Ethics and Neurodiversity

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Edited by

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Winter, 2013
C. D. Herrera and Alexandra Perry, Society for Moral Inquiry

INTRODUCTION

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

C.D. HERRERA

Overview

There are trivial differences between people, just as there are what we might consider trivial labels and offenses to go along with those differences. Nevertheless, trivial differences are at least noticeable (as when we routinely distinguish between those who have a sense of humor and those who do not). They are noticeable enough to raise important questions about which differences we are supposed to honor with a label, and what, if anything, should be said when we do. I would have a hard time convincing people that you had offended me when you claimed that I had a bad memory. We typically make light of such things. But what if my bad memory is due to some disability that I have had since I was a child? In another setting, what if I say that you make me uncomfortable when you walk over and begin speaking to me? It would be hard to fault me for that, though I might not be given this latitude if I announced that it is not you, but your kind that makes me uncomfortable.

Questions about differences and labels are no easier to avoid than human interaction is, and it is hard to envision how we could survive without both. In the settings that I just sketched, the point is to show that there are things about those differences that we're not supposed to say, and as some advocates for a more inclusive society might add, things we're not supposed to think either. Interestingly, the warnings about how careful we should be to respect differences have a familiar ring to them, as do the warnings that we should be on the lookout for differences in the first place.

We are used to hearing that labels lead to or are a form of exclusion, and that this is especially wrong when the differences have to do with ethnicity or gender, for instance. Most of us probably also have a fairly good grasp of the reasons for thinking that labels can cause harm. This is easy to understand where skin color is concerned. Among the things that

was wrong with the rules for segregated water fountains in the U.S., for instance, was the fact that they left members of both groups to wonder what they had done to merit such exclusive treatment. One cannot choose a skin color, we might explain. Similar explanations would account for the improvement in attitudes which led to more females being able to enter the workplace. One can now change gender, but not easily, and this does in any event only lead to new questions about that difference.

In instances like these, the question is not whether differences exist, but what society ought to make of them. The good news is that many now think that differences should be irrelevant for purposes of choosing employees or allowing people to hydrate. Even the most cynical among us can find some encouragement in the fact that society is taking more responsibility for clarifying the issues related to difference, inclusion, accommodation, and justice. But we are less accustomed to discussing differences that seem to relate to cognitive abilities or behavioral traits, and I will try to say a bit about those here.

As an introduction to the essays in this anthology, I want to address the following problem. We take it on faith that it is better to live in a world where no person has to feel excluded, and one suspects, where fewer people need to feel uncomfortable. But the challenge has always been one of knowing how we can make good on such a lofty promise. I will try to pose questions rather than supply answers. I am not convinced that the answers we need exist.

My goal is to take a skeptical view, and suggest ways that we might rethink the philosophical side of our labeling routines. If I am correct, we are too casual about the fact that the same person who devotes her life to eliminating discrimination in society can take real offense at being told that she should simply flip a coin to decide on a spouse, or that she should consult tea leaves when deciding whether to share a reading table with two acquaintances. Our reform efforts must include an examination of the ways that we might cite these comparatively "new" differences when we explain who it is that we want to spend time with, who we want to work next to, and how we want our children to choose their friends.

We need to do this if we want to respond to what are also relatively new claims of injustice or offense. But allegations about exclusion or injustice have proven to be challenging topics of conversation, let alone reform, in part because the linguistic customs that we use even to discuss these things are themselves prone to misinterpretation and controversy (Agam Segal, 2009). A common way to offend someone in scholarly discussion is to allege that a claim of injustice is in fact trivial. So long as the perceived seriousness of an offense can turn on a disputed interpretation

of the language involved, questions about which claims scholars should address will seem to remain wide open. That is especially so because many of the qualities or attributes that mark differences are subject to changing attitudes and interpretations.

The continually evolving understanding of what constitutes a difference goes hand-in-hand, of course, with changing interpretations of social justice. This is what give such differences their "newness," and in some cases, their trendiness. A behavioral trait that one person speaks of as a "symptom" might to another person be a feature worth describing in much more positive language. Likewise, behavioral traits that some parents might trouble over will to other parents be looked more positively, to the point that a demand might be made for additional resources on the child's behalf, even while other parents advocated for rules that would keep the children separated.

Because there are so many ways that injustice claims can arise over these differences, it should not surprise us that some reformers would, for a brief period anyway, recommend a relativistic position. They would have us agree to disagree, but without anyone claiming possession of the truth. Instead, we would justify our non-judgmental stance on the basis that truth is a slippery concept, or that no one is really sure how to even define the differences in contention. Disputes over what should be done about differences can also lead to a refusal to discuss things any further, with the participants convinced that nothing is to be gained from those who, for various reasons, just don't "get it." We understand the differences well enough, they might argue, and in some cases we can simply ask those who are being labeled as different what they want most (or we can make assumptions about what we think they want.)

