

4A: Daniel Salomon, presenter “Animals and Disability,” Orlando 2013

“Getting to Solidarity: Towards the Adjudication of the Conflict between the Animal Rights Movements and the Autistic Pride Movements”

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Outline of Presentation:

Part One: Introduction

- This paper will respectfully, sympathetically, generously engage the various animal movements to rethink the relationship between the autistic pride and animal rights movements, from the perspectives of ethics, critical social theory, political activism and conflict resolution.
- Includes a sympathetic critique of Temple Grandin, the relationships possible between neurodiverse humans and animals and a social justice alternative to the typical animal abolitionist or animal welfare approaches to the relationship between neurodiverse humans and animals in Animal/Disability Studies circles.
- I am neurodiverse too! I will use my “real life” experiences with animals and involvement with the animal movements as a model, to show the types of compassionate relationships possible between neurodiverse humans and animals. As well as, the potentially constructive role that all peoples with disabilities can play in the furthering of the animal movements.

Part Two: The Sympathetic Critique of Temple Grandin

- Neurotypical animal activist-scholars have unfairly used logical fallacies to refute famous autistic animal welfare scientist and Professor of Animal Science at University of Colorado-Fort Collins, Temple Grandin’s controversial contention. Contending that through significantly reducing fear and improvised environments in captive farm animals, meat-eating and factory farming can continue, if they become more humane.
- Grandin has accomplished this through using her autistic mammalian mind to empathize with the emotional needs of animals, combined with sound animal behavior science and taking a pragmatic, reformist approach. Grandin not only invented an operational “humane” slaughter system using the above criteria, Grandin even persuaded 1/2 slaughterhouses in the United States to use her system. She even has developed animal welfare audits which McDonald’s uses and reveres.
- Yet, some animal liberationists use both “ad homonym arguments” and “straw man arguments” to refute Grandin.
- An “ad homonym” argument goes after the person, not their ideas. Like “her animal intelligence insights are wrong for she lacks empathy towards other human beings, for she has an autism diagnosis.”
- A “straw man arguments” zeros in on weak arguments and disregards strong arguments. Such as disregarding Grandin’s disability social history and non-disabled, normative world and comparing Grandin and her methods to Nazi executioners. Without even “accounting” for Grandin’s strong

scientific, economic, even practical and strategic basis for reforming, yet preserving meat-eating, even factory farming, for the sake of the animals themselves.

- This type of debating is considered completely unprofessional in academia. I contend the only reason why animal activist-scholars have stooped is that they see Grandin as an “easy scapegoat,” because she is autistic. A member of an oppressed minority group, being one of the only autistic celebrities in the world. They do not dare compare powerful poultry tycoon like Frankin D. Perdue to a Nazi or try to assassinate his character, for fear of his army of expensive, high-powered lawyers. Yet, Perdue is far richer and much more politically powerful and his agribusiness practices are far more institutionally cruel to animals, than Grandin could ever possibly be. Trust me; I went to undergraduate in Perdue country for four years!
- Yet, I get where the radical complaint against Grandin is coming from. Mainly, she’s too animal welfare (cruelty like factory farming can continue as long as it is done humanely) versus animal abolition (cruelty needs to be eliminated). As a vegetarian, animal activist myself, my sympathies lie more with abolition than they do with welfare.
- As a neurodiverse scholar with a strong liberal arts background, I have concerns about Grandin’s social conservatism & sociological naiveté which she seems to apply consistently to both animals and neurodiverse humanity alike. She takes an apolitical “blame the victim,” “life is not fair,” “these are the way things are” approach to animals, neurodiverse humans, even herself. Seeing society as this natural entity, which from a sociological perspective is anything but natural.
- Grandin uses “machine” metaphors to describe animals and humans alike. Even making comments like “this animal was ruined!” “This autistic was ruined!” When describing our mistakes & misfortunes, implying that our lives are replaceable parts in a complicated machine.
- The most disturbing flaw is not Grandin’s or the animal movements’ fault. The neurodiversity community has been hit particularly hard by the same “tokenism” which has impacted the disability community at-large. Temple Grandin is now “the token” for the autistic community. Allowed to speak uninterrupted, as the neurotypical appointed ambassador of the autistic community, on all matters of autistic self-understanding, including animals.
- This is before the community at-large has had a chance to speak. As a result, the animal movements have gotten the impression, that every person on the autism spectrum has views about animals just like Grandin.
- In reality, if the entire community had the opportunity to speak on behalf of animalkind, neurotypical animal groups would learn that some members go farther than Grandin’s welfare. For example, esteemed autistic pride activist Jim Sinclair is a vegan. Grandin is not the only autistic animal show in town.
- As Critical Animal Studies scholars it’s legitimate to challenge Grandin like you would any other academic, on the grounds of her ideas, like her tacky machine metaphors, her sociological nativity and disagreeing with her animal welfare. As Critical Disability Studies scholars, we need to recover the full spectrum of views about animals in the neurodiversity communities, provide radical alternatives to Grandin and help other neurodiverse voices emerge in academia and popular culture.

Part Three: Autistic-Animal Relationships

- Now I am going to explore the relationships that are possible between animals and neurodiverse humans.
- First, because as autistic humans, we rely more on our mammalian mind than neurotypicals (non-autistic humans) we have special insights into the possibility of the existence of animal intelligence like Temple Grandin. Also, Aspie primatologist, Dawn-Prince Hughes, like many of us on the autism spectrum, “personifies inanimate objects,” where she used her autistic propensity, to identify the individual personalities of gorillas, subsequently studying gorillas as “non-human persons.” Similarities in my mannerisms, ritualized communication, keen senses and ability to compensate

using other members of my brain, I have developed interspecies communications abilities with both domestic and wild animals, especially birds, like domestic parakeets and wild geese.

