DISABILITY, LOVE, AND LIMITATION: A RESPONSE TO THE MERE-DIFFERENCE VIEW

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Abstract: Elizabeth Barnes’ argues that physical disabilities have no impact on how well someone’s life goes since disabilities are not negative difference makers to one’s life. I analyze Barnes’ position and tease out three background theses she utilizes in order to argue her position. The most significant of these theses (I call T2) suggests that the kinds of goods experienced by an individual are much less important than the amount of goods in a life. As long as a disabled person can participate in some goods unrelated to a disability, their life will go well for them. I argue that certain goods, especially those an individual loves, are not consistent with this thesis. I use the analogy with romantic love to illustrate that some goods are valued not for their relative quantity but because of their unique relationship to an individual. Given this inconsistency, I suggest that Barnes’ position needs further support to justify her argument.

DISABILITY, LOVE, AND LIMITATION

The relationship between disability and well-being is a complicated one.¹ It has long been thought that disability poses is a negative difference in an individual which causes a detriment to well-being. Principally, the detriment is in virtue of the capacities and opportunities that disabilities take away. Against this standard view, Elizabeth Barnes argues in her recent book, The Minority Body, that disability is not a negative difference but a mere difference. That is, disabilities are a mere difference in an individual like hair color or height.² She argues that since it is not a negative difference, disabilities do not have an impact on one’s well-being. Although I appreciate the motivation and rigor of Barnes’ argument, I think her view is incorrect. I think that at least some disabilities incur a negative difference and those disabilities have an impact on one’s well-being. In order to show this, I will lay out Barnes’ position, suggest difficulties with it that suggest disabilities are in fact negative differences, and show some virtues of my own position before concluding.

Disability as Mere-Difference

It is impossible to characterize the ideas and nuances of a monograph that Barnes has written on the mere-difference view of disability. Therefore, I will focus on three important theses that are part of Barnes’ case. The first thesis deals with the influence a disability has on the overall well-being of an individual. For Barnes, the presence of a disability is a difference in an individual like hair color or sex. Like these difference making qualities, disabilities are not bad and do not necessarily negatively impact one’s well-being. On her view, disabilities are only bad in a local sense in that they create difficulties in some part of an individual’s life. In this sense, they are local bads. For example, deafness makes it more difficult to communicate with others. Even though this has a negative impact when communicating with others, the overall well-being of an individual’s life may not be affected at all.³ We can summarize this into

Mere-Difference Thesis 1 (T1): Local bads do not generally impact one’s overall well-being.

Again, Barnes does not deny that disability may affect an individual in a certain sense. However, she has reason to think the effects are not negative when one views his life from the whole. There are some disabilities that introduce chronic pain and, in these cases, they will surely have a negative impact on well-being. However, there are a good deal of disabilities that do not cause chronic pain and therefore, they accord with T1.⁴

The second thesis has to do with the explanation of T1. Local bads do not generally impact one’s overall well-being because there are a variety of other goods in which one can participate in order to have a good life.⁵ Therefore, it is not the kinds of goods, generally

³ Barnes, sec. 3.2.
⁴ Not only does Barnes suggest that the disabled can enjoy other goods but she also suggests they can experience unique goods and pleasures. The deaf can feel the vibrations in a way that is more acute than the abled ears. The silence that they experience may be quite peaceful. Barnes, 57.
⁵ Barnes, sec. 3.5.
speaking, that contribute to the good life. Rather, it is that one simply enjoys the goods that they have access to. We can put this as

*Mere-Difference Thesis 2 (T2):* The kinds of goods are largely irrelevant to the good life. Rather, it is the general participation in goods, whatever they are, that contributes to the good life.

While someone who is deaf may not be able to enjoy music, he can easily enjoy friendship, meaningful work, etc., and therefore still have a good life.

The third thesis has to do with a common association with disability that Barnes thinks is unhelpful. Often, the public understands disability as a limitation of sorts. Understanding disability as a limitation is unhelpful because limitation captures far more than disability. For example, technically, it is a limitation that human males cannot get pregnant. Yet, this limitation is not a disability. Therefore, using limitation to understand disability is simply unhelpful and should be discarded. We can summarize this thesis as

*Mere-Difference Thesis 3 (T3):* Limitation is not a differentia of disability.

It is also clear that if T3 holds, it will further support T1. If disability is not uniquely a limitation, this can no longer be used as justification that it is negative.

As I mentioned before, there are many more nuances to Barnes’ view, but I have selected these three important theses to focus on.

**Causing Disability**

The mere difference view of disability has led critics to suppose that if disability is merely a difference then there is no reason why causing a disability in an infant is prohibited.\(^6\) Deaf parents may wish to have deaf children even though they are perfectly capable of having children

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who can hear. The mere-difference view of disability then, would allow parents to cause their child to have a disability. Yet, this does not sit well with us. We tend to think that causing disability is wrong and impermissible. Given that the mere-difference view does not judge disability as an overall harm (T1), does not affect the overall goods in one’s life (T2), and places no negative limitation on the child (T3), it seems to implicate that causing disability is permissible.