I'm not sure that we have the luxury of taking up either position. But I am especially skeptical of the first. It would be a mistake with far-reaching consequences if we were to reason that in the midst of this uncertainty about which differences count we should play it safe, treating all claims of injustice or offense as though they are worthy of our attention. That quasi-relativistic position would not be nearly as progressive as it first appears, and it would be a poor way to show how sensitive we are to exclusion, offense, or other problems related to differences. We cannot learn to pretend that we do not notice differences; we can only decide what should be done when we notice.

This might seem to overlook the prospect that, in our conversations about difference, we could stipulate one or two bedrock values that we think everyone holds. Values that have to do with rationality are traditional candidates in that contest, and have been ever since it seemed necessary to

make one of the most visible distinctions, that between rational beings and those, such as animals, that we think act only on instinct or genetic momentum. There is a great deal of wishful thinking in our preoccupation with using rationality as this dividing line:

> If human equality is true, it is not in respect to any host property we can see or touch; it is, as we have urged, because all rational persons share uniformly the capacity to be morally good. But that is believable if, first, all rational humans have a uniform capacity freely to strive to discover and realize the correct way and, second, if this striving works towards a person's moral self-perfection (Coons & Brennan, 1999, 121).

Even where we can say that our desire for this kind of taxonomy is itself made on more rational grounds, it has always been hard to avoid the political or social bias. The fact is that we very often want to live alongside others whose behavior can in some respects be understood, if not predicted. And we know what type of behavior we would like to follow from this common rationality, and that is not limited to the behaviors used to solve math problems or find the best price on new furniture.

The sentiment behind wanting to use rationality as a baseline does seem to be aimed in the right direction, that of trying to align different perspectives to a common morality. But there is more than one rationality to speak of, and there are still many more cognitive or behavioral differences that, taken in themselves, do not immediately bear on moral issues or even a vague sense of a social good. There is, for this reason, no solution to our problems in the systematic treatment of unequals, or those who we feel are unequal, as though they are equal. A strategy where we talk of embracing difference without making value judgments about which ones should take priority would have us acting" as if we were so impressed by the fact that we could not unscramble scrambled eggs that we denied that any legitimate distinction could be made between the ingredients" (Cooper, 1981, 65).

There is also the possibility that in our attempt to avoid privileging one claim of injustice over another, we would reduce complex moral issues to the equivalent of slogans ("celebrate difference!"). Slogans, we know from the history of social reform, tend to be bundled tightly with accusations and moral obligations, both so vague that society finds it almost impossible to respond to them in a way that does not leave everyone involved vulnerable to the next round of slogans. It seems, then, that we must draw some lines when we weigh claims about injustice, or when we talk of goals like inclusion. If we don't, we are going to be hard-pressed to

defend the solutions that we do arrive at. It does not make much sense if we, in an honest attempt to get serious about the full range of offense claims, work from a model of justice that will in the end leave us able to respond only to a few of them. This guardedly skeptical outlook follows from the belief that any account of justice worth having is going to ask that we make tough choices in light of our increasing stock of knowledge. The outlook is rationalistic as well, in the sense that reform is needed because in almost everything we do, we risk misunderstanding the motives, interests, and abilities of others.

Labeling the Social World

Behind the hypothetical scenarios I will present is the assumption that, when understood as the results of choices by rational actors, our behavior and our reactions should lend themselves to critical, and more or less objective, analysis. There are going to be exceptions, and I am not trying to reduce all of human experience to some simple, explanatory formula, any more than I am suggesting that we can take a value-neutral look at our cultural practices. I mean only that this stress on being able to rationally confront our customs and conventions where differences are concerned is as good an approach as we have found so far. And there seems to be much that we might learn in trying to tweak the details of ordinary interaction so that we can pose questions about where offense might arise and when we should respond to that possibility.

It seems undeniable that those of us who try to adopt a scholarly perspective on differences can pause and reflect on how we want to talk and write about them. At a common-sense level, we know that we can speak and write in a way that can make entire groups feel insignificant, unappreciated, and excluded. We also know that this risk can manifest in subtle ways, as when a well-intentioned essay or lecture might appear to gloss over or misunderstand the different priorities that people place on justice, for example, or the preference that some have for distinguishing between Us and Them. And it might seem convenient if we could treat such differences as though they are somehow outside of morality. But these things are what gives morality its point.

In that regard, one of the most important problems that we must solve has to do with the fact that not everyone is or can be as concerned to the same degree about morality or justice. We write on differences in full knowledge of the fact that there is little or no consensus on how (or why) one should live a moral life, any more than there is a universally accepted picture of human happiness.

> Once we recognize that some things are intrinsically valuable independent of people's desires or conscious states, it seems an open question what the full range of objective values would involve regarding their nature, content, or relation to sentient beings. Although presumably there will be some essential connection between our nature and the boundaries of moral value, why must it be one of benefit, for either us or others? Why can't the boundaries of the objectively good extend beyond what is good for someone, perhaps focusing on our capacity to lead a morally good life, as well as on our capacity to have a prudentially good life? (Temkin, 1993, 273).

If we are in search of differences to accommodate, the variety of perspectives on social justice would therefore be one of the first places we ought to look. But what is to be done about that variety of opinions, and are we wrong to think that it is a problem to be solved?