- Second, as oppression survivors, surviving being treated as “other” and inferior,” we are able to profoundly empathize with the plight of animals who also have been “poorly treated” by normal society, recognizing in animal suffering the patterns of our own abuse. Grandin who was bullied and isolated growing-up was able to recognize fear in animals, identified “reducing fear” and attentiveness to an animal’s “physical environment” as something animals need. Prince-Hughes who was also bullied growing-up had her conversion to the animal cause when she saw a captive troop of gorillas being teased and taunted at a city zoo. She stood in solidarity with the gorillas the rest of the afternoon and went on to become a primatologist & ape advocate. Jim Sinclair, who is no stranger to all-around creepy professional relationships, definitely saw a contradiction between Grandin claiming to love animals & calling for their deaths at the same time, publically criticized Grandin’s “human slaughter systems,” comparing them to modern-day death penalty practices. Knowing personally what it’s like to be targeted & scapegoated for being different, I got my start, witnessing how wildlife managers were welcoming sports hunters into my suburban home, to target & eradicate overpopulated yet native White Tailed Deer and Canada Geese with guns and crossbows. Using propaganda to intimate the animal movements. As a result, I became outspoken against such hunts, testifying at local public meetings. Becoming an ethical vegetarian in college and giving-up a promising career in biology, partially because animal experimentation was against my conscience, in the process.
- Third, we, the neurodiverse, bring gifts to the animal rights cause. Grandin’s gifts to the cause are unrestricted documentation of factory farm practices & malpractices across the country, reducing the most egregiously cruel practices towards animals in big farming through putting “absolute limits” on what these corporations can/cannot do to their own animals, reducing out-and-out scandals, an economic argument for morally considering animals and credible scientific evidence for emotions & intelligence in mammals and birds. Prince-Hughes’s gifts are standing in solidarity with animalkind, credible scientific evidence for personality & culture in gorillas, coupled with a passion for great ape issues. Sinclair brings the gifts of an Aspie who is a successful vegan, an Aspie critique of Grandin and a devastating critique of the key argument in-favor of animal experimentation: “animal experimentation ensures safe treatments for incurable conditions.” Sinclair implies that in the treatment of autism, animal experimentation instead projects animal cruelty onto autistic humanity, “treating us as animals,” applying Skinner-like Behavioralism on rats and mice to us, used to “violently socialize” us into normalcy.
- The gifts I offer are consciously & systematically linking the oppression situations of animals and neurodiverse humanity, situated into a liberal studies context. Expanding this discussion to include all animals (birds, fish, reptiles, amphibians & invertebrates). Ecology (plants microorganisms & natural elements, the land, the planet, the local and the ecological whole). Human eco-justice issues (ecofeminism, First Nations and environmental disasters). Ecospirituality issues (aesthetics, deep ecology, men’s movements, interspecies communications and Christian environmentalism).

Part Four: How Can Animals and Neurodiverse Humans Both Get The Social Justice We Deserve Through Engaging Conflict Resolution?

- I am going to offer an alternative which addresses the animal welfare/abolition responses to disability-animal relationships which is not helping anyone anywhere. My alternative also addresses the disability/animal dualism which is a false choice. Contending that it’s a false choice, when making ethical decisions, to choose between animal rights and disability rights.
- Such thinking has its historical & academic origins in Western philosophy. Such Western philosophies are immune to reality.

- The Western logic behind choosing to save one life over another is called *causeries*. Where one is giving a hypothetical situation like: “You get into an auto accident. You have a child and a dog in a car. You can only save one life. Whom do you save?” According to this logic, you always save the child, for the child is more rational than a dog. This is the logic behind speciesism (favoring humans over animals). This is also the logic behind Princeton animal ethicist Peter Singer’s controversial “Argument from Marginal Cases (AMC)” where he argues that some animals are more rational than some humans such as peoples in comas, infants under a year old and humans with developmental disabilities. When having to choose between saving a highly intelligent dog and saving an intellectual impaired child with a developmental disability, it would not be speciesist to save the dog over the child, for “reason” not “species membership” is the criterion for moral consideration.
- Social Justice does not necessitate that rational capacity be a prerequisite for receiving moral consideration or acting morally. Social justice is giving everyone what they need & some of what they want to survive & flourish, regardless of their functioning abilities. Everyone then is expected to contribute to society as they are able & take only their fair share, so everyone gets social justice through costs/benefits being distributed equitably.
- Conflict resolution, individualizes social justice, through refusing to choose between lives, which conflict resolution contends is an unnecessary “win-lose” solution which perpetuates injustice and violence, when a “win-win” solution is possible through the right balancing: privileging needs/wants over ideology and coming up with solutions which gives everyone social justice. Both approaches take seriously, reality, as a legitimate moral category.
- The implications for the animal and disability movements cannot be understated. Not only are all peoples with disabilities and all animals entitled to social justice, but even the Natural World is entitled to social justice, addressing disconnects with the environmental movements too. Justice is made possible through engaging conflict resolution like negotiation, reconciliation, mediation, arbitration, coalition building and nonviolent activism. Some religious traditions even contend that some of their holy people have been able to engage in direct, unmediated interspecies conflict resolution with other animal species.