The Philosophical Foundations of Disability Studies

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Abstract

The deficit model was, at one time, dominant in the
study of disability, but not in disability studies.
There are three variations of the deficit model: the
medical model, the rehabilitation model, and the
special education model. But a person with a disability
does not have a deficit. Identifying as a person with a
disability is an ideological act. There are nine
versions of the disability studies paradigm which can
be combined into one statement which raises the
question of why people with disabilities face
oppression. To answer that question the philosophical
foundations of Western culture must be examined. When
that is done the Greek, Christian, and modern versions
of an ontology with an epistemology are found. As we
are "socialized" and educated we are given one of these
ontologies with its accompanying epistemology. The
ontology contains uncritical hypotheses about the world
which are stereotypes of all but the power elite. This
type of ontology lies at the heart of discrimination
based on disability. We must critically examine that
ontology and reconstruct it. When we do so we will find
that only an experientially based epistemology will be
sufficient and that it produces some experientially
based knowledge, but mostly inferential knowledge. Life
therefore must be lived tentatively. Our research must
be guided by a critical spirit.

In order to discuss the philosophical foundations of
disability studies one must first deal with the deficit model and
the disability paradigm. (Pfeiffer, 2001) This analysis will then
lead to the actual philosophical foundations and their
implications.

In this paper the terms model and paradigm are used
interchangeably in part because it follows common usage in this
area. No matter which term is used, a model or paradigm presents
the major variables in a field and their relationships. Once the
major variables are known and their relationships are explored,
then fruitful research in a field can occur. However, the
researcher must know the primary, useful models or paradigms in

the field and what are NOT viable models or paradigms.

The Deficit Model

Until recently the dominant paradigm regarding disability (not disability studies) was the deficit model which is not to be found, and should not be found, in disability studies because it conflicts with the disability paradigm. The deficit model says that the person with a disability has a deficit which must be corrected. This model is still very much alive outside of disability studies and infects many people doing disability research outside of the field of disability studies.

There are three variations of the deficit model: the medical model, the rehabilitation model related to employment, and the special education model. Each model specifies a deficit (health condition, employment condition, learning condition) which must be corrected in order to make the person with a disability "normal." Of course many of these conditions can not be corrected (whatever that means) so that the person with a disability will never be allowed to be normal (whatever that means).

But there is no deficit in the person with a disability. There is nothing which keeps her from being normal. "Normal" is a value based perspective. Amundson (2000) gives an excellent analysis of the concepts of normal and abnormal. These concepts, he writes, form the basis of the deficit model of disability. He shows that normal and abnormal are social judgments of what are and what are not acceptable biological variations and functioning. By classifying people with disabilities as abnormal, these value judgments are used to justify the disadvantages which confront people with disabilities.

The deficit model can have a place in narrow circumstances as long as it is not an overall paradigm used for research in disability studies. For example, poverty is a problem for many people. Studying how people can be brought out of poverty is useful, but the focus can be wrongly shifted if the researcher considers the lack of skills in a person as a deficit. The failure of society to provide skills as a part of early education is the real deficit. For many persons who live in poverty the solution is creating an educational program which helps people learn skills. Another deficit (and not to be found within the person) is poor planning by government and by the private sector which makes skills quickly obsolete with no chance for people to learn new ones.

Disability does not refer to a deficit in a person. Disability refers to a value judgment that something is not being done in a certain, acceptable way. Just as race is not a viable biological term and has no "scientific" definition, disability has no "scientific" or even a commonly agreed upon definition. Disability is not based on functioning or normality or a health condition, but on value judgements concerning functioning, normality, and health. In other words, the term disability is based on ideology and social class.

The Nine Models of Disability Studies

In the field of disability studies there are at least nine interpretations or versions of the disability paradigm:

(1) the social constructionist version as found in the
        United States, (2) the social model version as found in
        the United Kingdom, (3) the impairment version, (4) the
        oppressed minority (political) version, (5) the
        independent living version, (6) the post-modern (post-
        structuralist, humanist, experiential, existential)
        version, (7) the continuum version, (8) the human
        variation version, and (9) the discrimination version.
        (Pfeiffer, 2001: 32)