To get at this question, we could suppose that you can honestly claim to not understand or feel the offense that another person feels. Does society have the right to force you to act like you do? Your reaction, as well as your reaction to your own feelings, might be significant enough that we would say that it marks a difference. But it has not been the type of difference that reformers have wanted to respect, and far too many writers on social issues presuppose without much evidence, that there is agreement on things like justice or freedom. This seems to me an instance where we must ask if the practice of purposely overlooking important differences, in the interest of practicality, can be sustained.

Of course, no one suggests that achieving a greater level of understanding of this or other differences is going to be easy. It is as common to find that what offends you is not, on any conventional view, wrong, as it is to find those who point out the distinction between something's being wrong and its being offensive. This is a variation on the idea we looked at earlier. It is the common-sense idea that:

> [N]ot every slight, abuse, injustice, sin, and the like brings with it questions of toleration. Many are what lawyers call de minimis, beneath notice. Before questions of toleration arise, the wrong or sin must be sufficient serious. Some judgments seem to carry seriousness with then, for instance, those described as wicked, vicious, and cruel; others do not. Even those judgments that imply serious wrongdoing, sin, or offense are sometimes used in ways suggesting lesser wrong, since, and offense. Reds may say that it is a 'sin' or a 'crime' that Blues are lazy, pushy, or excessively loud. But we mean this only half seriously or in jest, as when someone says that 'there ought to be a law' against wearing leisure suits in public (Oberdiek, 2001, 62).

The point for our purposes is to reiterate that, in spite of good intentions, there are going to be offensive ways of discussing claims of offense, and ways that we can carry on that can seem to exclude the very people who might be able to, through argument or experience, improve our chances for reform. It might even be true that there is value in talking about differences without needing to be guided by some visible endpoint. Perhaps the horizon will continue to shift away from us anyway. That shift could occur if, as I suspect, the more that we learn about human differences, the more that we will have to discuss whether (and how) our policies should promote or embrace them.

By the same token, the more that we sift through what we think are the lessons from our own history of attempts to get clear on such things, the more room we will have for second-guessing. When I suggest that we should pay greater attention to the way that we talk about differences, I don't mean to say that most people are unaware of, or just don't want to face, the problems involved. I think that there is widespread agreement that one of the most pressing issues we confront is that of achieving the highest possible level of inclusion in society, while remaining realistic about how, for instance, we should distribute healthcare, educational, and community resources.

Again, however, the problem is that we are pulled in two directions, especially when we try to devise general principles will help from one case to the next. Those of us who study and discuss differences are pulled, from one side, by the thought that differences shouldn't matter as much as they seem to, and where they do, it is because we are uninformed, insensitive, and reluctant to give up our power. From the other side is a pull from the idea that recognizing differences often means acknowledging that there are behaviors we prefer, personality traits that we find endearing, and those that we would rather avoid at all costs. If you are delivering a public lecture on the need to embrace difference, and I choose that moment to throw a pie in your face, it is hard to imagine that I would get much sympathy if I explained that, as it happens, this is just a disposition that I was born with. It is about time that you learn to be more accommodating, I might add.

To address the moral issues that scenarios like this one (minus the pie-throwing) raise, we will have to grant that the potential for offense exists wherever our conversations rely on the distinctions that we feel we must make between groups of people, or the attributes that we associate with individuals in those groups. We might decide that this means that the Members of the Pie-Throwers United! movement will have to understand that, in some cases, they must live with the fact that the differences which

they use to self-identify give others reason to want to find another place to conduct their lectures. "They have their place, and we have ours," we might say, if we wanted to put a spin on a very conventional interpretation of justice or personal liberty.

The trouble this time is that history reminds us that we know better. We know that in our conversations about difference it can appear that separate but equal is often too separated and not very equal. There is also the fact that, some would say, we are learning more about how many of the differences can be modified, treated, and even eliminated. This is another point on which it is difficult to make analogies to, say, ethnic differences, but it is also not something that gives us very much traction for reform. The prospect that things like differences in emotional reaction might be altered through various means does not tell us very much about whether they should be. If anything, that prospect delivers new puzzles about the boundaries of individual and community. If you notice my anxiety at parties, can you argue that I need treatment for that, so as not to upset the other guests? Should Uncle David seek medication that will block his urge to share smutty thoughts during family gatherings? Why can't he reply that the rest of the family should not impose their standards, and their labels, on him?

There are several ways to understand the tension in scenes like these. But I am interested in the idea that our feelings about cognitive or behavioral differences are not always reliable guides to what an appropriate reaction would be. I think that this unreliability is due in part to the deep-seated ambiguity about what it is that qualifies as a difference (a word that can itself function as a label), and the way that our reactions to difference, and our sense that we are different, are in the end expressions of feelings. It is a truism that one person can never share another person's feeling the way the two might share a park bench, so to the extent that the most common way to express and compare those feelings is to rely on language, we can answer calls for social reform by committing ourselves to better understanding the labels that we use when we describe differences.

