



Embedded Ethics:

CSC207

Mini-lecture 2:  
models of disability

# What do disabilities have in **common** with each other?

Wasserman *et al* 2006: a disability is a **physical or mental impairment** that is associated with a **personal or social limitation** on the activities one can perform.

A blue rounded rectangle with a thin black border, containing the text "Physical or mental impairment" in white.

Physical or  
mental  
impairment

e.g. paraplegia

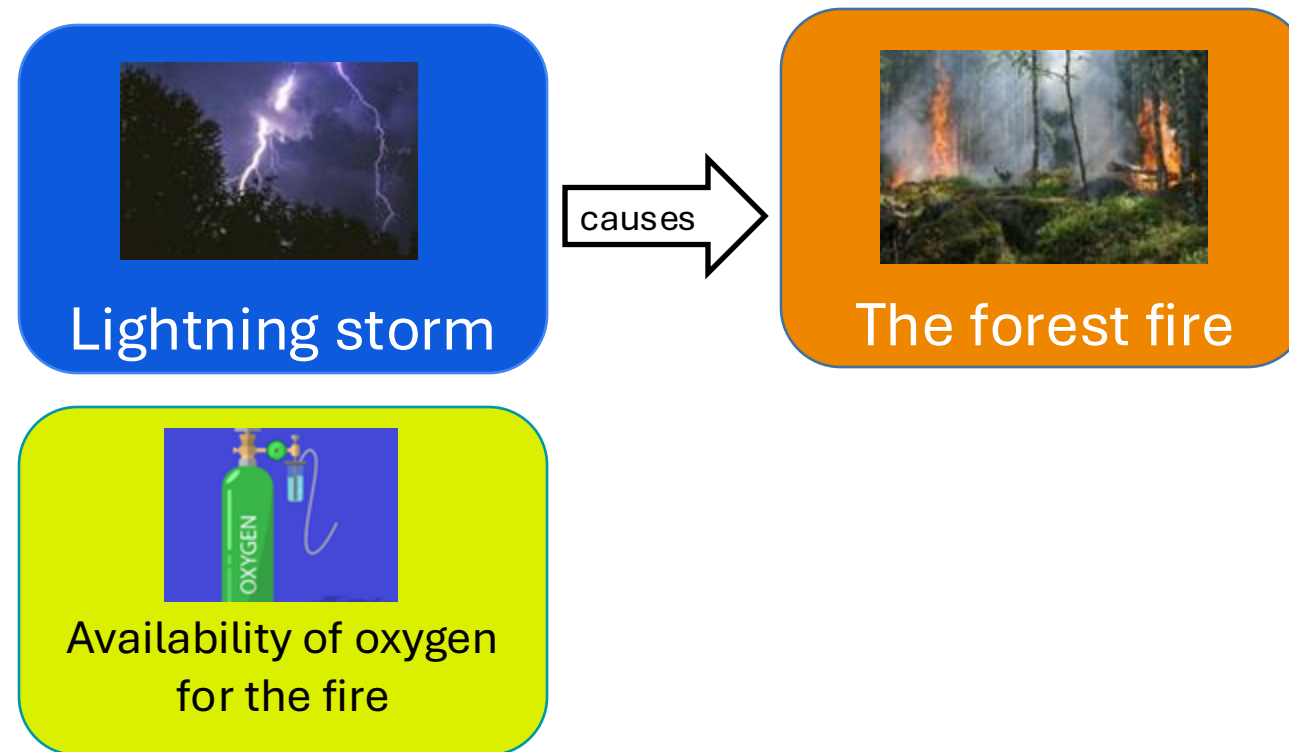
An orange rounded rectangle with a thin black border, containing the text "Personal / social limitation" in white.