Each of the nine versions will be briefly summarized and
critiqued. More information is to be found in Pfeiffer (2001).
        1. THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONIST VERSION AS FOUND IN THE US:
Ervin Goffman (1963) wrote about normal people and people who
have an unexpected differentness and their mutual interaction in
social situations. This unexpected differentness is seen as a
stigma by the so-called normal people who socially construct the
identity of people with disabilities based on that differentness.
Either the way in which they function (can not walk, see, hear),
the way they look, the way the behave, or some other way is the
basis of this unexpected differentness.
        There are three objections to the US social constructionist
disability paradigm: (1) acceptance of existing social roles
gives disability the appearance of objectivity and inevitability;
(2) the roles are based upon value judgements as to what is
"good"; and (3) it is a deficit model because the person with the
disability is blamed for not being able to fulfill the social
role. On the other hand, it makes sense to many people for why a
person is described as having a disability. At the same time it
has limited usefulness for research and advocacy.
        2. THE SOCIAL MODEL VERSION AS FOUND IN THE UK: Widely known
as the SOCIAL MODEL, this version presents a class perspective on
disability and its adherents usually stress their working class
origins. It emphasizes that the organization of society
(especially the means of production) prevents certain people
(known as disabled people) from participation in society in terms
of employment and access. According to the social model, society
also assumes disabled people are not able to make their own
decisions so that physicians are empowered to make decisions for
them about things which are not connected to medicine.
        Many writers, however, criticize it as only a model which
says why there are people with disabilities and it is not a
social theory which would lead to understanding and change.
Further, it is said, the model excludes some disabilities
(because those persons can work) and alienates them. Because it
is not a social theory it is said that it has limited usefulness
for research purposes. Because it alienates some people it is
said that it is not very good for advocacy. However, its
adherents are vociferous in its defense.
        3. THE IMPAIRMENT VERSION: This version states that it is
the impairment which differentiates people with disabilities from
people without disabilities and therefore it is the important
variable. It is countered that impairments and disabilities are
both socially constructed so that it is nothing new. And it is
seen as a deficit model because the impairment is in the person
while it is the social structures which produce the disability.

The impairment model is not fully developed yet and may or may not become worthwhile in the future.

The impairment version certain drives alot of research on particular conditions, but this research is not in the field of disability studies. And it also sets forth the focus of alot of organizations such as the Muscular Dystrophy Association, the Cancer Society, the March of Dimes, Easter Seals, and others all of which live off of people with disabilities.

4. THE OPPRESSED MINORITY (POLITICAL) VERSION: Let me caution many of you. Whenever your findings are presented with any indignation or fervor, you will be characterized (wrongly) as a partisan advocate and dismissed. (Ustun, Bickenbach, Badley, & Chatterji, 1998). The reason for this grievous mistake we will talk about when we discuss the philosophical foundations of disability studies.

This version points out that people with disabilities are treated as second class citizens, that we are confronted with various barriers (architectural, sensory, attitudinal, cognitive, economic barriers and others), and that we face discrimination. Because of this discrimination many persons with a disability see a correspondence of their experiences with those experienced by an oppressed minority group.

The major criticism of this version is that it has an inadequate theoretical basis with too much emphasize on structure excluding the importance of discourse. It uses dichotomies (disabled, non-disabled; rich, poor) which are limiting and not real. Furthermore, it is said, its militancy turns off non-disabled people. Its insights, however, are useful in research and it is very useful for organizing and advocacy.

5. THE INDEPENDENT LIVING VERSION: This version emphasizes that the person with a disability has a fundamental right to make personal choices and does not have a deficit which needs to be corrected. The problem confronting a person with a disability consists of various socially created barriers, poor support services, and the attempt of professionals to control. The solution is advocacy in order to eliminate barriers.

In investigating certain topics this version is useful and it certainly helps in advocacy and organizing.

6. THE POST-MODERN, POST-STRUCTURALISM, HUMANISTIC, EXPERIENTIAL, EXISTENTIALIST VERSION (THERE ARE MANY DIFFERENT NAMES FOR THIS VERSION): Disability is a cultural and political construct which needs to be decoded and deconstructed in order to set forth the basic orientations and unstated assumptions about disability and people with disabilities. Everyone has an agenda and this agenda must be set forth. To do this it focuses on cultural artifacts and texts to understand what is happening.

Critics argue that this approach and its product are not understandable by most academics much less the general public. It is of no use in organizing and in advocacy, they say. But it certainly has its adherents who use it as a basis for their work.

7. THE CONTINUUM VERSION: Implicit in all the versions and an assumption of all of them is that there is a continuum from non-disabled to disabled. Everyone, it is said, will eventually be disabled. However, this version is not fully developed even though it may become so in the future. It is a useful perspective as to why everyone should be concerned about discrimination based upon a disability.

8. THE HUMAN VARIATION VERSION: Kay Schriner and Richard Scotch (1997; 1998; with a nod to Higgins, 1992) are the originators of this version of the disability paradigm. They argue that while people with disabilities are similar to other oppressed groups, they suffer discrimination because the disability community is so varied, not just different. Society simply is not able to deal with the wide variation in the complex disability community and standardization will not work.

However, there are two problems with the human variation version of the disability paradigm. It relies too much on the concept of normal and it views policy outcomes (such as the ADA) as an attempt to remedy discrimination when it actually is a statement of rights and the ADA is in reality a civil rights statute.

9. DISABILITY AS DISCRIMINATION: All of the previous eight versions of the disability paradigm have some basis in logic and experience, but a person with a disability only feels she is disabled when confronted with discrimination. It is this discrimination which brings together the other versions.