When we try to understand labels, differences, and reactions to both, we should assume that there is not much that is new or simple in the puzzles related to our labeling. Questions about how we should describe and understand differences have been asked, since ancient times, within the larger conversations about human flourishing and what it can tell us about how to structure society. There are questions which have to do with the ontological status of the categories that we attach the labels to. Is there a real line between the normal and the deviant, or only an imagined, constructed one? Can a person be in one category while experiencing some

emotions or beliefs, and moved into another category while feeling something, and accepting beliefs, that are very different (Strawson, 2007)?

Regardless of the origin of those categories, how broadly do we want the labels that we associate with them to stretch? This last question gets at one of the most controversial, and political, aspects of our conversations about difference, so I will say more about it later. Now I will only stress that new or not, these questions take on practical importance when we need to explain why, for example, we describe one student as "gifted" and another as "outgoing."

The questions become more complicated still when we try to explain whether we think it is a good thing for a person to merit such labels, or for another person to apply them. As is true with the general attempt to show which claims of injustice we should take seriously, there do not appear to be any shortcuts worth taking when we reform our label-use, unless we want to generate doubts concerning how committed we are to reform in the first place. If, for example, we are comfortable with the idea that social categories, like "normal," are only human creations, then that status transfers to the labels we use when describing them. And if that is the case, we should have answers ready when someone asks us about the assumptions that led to our creating and using them.

There is a likely response, on that interpretation, which does not require any esoteric theory. We create labels when we want to fence one group of people off from another. With the matter stated that way, it can seem straightforward that we would cozy-up to the idea that our labels and categories have some backing in, as we might put it, the natural world. We could defend our use of them on the basis of some teleological or naturalistic argument: when we welcome some and reject others we are only doing what is natural.

This response leaves much to be desired. There is no doubt evidence that any two people "naturally" have different cognitive skills when it comes to certain tasks. But that information does not contain within it instructions on how an employer should structure a workplace around that difference, or how an employer should conduct hiring interviews. We should completely dismiss the hints that writers in Critical Theory or continental philosophy sometimes drop, that when we apply labels we fall back on the idea that we are only doing what comes natural because this will keep power where we think it should be. I am skeptical that we can avoid injustice by going in the other direction, and challenging any use of labels or by not thinking in terms of categories to begin with. The drawback to that is that we would still need something to replace those

labels with. But we should entertain proposals that would have us scrutinize any claims about how natural it is that are selective.

For the moment, assume that our labels are a necessary part of our language-use, and that this in turn reflects social necessity. That way, it would seem that if you ask me to pick up your children from school, I will need you to also tell me if I can instead transport any other children I see waiting, on the thinking that they are all pretty much the same, and that you would feel bad judging any particular child as more deserving of the ride home. It is easy to see the element of social necessity here, but how much support do we want to give to the idea that our rules of language-use do not come complete with guidelines on sensibility? One can understand the word "unintelligent," for instance, and not have a clue as to whether it would be wrong to use it when referring to someone.

Later, I will suggest that neither science nor philosophy can pretend to say, by themselves, why it should matter to us whether or not one can be labeled intelligent (or anything else). I will set that discussion up, however, with the following thought experiment. We have probably all sensed from the time we were young that we can't get very far without labels and roles. This is so even if at the time our knowledge was not terribly philosophical or scientific. That is, even if we did not, as children, try to arrive at consistent and fair ways of talking about these things, it seems likely that our childhood games like "cops and robbers" required that we understood the relevant labels, knew which of those went with certain roles, and which behaviors were suitable for the people we assigned them to.

This relationship between labels and roles would have had tangible benefits to us: if nothing else, the relationship would have helped us know when we were playing the games correctly. The labels might also have met the metaphysical test of referring to real divisions among groups and between individuals. Along these lines, it is also easy to think that as children we brought to our games of Cops and Robbers (or Afternoon Tea Party) roughly the same types of cultural resources that adults find necessary in social contexts. Admittedly, there is an important difference in that, as adults, we place a high value on reflection when we are in a specific role or when we need to assign someone (or some group) a label. And as adults we do spend a great deal of time wondering which of our linguistic references needs to be accurate, and which moral judgments should apply to the conduct of our games. But it nonetheless seems plausible to think that we had a vague sense of these things in our childhood games.

We might put this in stronger language: perhaps those games were possible, and enjoyable, only because of the assumptions that we held about how clearly a particular behavior related to a particular role. I also wonder if as children we did not at least wonder if the benefits which go along with each role were distributed fairly, what the costs of playing a role incorrectly should be, and so on. With these assumptions in mind, how might we, as adults, coach children who were going to play such a game? We know that these reflections are at the forefront of any social interaction, and that even a perceived misapplication of a label can raise questions about the metaphysical or moral basis for the label. But suppose that we were asked to observe and advise a child's game of cops and robbers. Couldn't we, without too much hesitation, coach the children on how to play a good or bad robber, a corrupt or heroic cop, or any of the other stock of suitable characters in these games?