Personal / social  
limitation

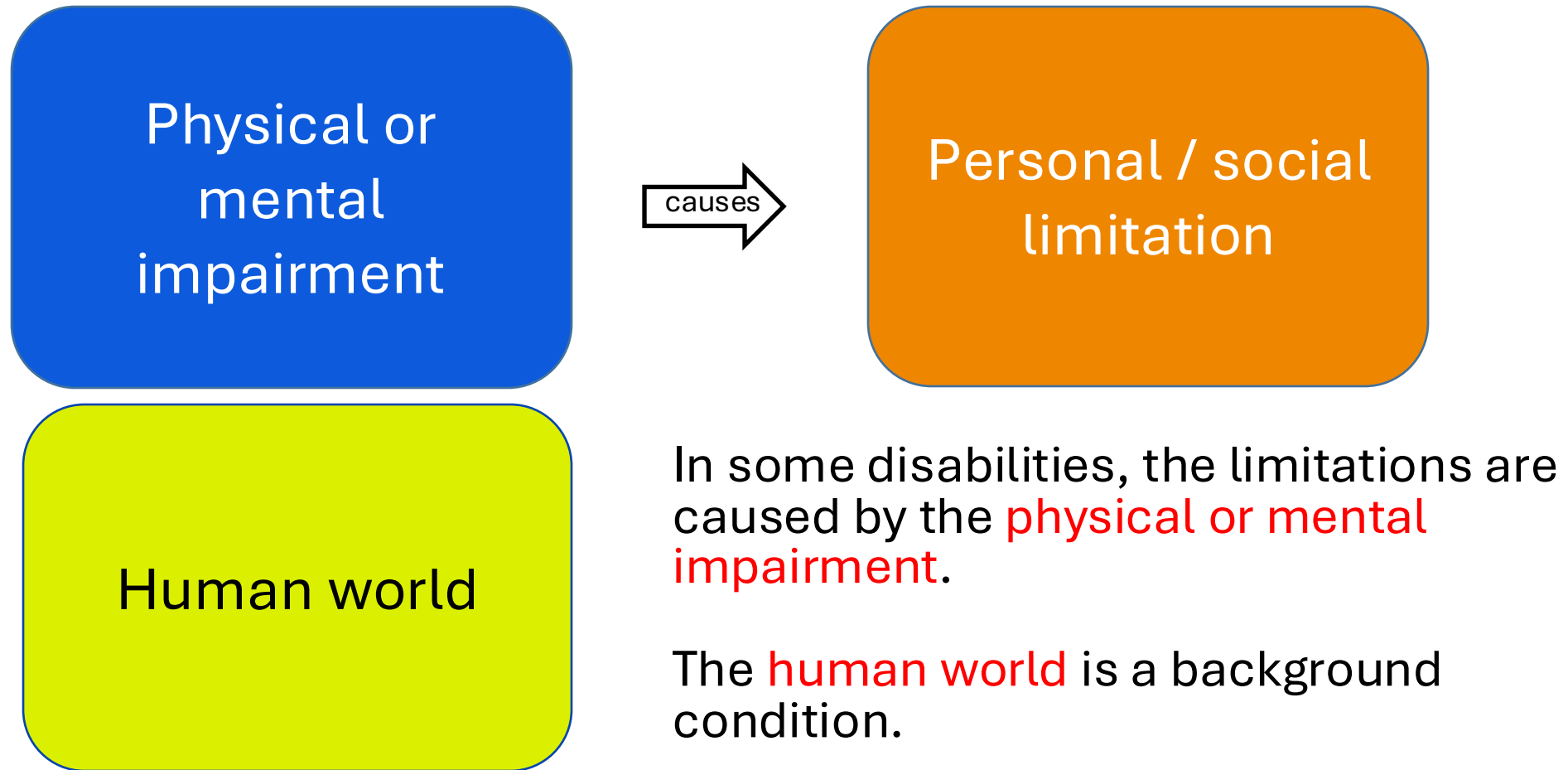
e.g. not being able to  
access public spaces

Normally we think of the “**cause**” of an event as another specific event that occurred before it.