Disability rights are civil rights. As Bob Burgdorf (1997: 568) wrote: "Nondiscrimination is a guarantee of equality. It is not a special service reserved for a select few." We must not be seen as being in a protected class with special prerogatives because that destroys all ideas of equality. We must receive equal protection (be treated as others are treated) and due process (be treated fairly). (Galbraith, 2002)

The discrimination version opens up a vast area for research. It can be used for organizing and advocacy (especially advocacy).

A Statement of the Disability Paradigm

What, then, is the disability paradigm? Drawing on the nine versions just presented, the disability paradigm sets forth the following ideas: (1) carrying out social roles and tasks produces discrimination; (2) the organization of society also produces discrimination; (3) an impairment in no way signifies tragedy and a low quality of life and to assume so is discriminatory; (4) people with disabilities are an oppressed minority; (5) all people need various services in order to live independently; (6) all people have agendas most of which result in discrimination, but especially discrimination based on disability; (7) everyone will eventually become disabled; (8) there is no "normal" human behavior which can be the basis of social policy; and (9) discrimination against persons with disabilities is found everywhere at all times. In summary, identifying as a person with a disability is an ideological act, the term disability is an ideological term, and there is no commonly accepted way to identify or define disability and to measure it.

The implications of the disability paradigm must be stated. Basically the person with a disability, not the professional nor the service provider, makes the important decisions. In addition, social change must occur and it is society and not people with disabilities who must change. As a result any research using the disability paradigm has to include, as active partners, people with disabilities because they are the real decision makers. These implications can be found in numerous places (Pfeiffer,

2001: 46; Pfeiffer, 2000; Walmsley, 2001; Mactavish, Mahon, Lutfiyya, 2000; Beaulaurier, Taylor, 1999; Gilson, Bricout, Baskind, 1998; Barnes, 1996; Oliver, 1992) At the same time, disability and the experience of disability is not a tragedy, it is not dependency, and it is not a loss of productivity and ability. Disability is a natural part of life. There is as much difference between people with disabilities as between people in general.

To speak of grief, guilt, and bitterness in relation to people with disabilities is not appropriate. Nor should people with disabilities be described as courageous, noble, and brave because of what they have accomplished any more than any one else. Unlike the common stereotypes, people with disabilities can be sexual, sensual, and very good parents. They are not poor unless they are unemployed. They are not ignorant unless they were excluded from mainstream education and only provided special education. Many people with disabilities are quite brilliant in fact. (Pfeiffer, 2001: 44-45)

These ignorant stereotypes form the basis of much research on the experience of disability and the lives of people with disabilities. As a consequence, most of the research done in public health and rehabilitation on disability and people with disabilities has no worth. Further, much of it is seen by many persons (including persons with disabilities) as oppressive or at least as irrelevant. For example, the World Bank uses Disability Adjusted Life Years (DALYs) which describe people with disabilities as burdens. (Murray & Lopez, 1996a; Murray & Lopez, 1996b; World Bank, 1995; Anand & Hanson, 1997; Essink & Marie, 1999; Kothari & Gulati, 1997; Michaud, 1999; Murray & Acharya, 1997) The World Health Organization and many researchers use the International Classification of Impairments, Disabilities, and Handicaps (ICIDH) and now known as the International Classification of Functioning (ICF). Not only does the World Bank in DALYs and the World Health Organization in the ICF try to measure an undefined concept (disability), they further the agenda of eugenics which will eliminate (kill off) people with disabilities. (Pfeiffer, 1992, 1994, 1998, 2000)

The Philosophical Foundations

Why does this discrimination and oppression happen? Why is this oppression obvious only to some researchers in the field of disability studies? Why is it not clear to persons who formulate and implement social policy? Why is it not clear to the people in the media who simply mouth platitudes which enhance this oppression? Why does it continue to exist? In order to resolve these questions there must be some philosophical analysis. There must be an examination of the current three dominant ontologies with their epistemologies.

This discussion of ontology and epistemology will not ring true to some readers because they are immersed in their ontology and epistemology. It will be irrelevant to others and it might even be silly to some. But, dear reader, be willing to understand some ideas which may be contrary to your ontology and epistemology. It is a very difficult thing to do. It may not be an easy experience.

Ontology and Epistemology

Ontology comes from the Greek word onta which refers to things which exist. The suffix ology means the study of. So ontology means the study of things which exist. It is "The science of being or reality; the branch of knowledge that investigates the nature, essential properties, and relations of being." (Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary, 1949: 587) That is a commonly used definition.

Epistemology comes from the Greek word episteme which means knowledge. Again the suffix ology means the study of. So epistemology means the study of knowledge. It is "The theory or science of the method and grounds of knowledge, esp. with reference to its limits and validity." (Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary, 1949: 277) That is another common definition.