Could we do this as well for a game in which the children were supposed to play "autism and neuro-normal," or one that pitted the "clinically depressed" against the "paranoid"? Although we might at first be uncertain how to coach the children, could we recommend that in the same way as before they try to draw on a set of shared cultural ideas about their dramatic roles? It could hardly be that we would decline the request for advice on the basis that we were unfamiliar with the roles themselves. Most of us probably know more people who are autistic than we do people who are genuine "robbers."[1] How much more evaluative license would we need as spectator-coaches of these games? We know how we could respond if, say, the child designated with the label of "robber" started to chase after the "cops." You're supposed to run the other way, we might explain. In a neuro-normal game, things would seem different, as would the measures that we could use when assessing the play.

Someone might object that I am omitting too much from the analogy. When we teach children how to play cops and robbers, part of the coaching has to do with ensuring that they understand what the roles and labels actually refer to. We would make sure that they understood, for example, that while it is fun to pretend to be the robber, they should not seek to become one in real life. Likewise, while it might seem exciting about playing the cop, the children should understand that interacting with real police officers is serious business. In this respect, it might seem that as soon as we tried to include a similar level of detail into the neuro-normal game, we would conclude the game before it started, since we would have to teach the children that it is wrong to make light of the relevant labels.

This objection raises an important point, but it also to make mine. I don't question whether it would in some settings be inappropriate to role-

play. On the contrary, it is probably true that games like cops and robbers have never been terribly sensitive to the realities of police work or the self-image of robbers. But the thought experiment can test intuitions that we have about labels like "autistic" or "bipolar," for instance. If we don't think that children should act out the roles that go along with such labels, it is worth asking why. It is noteworthy also that parents do ask similar questions about whether games of cowboys and Indians are insensitive toward certain groups too. And there the idea is that it is not enough to draw on what we think we know about our social world and its linguistic counterpart. The point is to challenge that knowledge. It would be a valuable lesson in itself if children could grow up thinking that some labels are ruled out today as holdovers from a time when we did not understand differences as we do now.

I have no illusions that these would be easy lessons to share with children either. The difficulty in talking about such things with adults suggests otherwise. In any event, there seems as much of a risk in thinking that children don't reflect as much as we might want them to about labels as there is a risk that we adults will come away from such hypotheticals thinking that we are better at that reflection than we really are. To that end, we would want the children to understand that, as vague as our labels can be, it is rare that we know for sure how they might affect the people we label. We would want to explain that tossing questions about roles back and forth is a complicated, serious game in itself because it forces us to poke around in so many other areas of private and public life.

This dynamic occurs when we focus on things like the different emotional reactions that people have to environmental stimuli. We probably think that we have a good idea of what to tell children about how they should react towards police officers (or cowboys and Indians). Shouldn't we be able to explain to someone who asks what should be done when a person in our midst expresses sadness in a way that we don't expect? We might think that something is amiss if a person laughs during a funeral ceremony. The trouble is in getting clear on what the wrongness involves, or how we should deal with the person who finds humor in that situation. The lines quickly blur when we try to describe the emotional reactions and judge their social value. If this were not the case, it would be a simple task to explain why we think that it is right that people be moved when looking at, say, photos of the victims of a natural disaster, and wrong that they be moved by looking at photos of their neighbors undressing.

We might imagine how a student could feel an emotional connection with a particular culture that he has learned about from his teacher. The student might then try to dress and speak like the people he associates with

that culture. As before, though, there will be questions about how accurately the student understands this culture, and which details would we think are important in that regard. When we ask these things, it doesn't seem beside the point that there are questions about whether there is really a genuine culture to speak of, populated by those who have been diagnosed with certain symptoms, or who meet some other useful means of categorizing. There are deep questions about what must happen to transform a group of people into a culture, or even a community, and what demands that group can then make on the rest of us. We must as a society talk through these considerations if we want to respond to claims of injustice, since we will need to explain why we think that, for example, one culture has a stronger claim to certain resources than another.

We Should Talk

These sketches are meant to get at question like the following. What is and what should be happening when we apply labels and make choices in light of them? Why is one act of ranking people acceptable and another is exclusionary or discriminatory? What should we make of a girl who attempts to model her behavior on the behavior of people she thinks exhibit symptoms of depression? Or another student who admires what he takes to be deaf culture, and announces that he will respond to others only if he can lip-read, for example? Would we judge these students the same way we might a student who is enamored with what he thinks are aspects of the culture of the Scottish Highlands, and takes to wearing a "kilt" to school?

Such questions seem to reveal the two elements at the core of many labels: a claim that X belongs in a certain group, and a claim that one ought to feel a certain way about that. The labels let us distinguish: we carve the social world with our words, and then, standing back, we rate our efforts. But as useful as these distinctions are, our rules of language use leave out an account of whether the same moral rules, for instance, which allow us to tell children not to accept a ride home from someone we would label a stranger, will let us decide whose children get to sit next to ours on the bus. When we make social distinctions, we usually do so in a way that will allow us to discriminate based on the qualities that we think a person ought to possess in a specific context, and based on the behaviors that we ourselves value in it.