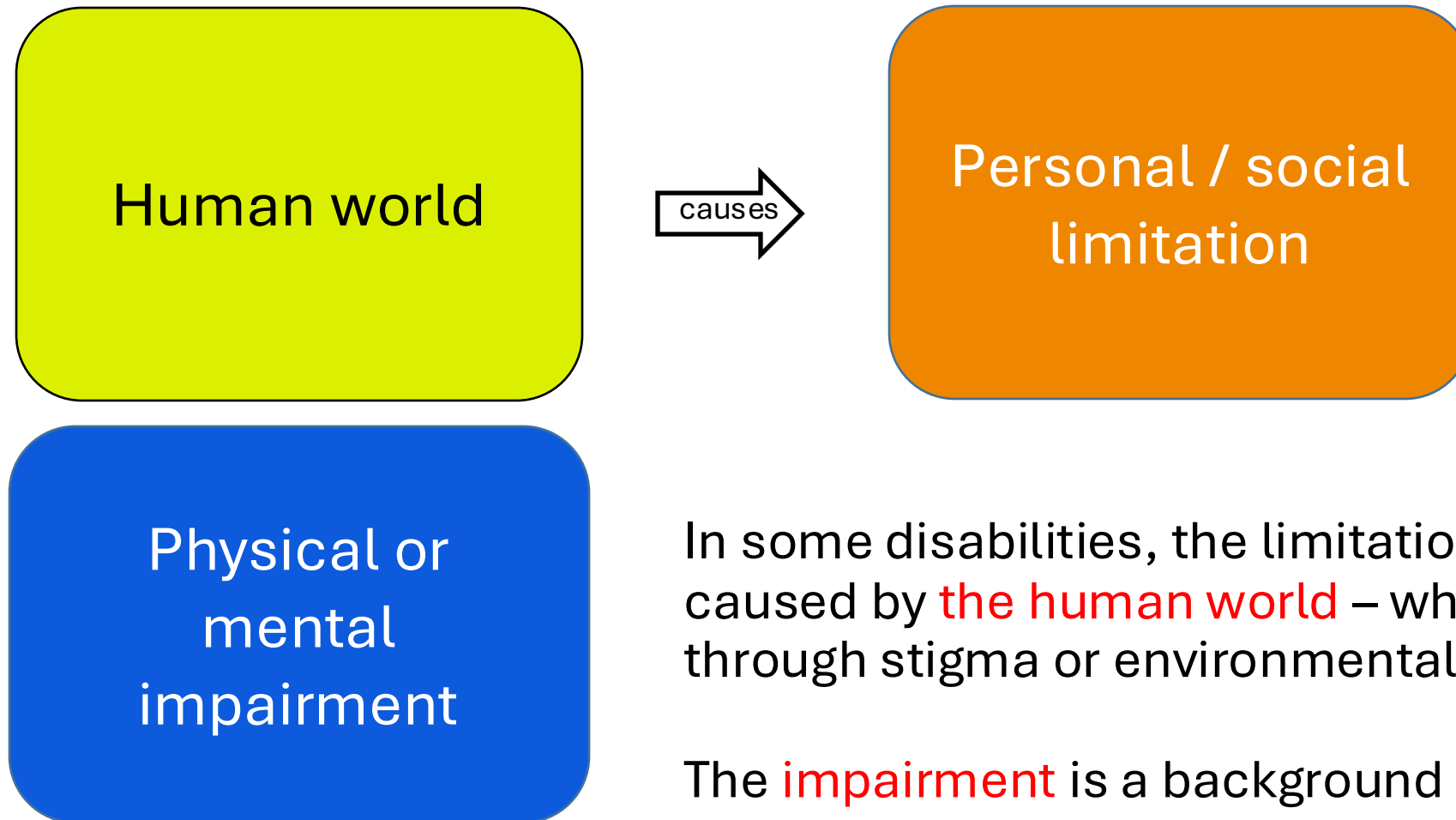
Other factors are simply “**background conditions**” - required for the event to happen, but not part of the “cause”



# The Medical Model of Disability



# The **Social Model** of Disability



In some disabilities, the limitations are caused by **the human world** – whether through stigma or environmental design.

The **impairment** is a background condition.





## Medical model: intervention reduces the impairment

- “closer” to the impairment
- Can work for one person without working for everyone
- Need to do something to trigger
- Designed with a particular impairment in mind



Social model:  
intervention prevents impairment  
from causing limitations

- “further” from the impairment
- Applies to everyone; cannot apply to just one person
- Requires little work to trigger
- May be designed with a particular impairment in mind or none in particular in mind