Ontology says what exists and epistemology says how one knows what exists. These two sets of philosophical principles govern how lives are lived and decisions are made for others.

In order to go further in this philosophical analysis the following two statements must be presented. They are assumptions which are based on the author's critical reflection and introspection. They are part of the author's ontology and as assumptions they can not be "proven."

The first statement is: In the process of maturing and developing people accept, from outside sources, an ontology which carries with it an epistemology.

The second statement is: Although this statement describes what appears to happen with people, the process must be reversed. A persons's ontology and epistemology must be closely and critically examined. Once that has occurred the process must be reversed working out an epistemology which then helps to determine an ontology.

First, however, this cautionary word. The following discussion of the three dominant ontologies today is only an outline of a very complex matter. It is a time consuming adventure with far reaching implications. However, it is vitally important to individuals - disabled or not - and to disability studies.

There are three dominant ontologies today in Western philosophy: the Greek, the Christian, and the modern (some people prefer to call the modern ontology the scientific ontology). The modern ontology evolved from the Christian which itself evolved from the Greek. All three ontologies can be found today both in politics and in research (and in other ways, too). They are to be found in non-Western philosophy under different names.

The most influential ontology in Western philosophy and one of the most influential in non-Western philosophy is the one which the Greeks, especially Plato, set forth. Even though it is found in non-Western philosophy, it should not be named "Greek" when discussing non-Western philosophy because it had a common origin with what we call Greek.

For now only Western philosophy will be considered because the author was born and educated in a society which largely is based on Western philosophy. He studied non-Western philosophy and does attempt to go outside of the Euro-American orientation. If the reader has done the same, the difficulties are well known.

Returning to the discussion of ontology, in Greek ontology

there are two levels of existence. The real world consisted of the logos sometimes translated as The Word. The imperfect world consists of every day existence. In Plato's allegory of the Cave, which is the classic explanation of this ontology, the person is seated facing away from reality and sees the imperfect world of existence. Behind him (certainly not her in the Greek tradition) reality passes back and forth in front of a fire. The person sees shadows of reality reflected against the side of the cave which he is facing and not reality itself. In order to know reality, the person must engage in difficult study with those people who have already gone through this process and who know reality through the use of reason. Only in this manner can the person come to know truth, justice, goodness, and beauty which are embodied in reality.

The epistemology which is embodied in the Greek ontology is acceptance of the knowledgeable person's word (that term is not used accidentally) describing reality. The unlearned person must accept the authority of the learned person. Some day the unlearned person may become a learned person if he works hard enough. Of course, it is the learned person who make the final decision.

The other greatly influential ontology in Western philosophy is the Christian ontology. In this ontology there are three levels. People are still stranded in an imperfect existence, but above it (above in a sense being better) is the reality of God who is in heaven. God is the source of all truth, justice, goodness, and beauty. God is the ultimate reality to which all people strive. Below the imperfect world is found the dung heap, that which is false, unjust, evil, and ugly - otherwise known as hell.

It is clear that the Church Fathers (theologians writing in the first three centuries after the time of Jesus) took the idea of the unworldly Greek reality and molded it into heaven. They also took the idea, which can be found in Judaism in what the Christians call the Old Testament, of a place where tormented people go after death if they do not go with Yahweh as part of the chosen nation of Israel. It is this place which is known as hell.

The cultures of the Greeks and the Jews were greatly influential in the formation of Christianity. In the Christian Gospel of John (which embodies this Greek ontology) the opening words are: En ache he ho logos c ho logos pron then. For those persons who may not remember their Greek, the translation is: In the beginning was the word and the word was with God. In other words, the essence of reality, of being, is the logos which is basically God. It is the expression of the Christian ontology in Greek terms.

The epistemology of the Christian ontology is very similar to that of the Greeks. One must put aside worldly experiences and study under priests to become knowledgeable about God. The highest calling is to be a priest. In addition, in order to be assured of getting to heaven, one must also have the blessings of the Church given by the priests. Being knowledgeable about God and entering heaven are equated.

One of the most influential early (first century) Christian leaders was Saul of Tarsus, otherwise known as Paul. This man Paul was very well trained in Greek philosophy as well as

rabbinical, what might be called Jewish, philosophy. At the same time he was highly trained in Roman philosophy which was more pragmatic than Greek philosophy and Christian and Jewish theology. Paul, in his Epistles, and Luke, in the Acts of the Apostles, were apologists for Christianity to the cultured Romans. Paul, Luke, and others were working to get Christianity accepted in the Roman Empire as a legitimate religion different than Judaism and separate from the Roman state religion. Because the Roman elite was pragmatic, Paul, Luke, and others (not John, however) pitched Christianity in pragmatic terms.

There was yet another tradition in early Christianity and that was of the everyday experiences of the working men and women. It was very down to earth and not consciously embodying the Greek, the Jewish, nor the Roman understandings of life.

