonhuman animals. As the author has demonstrated, the autist mind has its own

gifts and virtues. Yet, neurotypicals believe that their fully functioning vermis makes them superior to and worthy of the conquest of all others who do not conform or measure up. Let's look at how this oppressive dynamic plays out, building a profile of the harmful effects of neurotypical society.

First, neurotypical society sees autists and nonhuman animals as peripheral in terms of social justice (Houston and Frith 2000). Autists and nonhuman animals are considered by neurotypical society to be the "undeserving poor," versus homosexuals, women, the economic poor, or African-Americans, "the real poor," which are considered legitimate, because they demand less and are considered more like the dominant society (Johnson). Moreover, if the autistic struggle for justice is addressed at all, it is oftentimes as a tacked-on issue appealing to people's self-interests, whether in the form of "segregationist charity" (Eisland 1994: 73-75) for autists and others with disabilities or "compassion" (Nussbaum 2006: 2, 325) for nonhuman animals.

Second, neurotypical society sees autists and nonhuman animals as expendable (Houston and Frith 2000). If autists or nonhuman animals get in the way of the neurotypical agenda, they are sacrificed to the common good of neurotypical society. If he or she is disruptive, an autistic is expelled from a community, such as when an elementary school teacher in Florida, disciplined a troublesome five-year-old who was in the process of being diagnosed with Asperger's, by letting all his fellow students vote him out of the class, as well as publicly chastising and humiliating him (Wixon 2008). If he or she is found to be a nuisance, a nonhuman animal is killed, such as the standard policy of wildlife managers of addressing overpopulated and invasive species problems through hunting and other methods of eradication, as has been employed to deal with white tailed deer, resident Canada geese, or nutria problems. Even reintroduced wild wolves are not above being eradicated, even though they are endangered.

Third, neurotypical society patronizes and dominates autists and nonhuman animals (Houston and Frith 2000). Neurotypical society looks down on autists and nonhuman animals and does not treat them as equals. For example, a dog is seen as cute and made obedient. An autistic is treated like a little child, even when a full adult.

Fourth, neurotypical society expects autists and nonhuman animals to conform to neurotypical sentiments and standards set by neurotypical society (Houston and Frith 2000). Nonhuman animals are expected to not be a nuisance. Autists are expected to become “normal.”

Fifth, neurotypical society punishes autists and nonhuman animals when they do not conform (Houston and Frith 2000). Animals are euthanized when they are seen as a threat to neurotypical society. Autists are subjected to powerful psychotropic medications and traumatic behavior modification training, in efforts to get them to conform (Diament 2009, 2010).

Sixth, neurotypical society oppresses autists and nonhuman animals by putting them into situations in which they are incapable of properly defending themselves, or even properly handling themselves, thereby causing them to perform poorly at best (Houston and Frith 2000). For example, last year a pet chimp became violent under stress, because he ingested wine and medicine. Keeping the chimp as a poorly maintained pet, resulted in the chimp being drugged; neurotypical society then set-up a normally compassionate police officer to fatally shoot the chimp in self-defense, and to save the life of the owner (Wilson 2010). In the past, I have been denied support which would have helped me to succeed. When I did not do well, despite much effort, institutions severely punished me. For example, a doctoral program I attended for one year would have been successful if I had received the accommodation of a reduced course load, which was the recommendation of Disability Services, but was departmentally discouraged by the program. Because I was discouraged from taking a reduced course-load, I did not make the necessary grades to stay in the program, and was asked to leave.

Seventh, neurotypical society feels justified in violating the rights of autists and nonhuman animals with impunity. Because neurotypical society conceptualizes the autistic and nonhuman animal as cognitively inferior to the neurotypical, neurotypical society believes that they cannot handle these rights (Houston and Frith 2000).

Eighth, neurotypical society privileges neurotypical ways of knowing and being over autistic and nonhuman animal ways of knowing and being (Houston and Frith 2000). Nonhuman animals are seen as inferior. Autists are seen as savants.

Ninth, neurotypical society is suspicious of rational or intelligent behavior in autists and nonhuman animals (Houston and Frith 2000). Perceived rational or intelligent behavior in nonhuman animals is dismissed as being anthropomorphic. Perceived rational or intelligent behavior in autists is dismissed as unbelievable.