To return to the skeptical point that I mentioned at the start, it seems that loaded into these distinctions are cultural values that might or might not have rational backing. This suggestion, that our use of labels outstrips

our ability to justify ourselves, will for some require an explanation. There are some who would argue instead that, as it often happens, their labels have a self-contained justification, one that somehow immune from rational reconstruction. I have occasionally heard something to this effect, and the argument goes like this. Labels are to be fought over like turf, and the claim to that territory will be established by those who truly understand the real interests of the who are labeled. Where those who are labeled lack political or economic clout, it is necessary to establish spokespersons, institutions, and social movements in support of the reform of language, and in the name of justice. This could then be seen a positive development, a way of giving a voice to those who would otherwise have been left out of our discussions about difference.

In other cases, however, this idea that, once established in their proper social domain, labels are beyond moral criticism, can be an invitation to demagoguery and still more discrimination. It is as if the spokespersons are under the impression that we can speak of inclusion while we build even more fences. Activists who approach problems related to difference this way often have a bone to pick with scholars and other researchers who would recommend that we understand labels as dynamic reflections of the changing values in society. For those researchers, the way to arrive at proper balance of difference and discrimination is to update our labeling routines using scientific or clinical knowledge.

The advocates of this rationalistic method sometimes overstate the chances of success. As I have tried to explain, whether there is a rational justification for our labeling routines should not be the question. The better question is how open to examination our reasoning is, and where we can look for help when we want to validate it. If one agrees that this is important, then it would make sense to also examine our methods of arriving at conclusions about the social world, since that is where the labels and our routines are. I think that when we look there, we will find more pluralism and change than we will stability and consensus. Questions about offense, labels, and justice are controversial because so many of them turn on more fundamental disputes about how well they should hold up to scientific and moral scrutiny.

I am not sure that there is a way around the responsibility we have to continually reinterpret labels. It seems reasonable to assume that we keep improving our ability to identify one person as belonging to a particular group (and most people as belonging to several), for instance, just as we can identify behavior or attributes that we propose as being better or worse, more advanced, and so on. And if we want to understand how principles of justice can apply to those people, we must take seriously the

idea that there are empirical characteristics that the sciences might study, and abstract or conceptual details that philosophy might examine.

What worries some critics is that neither science nor philosophy can claim priority within the process itself. They warn that since these and other disciplines have not always been good at self-policing, we should not trust the scholars to reform our thinking about differences. The trouble is, when we talk about inclusion, it is unclear where the discussion should turn if not in the direction of philosophical and scientific territory. The hope is that science, philosophy, and other speculative disciplines like fiction can offer checkpoints for our attempts to get clear on what it is that people are capable of, interested in, and just as important, how we ought to react to whatever that is. If we assume that the talks that we should be having will concern what constitutes "normal," for example, any consensus will require judgments that are themselves informed by scientific accounts of things like human physiology. In that case too, the only live issue then is how much philosophy and science we think we need.

In some quarters, drawing those lines is as difficult as it is to know what should count as a meaningful discussion about justice. Not long ago, I participated in a panel discussion about, among other things, what should be done to improve the treatment of cognitively impaired patients. Things looked promising because the room was packed with scholars and specialists from across the disciplines, assembled for a day-long conference on neuro-diversity. But this discussion was off to a bad start when the first panelist worked a number of jokes into her introduction, announcing at one point that "when you meet one moral philosopher, you've met them all." (This was supposed to play on a popular slogan which refers to persons with autism.) This was followed by suggestions that writers in philosophy had become, at best, distractions in the public conversations that we should be having about difference. If there was any consolation to be had for philosophy that day, it was in the message that science comes out of all of this looking even worse. The ideas said to come from moral philosophers, having to do with personhood or moral agency, were described as flawed if not insulting, mainly because they piggybacked on developments in medicine.

The accusation was that those of us in philosophy knew just enough about developments in cognitive science, for example, to be offensive, and that we knew just enough about logic to be able to convince the wrong people. Yet who doubts that we all face a significant problem in knowing how we should translate the feelings that we have about human welfare and experience into rational arguments, and vice-versa? Once the laughter had died down in the panel discussion, the speaker began to discuss

responsibility, respect, social justice, and moral personhood. An audience that had been told that it would not have to bear one more discussion of moral philosophy was given, by panelists who had been trained at universities well-known for their programs in moral philosophy, a presentation which could not have made sense or been relevant without specific views about moral agents, for instance, and how we should account for the differences between them.

Questions about how we ought to treat each other and questions about how we should understand each other cannot be separated. Meaningful talk about inclusion and justice has, since Plato and Aristotle, included observation and speculation which has been directed towards answering questions of what we should do when people reason differently, when they manage emotions differently, and when people resist attempts to bring them into line. It isn't surprising that there are things that we do not like about this history; it is hard to defend Aristotle's view on the intellectual abilities of women, for instance. But it is the only history we have, and the most productive course would be for us to recognize the mistaken ideas that we have held about differences.