The existence of these four traditions is why the Christian New Testament begins with the Gospels otherwise known, in Greek, as the kyregma and in English the "good news" which is the story about Jesus. The four Gospels are Matthew (from the Jewish tradition), Mark (from the daily experience tradition), Luke (from the Roman tradition), and John (from the Greek tradition). Those four books plus the Epistles of Paul, the Acts of the Apostles, and the rest of the New Testament are meant to explain Christianity and attract to it the ruling elite of the Roman Empire. They also laid the foundation of Western civilization which still exists in the 21st century.

In the fifth century Augustine of Hippo made a important contribution to Western philosophy. He elaborated the Christian ontology from the everyday and the Roman traditions with help from the writings of Aristotle who studied under Plato and who is in the Greek tradition. In the 13th century Thomas Aquinas made another significant contribution. He elaborated the Christian ontology from the Greek tradition with a strong influence from Augustine. But there was a problem.

If everyday experience did not warrant study because it was not the logos, the word, what should be done with those pesky people who continued to study nature and find out important things? Remember that Galileo was censured by the Roman Catholic Church because his investigations showed that the sun, not the earth, is the center of the universe. Other advances in fields of knowledge other than theology were coming at a rapid rate. Most of these researchers acknowledged theology as the Queen of the Sciences and then went about their work which clearly threatened the Christian ontology.

It remained for another 13th century theologian, Peter Abelard, to fashion a way in which research on the everyday world of experience could be accepted by the Church. Abelard worked on the theological problem of how communion wine could both be fermented grape juice and the blood of Christ, otherwise known as the question of transubstantiation. Abelard argued, and it was generally accepted, that although the real world consisted of the non-material (the blood of Christ) it was connected (through transubstantiation) with the material world (the fermented grape juice). But only priests of the Church could perform this particular miracle in the Mass.

Transubstantiation made it legitimate to study the material world. Granted the material world was an imperfect counterpart to the logos, nevertheless, it was now proper to study it. The

modern ontology eventually came into existence. There was considerable more development of it over the centuries, but thanks to Peter Abelard it was possible and proper to study the material world.

In the modern ontology there is only the real, objective world, the scientific one, the material world. Its study is the highest calling because it gives "real" knowledge. At first the scientists had to nod toward the Church (not any more, sometimes the Church has to nod toward science), but soon the scientists had an ontology in which the material and the non-material, were separate. Scientists studied the material. Science told us the nature of material existence. Theology studied the non-material which was the source of law, morality, and ethics.

There were further refinements of this ontology by others including Descartes and Kant. Eventually the material world included the dichotomy of mind and body, mental and physical, so that mental experience (psychology) was as real as physical experience (physics). The three levels of existence were moral, mental, and physical.

The epistemology embodied in the modern ontology said that the only knowledge worth having was that which could be empirically demonstrated. There is quite an elaborate scientific methodology, but there is a problem. As so called hard science developed 19th and 20th centuries, it was embodied in mathematical formulations. Soon these mathematical formulations (often called theories) took on a life of their own. If empirical demonstrations conformed with the predicted outcomes, then both the experiment and the theory were considered worthwhile. If they did not conform, then at first the theory had to be revised. Now, the empirical demonstrations have to be refined and revised.

It seems that the Greek epistemology has reemerged. Today students study with the masters who tell them which theory to accept and develop (the nature of reality) which then dictates how the empirical demonstration (the epistemology) should proceed. It was almost not noticed that the third level, called the moral level, was pushed aside and reserved for non-worldly people to study.

The so called hard sciences look down upon the so called social sciences because the social science theory is not expressed in mathematical formulations and the methodology does not require a laboratory. If social science is formulated mathematically, as in economics, then it becomes obvious that the "science" does not explain complex human behavior.

The hard sciences say the methodology of social science is inadequate, but the social sciences say that for them there are too many variables which can not be controlled. The social science which has progressed the most is public choice theory, but it is still developing.

An example of the problems which developed for the hard sciences is quantum physics because it can only be understood in terms of mathematical formulations. Any experimental observation in quantum physics by definition changes the outcomes.

Doing Philosophical Analysis

Why bother to do philosophical analysis of the concepts of ontology and epistemology? Because researchers must go beyond the disability paradigm and understand their intellectual foundations before doing disability research. Unless they are aware of common

ontologies and epistemologies and what their particular ontology
and epistemology means, they are lost and wandering. Not only
will they be frustrated in formulating research hypotheses, they
can easily work on things which are empty of meaning.
Understanding the disability paradigm and generally understanding
the world will point them in fruitful directions for research.

One of the author's other assumptions is that everyone has
an agenda. In terms which the author would rather use, everyone
has a utility function which produces a preference order over a
series of alternatives in decision making. The utility functions
of people differ and there are some people who really are
altruistic though it is because of their utility function and not
because they are "saintly" or "good" people. Let it be noted that
this elaboration of a utility function is contrary to the usual
one in economics and in public choice theory.