Tenth, neurotypical society is suspicious of and threatened by the special relationship autists have with nonhuman animals, which serves as a prophetic witness against the anthropocentrism and speciesism which dominates Western culture (Houston and Frith 2000). For example, I have been targeted repeatedly because of my views on nonhuman animals. In Boy Scouts, the children used to tease me about my interest in birdwatching. Even today, I continue to feel like a target because of my beliefs about nonhuman animals. While recognizing that members of other groups are also bullied, e.g., homosexuals, in this case, I am convinced that I was bullied because I was an autist. Neurotypical children, who are also sensitive to animals and animal issues, have the advantage of a certain set of social skills to navigate through a bullying situation, which often involves silence in certain situations. Autists do not have these skills, or are in the process of developing them and oftentimes feels uncomfortable lying or being less than authentic. This is corroborated by statistical evidence. Surveys in 2002 and 2009 corroborate that incidents of bullying in the autism community were in the 90% range in 2002 and dropped only four percent in eight years, despite increased education, consciousness, and knowledge of the autism spectrum in the last decade. The 2009 study also reported lack of responsiveness to parent complaints by school officials (Little 2002; The Boston Herald 2009)

Finally, neurotypical society bullies and intimidates autists and nonhuman animals when an autist or a nonhuman animal engages in his or her natural behaviors (Houston and Frith 2000). Autists are mercilessly bullied in school, and even into adulthood. I can easily become a target, and be repeatedly revictimized, whenever I engage in my natural behaviors as an autist. This is often sanctioned by neurotypical society through unresponsive teachers and administrators and unsympathetic social

institutions. Nonhuman animals are also bullied though more intensely physically violent, oftentimes lethal, means, as a result of neurotypical society's propensity to sanction the practices of sport hunting, recreational fishing, bullfighting, and rodeos. Bullying of autists is usually emotional, although not always, e.g., also can include beatings (Little 2002). Bullying of nonhuman animals is usually physical, although not always. For example, when a little girl chases pigeons in the park, the same underlying mentality is at work. The purpose of bullying--- whether sports hunting or playground teasing --- is to systematically and radically exclude a certain class of beings from the mainstream of human society, with the goal of dominating these beings, thereby giving them an inferior social status. Bullying of autists and nonhuman animals are similar in that both are considered accepted practices to vent aggression, domination, and violent urges, because both classes of beings are considered other and inferior.¹³ (Johnson 2003)

As I have demonstrated in the above profile, neurotypicals have behavioral problems that impact other persons and beings, just as neurotypicals claim autistic and nonhuman animal behavioral problems impact neurotypicals. Now, we will look briefly at some objections to this framework.

Practical Implications of the Linked Oppression Model

In advocating and defending this version of linked oppressions, I have received three main objections: that I stereotype neurotypicals (Sinclair, personal conversation), that I scapegoat neurotypicals (Sinclair, personal communication) and that I invalidate the neurotypical perspective (Boyle, personal communication). With respect to the first objection, it is important to make clear a distinction between individual persons who happen to be neurotypical and neurotypicalism, which is a worldview or ideology held by neurotypical society *as a whole*, and which informs collective neurotypical behavior, cultural assumptions, and institutional structures (Boundy 2008). Not all neurotypical individuals subscribe to this worldview in its entirety (Boundy 2008).

¹³ Generalized principles are derived from Houston and Frith, although, in most cases, Houston and Frith did not apply their analysis to nonhuman animals. See Linzey (2009: 87-88), "Hunting as anti-social behavior," for an example of a correlation between bullying in children, animal cruelty, and hunting.

Some neurotypicals are becoming increasingly sensitive to autistic oppression and pride (Boundy 2008). Some neurotypicals are beginning to question the legitimacy of anthropocentrism and speciesism, such as Singer, Regan, Rachels and Linzey, and even the primacy of verbal reasoning itself (Boundy 2008). Nonetheless, by the mere fact that neurotypicals are the ruling majority, every neurotypical to one degree or another has bought into, benefits from, and is validated by at least part of the neurotypical worldview (Boundy 2008; (Sinclair 1988 1998; Diament 2009 2010; Little 2002; Johnson 2003; Disability Social History Project). In other words, neurotypicalism informs individual neurotypical's social location, sense of social privilege, and experiences of reality much in the same way race, gender, or sexual orientation does (Boundy 2008; Sinclair 1988 1998; Diament 2009 2010; Little 2002; Johnson 2003; Disability Social History Project). This model recognizes, consistent with scholarship in sociology, that individuals behave collectively as part of a given society and social arrangement (see Appelbaum and Chambliss [1997], for an introduction to the sociology perspective). Individuals are, in part, "socially produced" (Cipollo, university sociology lectures).

