

This Machine Kills Ableism

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The relationship between modern analytic and continental philosophy is an interesting one. Philosophers in each camp often believe the other camp to be inherently reactionary. The continental philosopher is advocating mysticism and anti-science, while the analytic philosopher is advocating imperialism and transmisogyny. However, I believe that discussion and cross-fertilization between the camps can be fruitful. In particular, there are cases where each camp holds one piece of the truth. One of these cases is neurodiversity. The idea of neurodiversity certainly isn't unique to continental philosophers, but the idea does have distinctly continental overtones. Modern continental philosophy delights in breaking down the platonic categories our society has inherited, so this should come as no surprise. The point I wish to make is this: To the extent that neurodiversity grows out of continental philosophy, it is necessarily incomplete. To complete it, we must add to the mix a philosophy associated with the analytic tradition – namely, transhumanism. Two of the core principles of transhumanism, after all, are cognitive freedom and morphological freedom. These freedoms must include, by definition, the freedom to change one's neurological makeup. If we wish to assert that neurodiversity is a good thing, why limit ourselves to the diversity we were born with? The body modification community certainly knows better than that. In a sense, body modification is simply the engineering of diversity.

There are two practical upshots to this approach. The first is that the defender of neurodiversity must not defend it solely on the basis that it is incurable. Indeed, I often see people defending those on the autism spectrum by noting that autism can't currently be cured, and that attempts to cure it often do more harm than good. These points are entirely valid, but they miss something important: even if autism could be cured, it would not imply that we should attempt to coerce these people into taking the cure.

One can draw an analogy to a similar argument within the transgender community. Often times, one sees defenses constructed on the basis of transmedicalism. Trans people must be allowed to transition because they suffer an unbearable dysphoria that cannot be relieved otherwise. Trans women are a perfectly natural occurrence because all people undergo a process of defeminization in the womb, anyway. These facts may all be true, say the critics of this approach, but not all trans people experience dysphoria – yet they should still be allowed to transition anyway. The latter argument is made for good reasons, as it is an expression of morphological freedom.

So it is with neurodiversity. If someone with any form of neurodivergence wishes to become neurotypical, they should have the ability and the right to do so. This includes the mandate that people who wish to research the possibility of such a cure be able to do so. However, this principle also applies in the opposite direction. As much as I'm sure this will annoy many in the community, if a neurotypical person wishes to become atypical – for example, by being on the spectrum – they should be able to do so as well.

The second upshot is that ableism itself no longer has any way of inserting itself into the conversation. People can still debate over whether or not the concept of mental illness is socially constructed, but it no longer matters. Even if the advocates of neurodiversity were wrong, and mental illness was a purely biological construction, the ableist would still be full of jet exhaust. In a world of cognitive freedom, the concept of shaming people for the way their minds are constructed is completely foreign.

From the perspective of the transhumanist, there is not and cannot be any such thing as human nature. Is there some part of your “nature” that you'd rather do without? Perfectly understandable – and it's now a mere engineering problem.

But what of the eugenicist who explicitly rejects the concept of cognitive freedom? What of the green who thinks vaccines are causing an autism epidemic but has no problem calling for state-mandated population controls? Of course, this is where the difference comes in between anarchist thinking, and every other way of thinking. One could point out that societies that allow significant amounts of freedom tend to develop ideas faster. One could point out the epistemological problems in attempting to control a society from on high. One could even take the deontological standpoint and cry that taxation is theft. In all cases, the argument against ableism has been reduced to the argument for freedom in general – and appealing to people's sense of freedom will often be easier than arguments about the nature of neurodiversity.

Anarcho-transhumanism is the machine that kills ableism.

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