In politics (domestic and international) there are agendas.
Usama bin Laden and George Bush both have agendas (utility
functions) which govern their actions. But why would others
follow these people or any political leader? They follow the
political leader because of the logos. The logos, the Word, the
ethical, the Divine, or call it justice, right, good, truth,
whatever, was snuck back into the modern ontology and says the
powerless should follow the powerful leader and the ones who
know: the scientist, the priest, and the political leader. In a
cynical vein, acceptance of this logos is a defense mechanism
which makes tolerable the miserable life of most people.

This part of the ontology which the political leaders and
the followers (including the scientists and priests) accept says
that the populace must follow their leaders in order to enter
paradise (in one case) and in order to achieve national security
(in the other case). This point later will be discussed again.

The modern ontology (with the logos) and its epistemology
are widely accepted in both the Western and the non-Western
worlds. It is consciously accepted by many people, but just
plainly accepted with no reflection by most people. In this way
one could explain the appearance and spread of democracy, a
secular religion as some people describe it. One could also use
the modern ontology with the logos as the explanation of
evangelical religious movements which come and go. But the modern
ontology is not without its faults.

There are two major problems with the modern ontology and
epistemology. The first problem is the blanket acceptance of a
series of dichotomies. It is assumed that there is objective
reality and subjective illusion. This dichotomy is exemplified by
body versus mind or hard data versus soft impressions. It is
assumed that the modern ontology embodies a true value system as
opposed to confusion. From this value system come statements of
right versus wrong, truth versus falsehood, evil versus good,
worthy versus unworthy, beautiful versus ugly. There is a whole
value system inherent in the contemporary version of the modern
ontology and epistemology. (Brown, 2001) And guess what? People
with disabilities are wrong, false, evil, unworthy, and ugly.

The second problem is that while in the so called hard
sciences there is careful experimentation and the requirement to
reject hypotheses if they do not meet the standards of the
accepted methodology, there are alot of hypotheses which never
get tested. If the so called hard sciences were consistent, they

would challenge many of the hypotheses about human behavior which are passively accepted. (Cetina, 1998) In other words, people who only accept the modern ontology are ignorant of large areas of knowledge about people. And they are quite arrogant about their ignorance.

Usually these passively accepted hypotheses about human behavior and people are called stereotypes. In Western society due to the modern ontology there are a number of stereotypes about groups of people. Consider the following stereotypes of African Americans, women, Japanese Americans, elderly persons, and persons with disabilities. They can be elaborated even more.

The stereotype of African Americans: they smell, have greasy and dirty hair, are lazy, shiftless, but they do have rhythm, they steal, can not be educated, are sexual animals, do not know proper English, live in abject poverty, love to be bossed about by whites, and are drug users.

The stereotype of women: they are helpless, can not make decisions, are soft, giggle, are high strung, easily become hysterical, can not understand complex ideas, want to be dominated, want to sexually satisfy any man around, and are sickly.

The stereotype of Japanese Americans: they are sly, scheming, can not be trusted, do not know proper English, are inscrutable, hang together, are unfriendly, are deceptive, and plot against all other people.

The stereotype of elderly persons: they are helpless, impotent, a burden, frail, have mental lapses, are confused easily, are rude, can not work, live in poverty, are not productive, and are chronically ill.

The stereotype of people with disabilities: they are helpless, ignorant, can not learn, are confused, are ugly, embarrassing, unable to do things, have a low quality of life, are poor, unemployed, can not keep a job, want to be with their own kind, are incontinent, are in constant pain, often drool, have no social graces, are pitiful, tragic, a social burden, in need of charity and welfare, are sexless, sick, and broken and need to be fixed.

Then guess what: the stereotype of white males are that they are virile, manly, intelligent, smart, strong, able, are problem solvers, are natural leaders, run the world, are heterosexual, healthy, and good looking and in their lives they embody truth, goodness, value, justice, and beauty.

The point is that anyone who passively accepts an ontology with its accompanying epistemology without critically examining it accepts alot of baggage known as stereotypes. That is the primary reason that people with disabilities face discrimination. What Is to Be Done?

People must become aware of the value assumptions of the ontology and epistemology which are handed to them as they grow up. They must become critical, skeptical thinkers. They must start with epistemology and once it is worked out, they must then apply it to the ontology which they are expected to passively accept. Only then can they become free.

In other words, not only must people examine and then reconstruct their personal ontology using their critical epistemology in order to free themselves from harmful stereotypes, they must keep this procedure in mind when they do

research, especially in disability studies. People's lives, which includes research, must be based on critical thinking. However, critical thinking and discussion is difficult to do because language guides thinking (Minkel, 2002) and English is fundamentally Platonic in its ontology and epistemology. Nevertheless, it must be done.

