

On Ugly Instincts

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There's a problem with the way "ugly instincts" are treated in many alterhuman spaces, and it's been on my mind lately given much of the discourse that's arisen in community spaces. But first I feel it's important to bring up the various places that the opinions on and the subsequent poor reactions of these specific kinds of instincts or urges originate from.

It's not uncommon for many places or smaller sections of the various alterhuman communities to want to present a "clean" front to outsiders. This is in part because of respectability politics—the idea of sanitizing alterhuman experiences in order to make them more palatable for non-alterhumans, despite that missing the point of alterhuman-oriented spaces entirely—as well as some unfortunately common viewpoints surrounding emotions and thoughts regarding their relationship to personal morals.

The former is where the line between supernumerary phantom limbs and "otherlimbs" or "metalimbs" gets drawn to avoid offending non-alterhumans, where species dysphoria is determined to be transphobic by virtue of its existence, and how someone who says that wearing a collar makes them feel comfortable gets booted from specific spaces for not being 'minor-friendly.'

The latter relates to what is sometimes called "purity culture," but what is essentially an American conservative shift in perspective within online spheres that was originally initiated by corporations, but of which many in personal and private spheres have similarly taken up the mantle of. It's part of how we define what is proper to showcase on the Internet, even on small, private sections of it: it's the reason the previous "go nuts, show nuts" policy of Tumblr shifted to banning all but "male-presenting" nipples, it's behind the fact that some people think Grand Theft Auto and violent fanfictions are going to inspire teenagers to go on mass killing sprees, and it's directly responsible for how many younger or newer denizens understand morality. We've reached an era on the Internet where accountability doesn't necessarily mean holding someone responsible for their literal actions and the consequences thereof, but

instead can mean a wide range of various responses to perceived threats or perceived insults towards society. The results of this are understandably messy when forced into niche or “weird” subcultures, communities, and identities.

There's also the ironic KFF issue and elitist gatekeeping problems that surrounds ugly instincts, two sides of the same functional coin. For alterhumans whose identities are wholly voluntary and who do not take their own alterhumanity particularly seriously, there arises an issue when they reflect their personal laissez-faire attitude onto others who experience involuntary aspects. Non-alterhumans who believe that all aspects of alterhumanity are voluntary to a controllable degree, and should therefore be held to unrealistic or entirely nonsensical standards, are also a related problem.

For alterhumans whose identities are drenched in their own misbegotten superiority complex, you end up with individuals who similarly use their own experiences with identity as markers of what is appropriate/possible and inappropriate/impossible for others to experience. Anything they don't like or don't agree with is just mincemeat to be tossed into a No True Scotsman pie.

No matter where the opinions on it are coming from, ugly instincts can often be treated as evidence that someone isn't “really” alterhuman or otherwise used as an excuse to ostracize, dehumanize, and harass others in spaces more prone to toxicity and abusive behaviors. On the flip side, though significantly more rare than the aforementioned, sometimes certain unhealthy instincts are also glorified and encouraged, which is deeply unsettling in itself.

These instincts tend to fall into one of two categories, either being somewhat violent or sexual in nature. For the violent category, the one that perhaps most readily jumps to mind is hunting instincts, especially those aimed at small animals (including pets), small children, and humans more generally—those have been long-time favorites for personal judgement. For the sexual category, autozoophilic and zoophilic urges are especially controversial during this period of time in the community, in part due to a rise in therian bestialists and a conflation of the two.

But regardless of the specifics in question, what's more important is the fact that these instincts are often treated as moral failings by those who have them or as

markings of illegitimacy in regards to their identity. This doesn't make sense for several reasons—one that they're involuntary and beyond the individual's control to stop or continue feeling much of the time, and two in those emotions, thoughts, and urges aren't singularly representative of an individual's moral compass nor the "validity" of their own personal alterhumanity.

