
Precis of *The Minority Body*

The *Minority Body* is an exploration of the connection between physical disability and wellbeing. It examines the common assumption that physical disability is (by itself) something that makes your life go worse - that is, that physical disability has an intrinsic or counterfactually robust connection to reduction in wellbeing. I argue that disability is *neutral* with respect to wellbeing. It does not, by itself, make your life better or worse. But that is consistent with physical disabilities sometimes making life worse (or better) for particular individuals, depending on what else they are combined with. And it is consistent with physical disability often or always causing some degree of harm.

The book can roughly be divided into four main sections (which I'll refer back to in my replies to commentators).

Section 1 (chapter 1): I attempt to give a definitional account of physical disability. As I understand it, this is the project of analyzing of what the specific physical conditions we label 'physical disabilities' have in common with each other. I take this to be a project in social ontology - I'm attempting to specify what (if anything) in our social world we are talking about when we talk about physical disability. Most definitional accounts of physical disability tend to fall in one of two camps - realist biomedical theories and social constructionist theories. According to the former, the nature of disability is explained by biological defect or abnormal biological limitation on functional ability. According to the latter, the nature of disability is explained by how people with certain types of bodies are treated. The view I defend is situated somewhere between the two. I argue that disability is, in part, a matter of what your body is like, and your body must (really, objectively) be a particular way in order for you to be disabled. But the reasons that all these widely varying physical states form a kind are social rather than natural - that is, all the individual physical states we think of as 'disabilities' are unified by how we think about them, how they affect people's lives, and so on. More specifically, I argue that disability forms a social kind because of the way it functions, within the Disability Rights Movement, as a way to articulate a shared social experience. You are disabled, on my view, just in case you're in a bodily state for which the Disability Rights Movement is promoting justice.

Section 2 (chapters 2 and 3): This section is the heart of the book. I distinguish between what I call 'bad-difference' views of disability and what I call 'mere-difference' views of disability. The former are views that maintain that there is either an intrinsic or robustly counterfactually stable connection between disability and reduction in wellbeing. That is, they're views that say that disability is, generally and other things being equal, something that tends to make life worse. The latter are views which maintain that disability does not, by itself, make your life worse (or better). It's something that makes you physically different from the norm, but that difference doesn't itself tell us anything about your wellbeing. I argue that bad-difference views, although widely accepted, aren't as 'common sense' or easy to

support as is generally assumed. I then articulate my own favored interpretation of the mere-difference view, according to which disability as mere-difference is compatible with there being some things about disability that are harmful, and which would still be harmful even in a much more inclusive society.

Section 3 (chapters 4 and 5): This section responds to two major objections to mere-difference views of disability. The first is that arguments in favor of mere-difference views improperly rely on the testimony of disabled people. When disabled people claim to value being disabled, this testimony shouldn't be treated as reliable because it is an instance of adaptive preference. The second objection is that, were the mere-difference view true, it would make it permissible to cause disability. It is impermissible to cause disability, therefore the mere-difference view is not true. I respond to the first objection by arguing that we're not justified in diagnosing adaptive preference in the case of (most) disability-positive testimony, and that the tendency to dismiss such testimony as adaptive preference or status quo bias is an instance of testimonial injustice. I respond to the second objection by arguing that there is not general connection between the mere-difference view and the permissibility of causing disability, and that in no cases does the mere-difference view license morally impermissible action.

Section 4 (chapter 6): I argue that one important aspect of mere-difference views of disability is the way in which they allow for Disability Pride. Disability Pride - and Pride movements more generally - are often thought of as ways of providing emotional support and reinforcement. But I argue that Pride has a distinctive type of epistemic value, and as a result can be an incredibly important part of disabled people's ability to understand their own experiences.

Each of these sections is more or less independent of the others. You can accept the arguments I give about the connection between disability and wellbeing while rejecting my analysis of disability as a social category.¹ You can think I'm right about the connection between disability and wellbeing but think that Disability Pride is a red herring.² And so on. But woven together, these sections represent my attempt to grapple with the complex relationship between disability, wellbeing, and oppression.

¹ Leslie Francis, among others, has argued for this. See Francis, Leslie (2018). Understanding disability civil rights non-categorically: The Minority Body and the Americans with disabilities act. *Philosophical Studies* 175 (5):1135-1149.

² Ron Amundson thinks exactly this, for example. See Amundson, Ron (2017). The Minority Body by Elizabeth Barnes. *Kennedy Institute of Ethics Journal* 27 (2):5-9.