

Definitions of Disability

Weekly Short Paper

PHIL 399 L01
July 19, 2015
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The paper '*Definitions of disability – Ethical and other values*' by Steven D. Edwards creates a discussion around attempting to define disability by a value (or lack thereof) oriented approach. Edwards describes to the reader of three main types of value sets: medical, moral and aesthetic values (Edwards, 2009, p. 30). Briefly summarizing each, medical values are 'ideals of freedom from pain, of human ability, and of bodily form and movement' (Edwards, 2009, p. 31). This value set seems to deal with disability on mostly a physical approach; it alludes to a species-typical morphology when referring to 'bodily form' and deviation from it is seen as 'negative' if they "cause suffering, impede mobility and so on" (Edwards, 2009, p. 32). The second value set is moral values which involves 'doing good', 'benefitting others', 'acting fairly' and/or 'not harming others'. It is then suggested that disability is something one has a strong rational preference not to be in, as it may be considered a harmed state. It is elaborated that it may be considered a harmed state if it deprives one of a 'worthwhile experience' or restricts the ability to pursue 'vital goals'. The last set of values takes into consideration aesthetical values. Edwards uses a statue of a pregnant women with no arms to provoke discussion on the matter and the mixed judgments the statue has received. Going back to a species-typical morphology, a deviation from a common bodily form may be seen as 'ugly'. This aesthetic value view provides food for thought that perhaps disability isn't simply confined to lack of ability but also encompasses the idea of 'ugliness' of having a species atypical form, a very bold claim! To conclude, essentially Edwards engages the reader in discussion about the multitude of ways of looking at disability and provides a bit of commentary and criticism of the different value views.

A point mentioned in the chapter that I found interesting and would like to explore further is that "it is not clear that there is one common aesthetically ideal human form that is universally positively valued" (Edwards, 2009, p. 40). On a biological level, there is indeed an ideal morphology to homo sapiens that a great percentage fall into. This form may or may not be aesthetically *universally* positively valued, but I would argue that it may definitely be *generally* positively valued. One only need to look at the vast amount of human literature, film and art to see that there is a common human form that greatly overshadows any other depiction of humans. This is truer today in contemporary media which exposes the human population to certain standards of aesthetics. A crude example I would offer is take two identical twins with identical personalities, except one is missing an ear. I believe it is plausible to say that given a survey on which possesses the 'aesthetical human form', though you may not get universal results siding with one twin, the overwhelming general majority would consider the twin with both ears. Is this then to say one who doesn't fit a generally aesthetic ideal human form possess a disability? Depends on who you ask and how you define disability!

Works Cited

¹ Kristiansen, Kristjana, Steven Edwards, Tom Shakespeare, and Simo 'ehmas. (2009) "Definitions of Disability - Ethical and Other Values." In *Arguing about Disability Philosophical Perspectives*. London: Routledge, 30-41.