With respect to the objection about scapegoating neurotypicals, I respond with recognition that neurotypicals are not the only ones capable of doing wrong or doing evil. Autists can and do wrong things, even evil things, to nonhuman animals. But the point of this model is that autists are not to blame for their own oppression. Nor are they inherently disabled or diseased. Nor is autism inherently psycho-pathological or socio-pathological, with neurotypicalism being the norm for determining a person's abilities, health, or functioning. The author forcefully affirms that autists have a right to exist in this world, and to be included in the world, as much as neurotypicals do, and that we have unique gifts and talents, which can contribute to human society and the nonhuman world in ways at which neurotypicals have not been completely successful. This is in radical opposition to the prejudgment that peoples on the spectrum are "dead weight," distracting attention away from animal liberation. In fact, this is a radical affirmation that autists are not "marginal" to the animal liberation cause. We have a function in the "cosmos," as well as intrinsic value as individuals. This model is a radical deconstruction of the notion that what is considered by neurotypical society to be "normal" are the way things should be, or that such conceptions of the "normal" even fully take into account what actually "is." In other

words, this analysis provides a “serious and radical critique” of “conformity” and a revolutionary affirmation of life, in all its myriad of forms. It forcefully affirms the value of different nervous systems, whether human or nonhuman.

Finally, I do not invalidate neurotypicals. In fact, I contend that autists are interdependent (not dependent) on neurotypicals and neurotypical society. Neurotypicals can bring the following to the table: methods for reducing interpersonal conflicts; a system of accountability for harmful autistic behaviors; recognition that the human body is a valued part of the Natural World; scientific and philosophical reasoning; measures to reduce anxiety, fear, and obsessive-compulsive behaviors in the autistic; and spiritual, ethical, and scientific formation for the autistic, in terms of cultivating their sensibilities toward nonhuman animals. According to this model, neurotypicals are definitely welcomed at the autistic table; they just need to meet autists and nonhuman animals halfway.

Conclusion

Autists and nonhuman animals share a common plight at the hands of neurotypicalism, an ideology that privileges verbal reasoning. Consequently, autistic activists and animal liberationists must unite or at least reach a truce. This does not mean that PETA and other animal groups need to be a social service agency for autists and others with disabilities. PETA and the various animal movements can focus on giving nonhuman animals the best defense against speciesism and institutionalized animal cruelty possible, because these groups have precious little funding, resources, sympathy, and positive media access. Nor do autistic pride groups and individual autists need to agree with PETA and other animal groups on every issue or strategy. Autists and the autistic community should be free to develop their own positions and strategies, for addressing animal issues that provide an original, unique, thoughtful, important, and necessary, critique, ethic, strategy, and vision for animal liberation. So therefore, both the autistic pride movements and the animal liberationist movement need to stop attacking and disrespecting out-of-hand each other’s positions, strategies, motives, and ontological foundations, especially the employment of *ad hominem* arguments as rhetorical devices. Both parties need to recognize that the plight of

autists and the plight of nonhuman animals are fundamentally linked, and that both movements (autist pride and animal liberation) are fighting the same oppressor (neurotypicalism) and working toward the same goal of liberating the oppressed in a society which is fundamentally neurocentric, with each of the two movements offering unique gifts in their quest to ameliorate this injustice. (Bouma-Prediger 2001)

Such a view neither stereotypes nor scapegoats neurotypicals, but simply points out the benefits neurotypical individuals receive from society's present structure. Neurotypicals and autists alike bring complementary gifts to the table. The conflict between autists and animal liberationists is completely unnecessary, alienating a group of people who do not need to be alienated, and who can be of service to the animal liberation cause.

Certain sectors of the animal movements alienating a group of people, who do not need to be alienated, is both counterproductive and undermining to the animal liberation strategy. Most certainly, the animal rights movement, scapegoating an oppressed group of people, who have a predisposition toward being sympathetic, even empathic, toward nonhuman animals, is especially undermining and degrading to both parties. Yet, when certain peoples and groups in the animal movement remain insular to a neurologically chauvinistic strategy, autist individuals and groups will continue to feel compelled to make negative comments about the animal rights movement online, hurting the animal liberation cause in the process.

Whether one is arguing the AMC or Linked Oppressions, it is important to realize, that these arguments are merely "means to an end," strategies toward our collective goal of animal liberation, whatever that vision looks like in theory and practice, depending on the vision of the individual or group involved. We all need to keep what is in the best interest for animals in mind, not becoming insular to certain strategies or arguments, particularly when they loss integrity and persuasiveness, starting to undermine the credibility of the movement in the process, making it difficult to recruit much needed allies, because the target groups finds the framing of animal rights, repulsive and offensive. We need to be both pragmatic and strategic, while retaining our highest ideals, for this endeavor to be fruitful, accomplishing our intended goal-the actualization of animal liberation.

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