It doesn't make sense to punish people for having ugly instincts. If someone justifies poor or dangerous behavior with such then that's a separate scenario, but no one can control how they think or feel—just how they act in response to such. More so, in the cases where individuals do feel like they're struggling with certain aspects of their alterhumanity or are worried they might cause harm to themselves or others, then it makes more sense to meet them with community compassion, rather than community scorn. Ostracizing individuals makes it more likely that they'll be pushed towards groups or people who might encourage their more dangerous or harmful urges or otherwise take advantage of their vulnerability; meeting individuals with empathy and providing private environments where discussions oriented around navigating these urges in safe, socially-acceptable ways is something that makes more sense from an ethical and logical standpoint. This helps to avoid both any unhealthy lionizing and any unhealthy contempt while also normalizing interacting with more societally unacceptable urges in safe, sane, and—when applicable—consensual ways.

Ugly instincts should be treated like any other negative aspect of alterhumanity. They shouldn't be shamed nor celebrated for just existing and people should be allowed to talk about them in appropriate spaces without fear. We should hold people responsible in the rare cases someone does act on them, but it doesn't make sense to judge someone just for having these feelings, especially in cases where an individual has already found reasonable ways to express these parts of themselves or otherwise cope healthily with this aspect of their alterhumanity. No involuntary and underlying part of someone's experience or identity should be taken as a litmus test for whether or not they're allowed to consider themselves alterhuman in some capacity, either.

Someone's not evil, or irredeemable, or "not really alterhuman" just because of their ugly instincts—and yes, this applies to literally any type of feeling you're thinking "except for..." about this to. Yes, including people whose prey drive aims itself at cats

and dogs and every other cute, fuzzy small animal that you love and adore. Yes, including those out there who feel the urge to scent mark and do any other specific “weird” bodily function for animality-related reasons. And yes, even including people who think lions and tigers and bears (oh my!) are hot. What matters is always the physical actions that people partake in and the choices that people make—not whatever thoughts or feelings their brain is throwing at them beyond their control.

So here’s the part of my essay where I hop down off my soapbox and confront the “well what do you plan to do about it?” part of the issue. And the truth is admittedly lackluster—I don’t think these attitudes in the community, that ugly instincts are some sort of personal failure (or more rarely, something to be encouraged), are ever going to truly disappear. More than that, I think the only real way to tackle them is by people speaking out about their experiences and being examples of what I’ve already spoken about here and showcasing themselves that just having urges isn’t the same as acting them out, and that people who have these thoughts are evil caricatures of alterhumanity. And that’s just not something that’s going to happen and shift people’s thoughts on the matter overnight—it’s going to be a gradual change, much like how we’ve seen discussions on other controversial subjects in the community change over time.

There’s also the issue of the “therian zoosexuals,” who are more literally known as the bestialist therian groups. These are therians who engage in and/or encourage engagement in bestiality, and who also often publicly further the idea that therianthropy (and by extension, alterhumanity) are inseparably intertwined with bestiality and zoophilia. Therian bestialist groups are a prime example of what I talk about when I mention the rare cases where someone takes their harmful urges and glorifies them and of groups who prey on individuals who have been ostracized by larger alterhuman spaces.

These groups have had wide-reaching effects that go beyond just more public associations between bestiality and therianthropy; they’ve also made it functionally taboo to talk about ugly instincts that relate to sexual urges in any capacity, even ones that are entirely disconnected from (auto)zoophilia or real-life animals, because doing so will simply result in you being mislabeled as a bestialist and ousted from many spaces. This has created a cycle with seemingly no end. You have one side where people are

unable to speak about their feelings or, more importantly, reach out to their community for support in times where they feel they need it, and the other side where people are turning sexually abusing animals into something to celebrate and be prideful of, with no functional in-between where actions are rightfully condemned and instincts are appropriately acknowledged.

With those problems in place, it disinclines people across the board from talking about their problematic urges in any in-depth capacity, and that's where the biggest obstacle to changing attitudes lies. It's something I have no idea how to overcome, because the bestialist therian groups certainly aren't going to go away anytime soon and the damage they've done (and continue to do) in regards to how they attempt to represent therianthropy to the wider public is having a litany of effects that we will likely see the consequences of for years to come—not just on therianthropy itself, but, more to the point of this essay, especially in regards to how larger alterhuman community attitudes form around both public relations and respectability politics, and in regards to alterhuman-related ugly instincts and urges.

I'll just be here in the corner, occasionally spouting off about my own ugly instincts in essays and on forums, and maybe that will help or maybe it won't. But that's likely the best I, as an individual, can realistically do.