There is nothing to be gained in quarrels about who ought to have the authority to offer definitive labels like neuro-diverse, or about who can really "speaks for" those involved. A more productive outlook would hold that for us to talk about inclusion, and to attempt to resolve some of the moral, social, legal, and medical problems associated with that ideal, we need the help of as many specialists and disciplines as we can find. As we have seen, the distinctions we need when we talk about something like discrimination or justice will have to be brought alongside our need to explain what we mean by such terms. When using labels we will have to come to an understanding, of how far we want to welcome some kinds of behavior in society and restrict other kinds. And regardless of our disciplinary backgrounds, we should be secure enough in the knowledge of our own limitations to bring to these kinds of questions a welcome skepticism, not just about the possible answers, but to the way that we, as scholars, choose to break the questions off from the surrounding context. We can make our skepticism work for us if we continually look for ways to improve our conversations about what it means to not only live together, but talk about each other as well.

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CHAPTER ONE

NOISE AND METONYMIC THOUGHT IN THE PHILOSOPHY OF ARTHUR SCHOPENHAUER: SOME BENEFITS OF RETROSPECTIVE PSYCHIATRIC DIAGNOSIS THROUGH WRITING

ALEXANDRA PERRY

Retrospective Diagnosis through Writing

While philosophers have traditionally used introspection to explore normal conscious experience, an introspective approach may also be useful in constructing a coherent understanding of atypical conscious experience such as autistic experience. Of course, the appropriate methods for retrospective social diagnosis in medicine and psychiatry have been widely debated, and this type of diagnosis is often done using historical methods by looking at biographical or autobiographical accounts of authors and historical figures. Historical methods were used, for example, to retrospectively diagnose Frédéric Chopin with cystic fibrosis and bipolar disorder (Majka, 2003; Karenberg 2007).

Shortly after his death, Chopin's autopsy report was lost, and so medical historians and geneticists have used the medical records of members of Chopin's family to construct a genetic profile for the musician. Evidence that his father and two of his sisters had died prematurely from respiratory illnesses led medical historians to believe that the family might have carried the CTFR gene, which is often linked to Cystic Fibrosis and Tuberculosis.

Accounts of Chopin's melancholic periods offered by his pupils and friends in letters and eulogies have led historians to believe that the musician also likely suffered from bipolar disorder, and perhaps from hallucinatory disorder as well (Vasquz, 2011). Relatively conclusive

evidence that this diagnosis is accurate is offered by authors such as Bernard Govaty, a Chopin biographer, who translated a letter that was part of his own private collection in which Chopin described a hallucinatory experience. Chopin wrote:

> A strange adventure happened to me while I was playing my B flat Sonata for some English friends. I had played the Allegro and the Scherzo more or less correctly and I was about to play the March when, suddenly, I saw emerging from the half-open case of my piano those cursed creatures that had appeared to me on a lugubrious night at the Carthusian monastery [Majorca]. I had to leave for a while in order to recover myself, and after that I continued playing without saying a word (Chopin, 1848 in Gavoty, 1977).

Still, retrospective diagnosis is not a straightforward process. There are cases where psychiatric episodes are not described in as much detail, biographically or autobiographically, as Chopin's were. Oftentimes the relatively new recognition or identification of a disease or disorder makes it difficult to use historical information to retrospectively diagnose a physical ailment with as much accuracy as we might with a modern biological diagnosis (Mitchell, 2011). The criticism of using historical methods in retrospective diagnosis has recently been termed the Cunningham Debate.

Andrew Cunningham questions the legitimacy of the work of historians of medicine if they do not raise and address the sorts of philosophical questions about historical methodology and the limits of history that have been raised by philosophers of science about scientific methodology. Cunningham claims:

> It seems obvious to us, looking through our scientific medicine spectacles, that of course social interpretations of disease (and what 'counts as' a disease) do and have varied from society to society, but it seems to us that these just express greater or less success in coping with the underlying constant disease reality 'out there' in Nature. As we assume that our own success in coping with disease has been the greatest, we naturally take our models of disease identity as the final, and thereby the only legitimate, models. So when we come to doing the history, when we come to trying to identify past outbreaks of plague for instance, we assume that what we need is the best modern thinking about the disease and its manifestations. Armed with this supreme form of knowledge we are able, we believe, to correctly identify outbreaks of plague in the past, even down to pronouncing on the presence or absence of the bacillus, and we correct the people of the past in their identifications of plague, telling them when they were right and when they were wrong, since our form of knowledge is clearly

> superior to theirs. Yet in fact this is just our society's way of thinking: true for us and our world, but not necessarily true for other societies and other times. (Cunningham, 2002, 14).

Ultimately Cunningham argues that historians of medicine do not have adequate methods for retrospective diagnosis and that identifying disease in the past, at least in any reliable way, was philosophically untenable. The Cunningham debate centers on two points that Cunningham takes to be true. First, that all disease is experienced both biologically and socially, and second, that diagnoses and causes of death had no legitimacy outside of the time and place in which they were recognized, or, as Cunningham put it:

> [Y]ou die of what your doctor says you die of. Your cause-of-death certificate is not negotiable. While this might seem a reasonable thing to say about people dying today, I want to argue that it also applies to everyone in the past. They died from what their doctors said they died of. Their cause-of-death certificates (as it were, for of course such certificates are very modern and very western) are equally not negotiable, neither by the modern medic, whether clinician, pathologist, epidemiologist or psychiatrist, nor by the modern historian (Cunningham, 2002, 18).