A Philosophical Analysis of Disability Studies

Does this philosophical inquiry relate to the disability movement and disability studies research? Of course it does and here are some examples.

During the Fall of 2001 a very influential book on disability studies was published. It is the Handbook on Disability Studies edited by Gary Albrecht, Katherine Seelman, and Michael Bury (Albrecht, Seelman, & Bury, 2001). The author, in his research, is very concerned with the influence of the International Classification of Impairments, Disabilities, and Handicaps (ICIDH) which was revised and now is named the International Classification of Functioning (ICF). He is concerned about the ICIDH/ICF because it uncritically embodies the modern ontology and its epistemology. This Handbook on Disability Studies liberally uses the ICIDH/ICF framework especially in the first part of the book.

He is concerned about the ICIDH/ICF because it is based on a medical model, a deficit model, of disability although many of its adherents protest that using the term impairment does not point to a deficit and that the idea of social participation is now embodied in the ICF. But they are wrong. The ontology embodied in the ICF objectifies disability as a deficit and conveys stereotypes (the untested hypotheses) of the worst type about people with disabilities.

The Handbook on Disability Studies is a peculiar work. Part I is titled The Shaping of Disability Studies as a Field and eleven of its twelve chapters uncritically accept the ICF and its baggage. There is one of those twelve chapters (Asch, 2001) which concerns the field of bioethics and which raises the concerns expressed here. It really seems out of place because the other eleven chapters so uncritically accept the ICF.

Part II of this Handbook is titled Experiencing Disability. It opens with a chapter (Gill, 2001) which clearly distinguishes between the way people with disabilities experience disability and the way "outsiders" say disability ought to be experienced. This chapter easily debunks the ICF's stereotypes of people with disabilities.

Although Part II and also Part III (titled Disability in Context) contain a number of chapters which are not very good, they do contain some chapters which, although they ignore this question about ontology and epistemology, make important contributions. (Ferguson, 2001; Barnartt, Schriner, & Scotch, 2001; French & Swain, 2001) A full philosophical analysis of this Handbook would be a very valuable contribution.

Josie Byzek in an article in the January-February 2002 issue of Mouth Magazine (Byzek, 2002) applies philosophical analysis to the disability movement using ADAPT as the key example seeing it (correctly) as a main part of the disability movement. The term ontology is not used, but rather the disability movement's foundation is substituted.

The disability movement, Byzek writes, has an ontology (not

her term) which is based on anger which comes from how people with disabilities are treated. It is pseudo-nonviolent because demonstrations (by ADAPT and others) produce hostages (people who are not allowed to leave their offices) who are the same as people being forced to live in nursing homes. The movement is non-self-critical because the leaders of the disability movement decide the issues, the targets, and the actions to be done passing them down to the demonstrators. The foundation of the disability movement is anger, pseudo-nonviolence, and non-self-critical leadership.

Byzek says that the disability movement must reject this ontology (not her term) in order for it to survive, grow, and be successful. By saying this last statement Byzek outlines the needed epistemology: what ever makes it possible for the disability movement to survive, grow, and be successful.

The nine versions of the disability paradigm can also be subjected to philosophical analysis.

The social constructionist version as found in the US, the social model version as found in the UK, the oppressed minority (political) version, the independent living version, and the human variation version all assume (all have in their ontology) something known as social groups, social organization, social oppression, and social ways to deal with differences usually by creating social barriers. However, these things do not exist. Only the individual self exists with its perceptions.

This view (which the author accepts) produces a radical epistemology in which it is not certain that other selves exist. Therefore, in doing research, the author must be very careful in testing hypotheses about social forces and organization. The author, as a researcher, may want to test a hypothesis which assumes that other selves exist, but he must be very clear what is going on. He may also want to test a hypothesis that extraterrestrial aliens or demons or ghosts or gods exist, but he would not know how to do such a test. In the same way he has problems testing a hypothesis about social forces and organization.

The impairment version and the continuum version are both deficit models in that there is a deficit, a short coming in the person with a disability. Otherwise, it makes no sense to speak of an impairment or a continuum of disabilities. At the same time, since people with disabilities do not have deficits in this sense there is no epistemological test to use. You can not test nothing.

What is then left are the post-modern, post-structuralism, humanistic, experiential, existentialist version and the discrimination version. The former version (which shall be named the existentialist version) has an experienced based epistemology which identifies things in its ontology. Although one can identify with these experiences, they are hard to deal with. One can discuss them, but how can they be tested? The users of the existentialist version have their texts to work with, but they even say that their texts are subject to different interpretations. They are on the right track and produce accounts which are of considerable value, but they appear to only produce inferential knowledge and no experiential knowledge.

So there is the discrimination version. How does a person know that discriminatory behavior exists? It is experienced. A

person knows when there is a denial equal protection and due process. Stated otherwise, the person knows when she is not being treated as others are treated and when that treatment is not fair. A person knows when she is faced with discrimination.