The Cunningham debate has sparked questions in the history of medicine about the reliability of using historical methods to retrospectively identify epidemics, disease, and causes of death in the past. Behavioral scientists, however, have recently started to make the case that the historical methods used to retrospectively make diagnoses of mental and cognitive disability can be corroborated using methods from forensic linguistics, and that retrospective diagnosis may be a useful way to understand the relationship between language and atypical conscious experience.

Garrard (2005) conducted a linguistic analysis of the work of Iris Murdoch, a British author and philosopher who received a diagnosis of Alzheimer's Disease in 1995. After comparing three works: her first novel, a novel from the prime of her writing career, and her final work, Garrard was able to detect linguistic changes in her final book that were consistent with the linguistic changes expected in patients with Alzheimer's. Murdoch's final work was published over a year before she received a formal diagnosis. Garrard (2005) reported that her final work showed a decline in lexical diversity.

Similar work has been done in forensic linguistics to identify cognitive, developmental, and mental disorders such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, major depressive disorder, and autism.

The unconventional use of rhetorical devices is often reflective of autistic thought patterns, and text analysis has proven to be a useful diagnostic method for autism given that at least 39% of all individuals on the autism spectrum are non-verbal (Jepson, 2007).

In this chapter I argue that an analysis of the use of metonym in the philosophy of Arthur Schopenhauer, a 19th century German philosopher shows a striking similarity to the use of metonym found in narrative accounts of autistic sensory and social experience, and that using historical methods in looking at Schopenhauer's philosophy, introspective accounts, and biographical information corroborates this. Autistic experience differs somewhat from typical conscious experience. Through the reports of clinicians and narratives of those on the autism spectrum, we now know that individuals with autism often have sensory experiences that vary greatly from those not on the autism spectrum, who are often called "neurotypical" (Hacking, 2009). These reports and narratives also relate that individuals with autism spectrum disorders experience differences, often debilitating differences, in social interaction. I claim that the retrospective diagnosis of authors like Schopenhauer, who described both sensory and social experience in great detail in his introspective accounts, can serve to inform contemporary clinicians about the nature of autistic experience.

Schopenhauer proposed philosophical theories on topics ranging from metaphysics to ethics to human relationships. Much of his analysis of the metaphysical and social worlds was grounded in introspection, and his accounts often struck critics as being strange or extreme. The linguistic convention in Schopenhauer's introspective accounts and metaphysical theories is similar to what we now recognize as autistic use of language. Schopenhauer's introspective accounts of sensory or relational experience also seem to illustrate autistic experience. In this chapter I offer an overview of metonymical thinking and compare typical uses of metonym with atypical or autistic uses of metonym. Finally, I argue that Schopenhauer's philosophy and introspective accounts of experience can offer researchers and clinicians information from which to begin developing appropriate and ethical interventions and accommodations for those on the spectrum if the disturbances and differences that Schopenhauer explores are given a serious look.

Metonymical Thinking

The term "metonymic" refers to a rhetorical device similar to a metaphor called "metonymy." Metonymy, as figurative language, is the

"transfer of the name of a thing to something else that is closely associated with it- such as cause and effect, container and contained, possessor and possessed, and so on; for example, 'crown' or 'throne' for monarchy" (Bredin, 1984).

In contrast to metaphor, metonymy relies on contiguity rather than similarity between related things. It does not indicate shared qualities, but rather a relationship based on constituency, adjacency, toponymy or another form of contiguous association. For example the phrase, "Denver is working hard to address racially-motivated crime" is a metonym, as the city of Denver is not working hard toward this aim, but rather representative of those *in* Denver who *are* working hard to address such crimes.

A politician who was concerned about the amount of campaign work that needed to be done might claim that he needed "all hands on deck" meaning that everyone's efforts would be needed during the final campaign push. "Hands" in this case might be used metaphorically, if "hands" is taken to refer to "deckhands" or sailors. The term "hands" might also refer to the body part, as its usage in the term "deckhand" does. In this case, "hand" is used metonymically for "people" or "campaign staff" because there is a contiguous relationship: most people, even campaign staff, have hands.

The use of "deck" in this idiom, however, could be taken as metaphorical because in using the idiom the speaker is relying on the transfer of qualities from "deck" to the place where he needs his staff to be ready and working, the campaign headquarters. This use is not metonymical because there is no contiguity between a ship's deck and a campaign headquarters, which are unlikely to share the same space or be part of one another. Instead there is a metaphorical relationship between the deck and the campaign headquarters because they share qualities: they both exist as a place where people can ready themselves and report to work hard.

Metonym is also commonly seen as a sort of communicative shorthand. Capital cities might be used metonymically to represent the states in which they're located. Residents of Oregon might claim that "Salem got it right" if they want to agree with the outcome of statewide elections while residents of Montana might blame it on "those politicians in Helena" if they are unhappy with their election night outcomes. The state capitals are contained within the state and may well be the site of much political decision-making, and so these terms are used metonymically, rather than metaphorically. Other ways that metonym might be used as shorthand are archetypal ("the blue dress" might be used evidence of an