The overwhelming conclusion from this philosophical analysis is that alot of research in the field of disability studies is worthless. It concerns things like social groups and deficits which have no empirical, experiential, existential meaning. But it is very difficult to object to this meaningless research because the very language used embodies a Greek-Christian-modern ontology and epistemology. It contains words (that is, concepts) of good and bad, truth and falsehood, justice and injustice, worth and insignificance, beauty and ugliness. These are false dichotomies because the world is not just either/or. There is an absolute relativity of value systems in the world including the value system underlying that statement.

Concluding Remarks

There is no way to draw a conclusion to this presentation, but one can draw out the implications of the ontological approach as outlined (the Greek, the Christian, and the modern) and contrast it with the epistemological approach of critical thinking and experiential testing.

On September 11, 2001, a group of religious fanatics killed some 3,000 people using four civilian airliners filled with jet fuel. The point is not that it happened, but why it happened and how it can be understood. Understanding these types of events is the real reason one does research. Even though each study may be a small step, together they add up to an understanding.

It is here contended (as the result of the author's research) that accepting the Greek, Christian, or modern ontology, as here outlined, leads to a fanaticism in which the "other" should be, needs to be, must be destroyed. A fanaticism in which giving one's life in the destruction of the lives of the "other" is the highest moral, ethical, and religious act possible.

In the US during the nineteenth century many persons conceived of a manifest destiny for the country to bring democracy to the rest of the world. The US built up quite an empire doing it. The US entered World War I to make the world safe for democracy. The US entered World War II to defend democracy. The US fought in Korea, Vietnam, Kuwait, and now in Afghanistan to protect freedom and capitalism. The wording changed a little as did the emphasis, but the ontology was the same: the US knows truth, justice, goodness, beauty, and what is best for the rest of the world and it is are ready to kill others to prove it. But the US is not the only country to adhere to this ontology.

Some Japanese in the 1920s and 1930s conceived of their people as having a pure spirit unsoiled by Western culture. Therefore, their military campaigns during the 1930s and 1940s were to purify East Asia and to destroy the influence of the "white devils."

Some Germans in the 1920s and 1930s conceived of their people as having a pure spirit unsoiled by Western culture. Therefore, their military campaigns during the 1930s and 1940s

were to purify Europe and to destroy the influence of the "Christians, liberals, and Jews."

The English did it, the Russians did it, the Germans did it, the French did it, the Spanish, the Italians, the Japanese did it, the Balkan nations, the Chinese - they all did it. In fact, no nation and no religion avoided killing others (if they had the resources to do so) in the name of truth, justice, goodness, and even beauty.

In all of these cases value systems embodied in utility functions based on respect and more importantly based on the equality of people, of gender, of race, and of differing intellectual viewpoints were the enemy which had to be destroyed. As well discussed in Buruma & Margalit (2002), they had to be destroyed because they undermined the ideal of the pious, uncorrupted peasant who worked hard and always obeyed authority. The religious leaders and the political leaders worked together to keep society stable - and therefore their privileged position.

According to the religious and political leaders it is the soul of the peasant which is in danger from these values. It is no accident that West European and US missionaries go to other lands to save souls. And they go into the country side and into the urban slums in all parts of the world to save souls.

It is primarily the skeptical intellect which is the target of missionaries. The peasant must become pious (as defined by the religious leaders) and obey the law (as defined by the political leaders). The scientists present the "facts" which support the definitions of the religious and the political leaders. Intellectuals who question motives and means must be removed and silenced. Law is based upon divine revelation and implemented by leaders. It is this view which unites right wing Christians in the US, ultra-orthodox Jews in Israel, fascists in many dictatorships around the world, far right Islamists, and any authoritarian group.

It was far right Islamic terrorists who crashed those planes on September 11. It was right wing Christians Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson who said it was punishment from God (their god of course) for the denial of God (again their god) in US society. They both had the same ultimate goal: to chastise the US populace in order to force them to embrace their ontology, their epistemology, their value system.

People with disabilities are seen in the US today as the "other" which is concretely involved with the world of experience. Any ontology which presents a world of experience as inferior to a world of divine law will lead to the oppression of people with disabilities. Any ontology which emphasizes ablism and normality dooms people with disabilities to destruction. Any ontology which presents an epistemology based on authority and conformity results in the death of people with disabilities.

Is starting with a skeptical, experienced based epistemology the only way? The answer is no. To take such a position will lead to the attempt to cleanse the intellect of people who disagree with that position. Cleansing the intellect is no different than cleansing the soul. They both involve killing the "other."

Much is explained when the dominant view of people with disabilities is seen to rest on an ontology which has an epistemology based on authority and conformity. Perhaps the most fundamental research question of all in disability studies is how

do we turn around this dominant ontology.

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