Barnes claims that her view is not committed to this implication. She argues that simply given that something (disability or otherwise) is merely a difference maker does not permit us to apply that difference to another agent. She justifies this claim by an appeal to “non-inference rules.” Causing disability is wrong because we should not determine traits in an infant that are identity determining. We would think that it is wrong to change a male infant into a female (or vice versa) not because either of these are bad but because they are identity determining. The general principle at work here is that we tend to think we should not make drastic changes to another’s life without their consent. This non-inference principle is vital to the mere-difference view avoiding the above unwanted implication.

These non-inference rules have come under heavy criticism by Guy Kahane and Julian Savulescu. If these criticisms succeed, then Barnes’ three theses above imply that causing

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9 She readily admits that she is not quite sure what the inference principles consists of but that her noting that they are there is sufficient enough to latch onto our intuitions. Barnes, 150.

10 Kahane and Savulescu, “Disability and Mere Difference.” Barnes has a forthcoming response, but it remains to be seen whether she succeeds in satisfactorily responding to her critics. Barnes’ forthcoming paper is in *Res Philosophica*.
disability is permissible. I will not rehearse those arguments here. Instead, I will argue that there are additional reasons to reject Barnes’ view that focus on the three theses above.

**Disability as Detrimental-Difference**

I propose that some disabilities create a detrimental difference for the individual’s overall well-being. This detriment is primarily in virtue of the individual missing out on goods in life that are incommensurate with others. As a result, the goods that disabilities take away cannot be easily compensated for. In effect, this says that T2 does not take into account the particular relationship and loves that individuals have to the goods their capabilities allow them to enjoy. I formulate my argument in response to T2 with specific attention to the “particularist error.” This error amounts to saying that particular activities, like walking, are intrinsically valuable for all humans. The particularist error has been noted in the literature and my account avoids it. Furthermore, the failure of T2 implies that T1 cannot hold since local bads, at least in some cases, create an impact to one’s overall well-being. After I talk about the incommensurability of goods and its impact on T1 and T2, I consider limitation a differentia of disability. This rejects T3. As a result of rejecting T3, I conclude by showing how my view has resources to justify why causing a disability is impermissible.

**Type Incommensurability**

I have doubts about whether some goods can be exchanged with any other. While it may be true that disabilities allow the individual to participate in other goods, I suggest that disability

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11 I borrow this term from Kahane and Savulescu as I find it more helpful than Barnes’ characterization of a similar view. See article above by Kahane and Savulescu. Also see Guy Kahane and Julian Savulescu, “Welfarist Account of Disability,” in Disability and Disadvantage, ed. Kimberley Brownlee and Adam Steven Cureton (Oxford: OUP, 2009), 14–53.

is detrimental to the individual because it bars off goods that the individual cannot compensate for by participation in other goods. Various goods cannot be compensated for because of two kinds of incommensurability that I will call type incommensurability and token incommensurability.

Type incommensurability suggests that some goods experienced in one category of life cannot be compensated for by another good from another category of life. Take the case of Jon, a viola player, who has always loved music and playing his viola. He regularly participates in bands and community orchestra and this activity gives him a great deal of meaning and enjoyment in his life. In a tragic accident, Jon becomes deaf and as a result can no longer participate in these kinds of activities. While there will surely be a period of transition and pains associated with this accident, Jon’s life, according to T1, will not go on the whole, worse. In fact, it may go just as well or even better. The reason Jon’s life will go pretty much the same is of course T2. Jon can participate in a variety of other goods. He can take up running and chess and find enjoyment in those activities.

Although it is surely possible that Jon can participate in a variety of other goods that contribute to a good life, this does not capture the unique relationship that Jon has to hearing music and the profound value it adds to his life. Jon can participate in other goods, but these goods are simply incommensurate with the goods he receives from music. Music resonates with Jon’s soul and any other goods will not substitute the special place that music plays in his life. This reality holds even if Jon has a good deal more goods in his life as a result of his disability that he never otherwise would have pursued. To Jon, it is not an overall calculus of goods in general that matter to him but the specific good of music and viola playing. To say it another way, it is not good in general but the specific goods of music that contribute to his life.
If Jon’s case is conceivable, then there is reason to doubt T2. It is not only the number of goods but the specific kinds of goods in one’s life. If there are specific goods that contribute to well-being, then disabilities such as deafness are likely to detract from one’s overall well-being, which rejects T1. Notice that in the case of Jon, I have not committed the particularist error I mention in the introduction. It is not that all individuals must participate in viola playing. Rather, the claim is that for Jon, who holds this unique relationship to viola playing, other activities will not substitute.13

**Token Incommensurability**

Not only are some goods incommensurate with others in virtue of the category from which they come but some goods are also incommensurate in virtue of the particular and individual they are. This is similar in structure to type incommensurability except that it is focused on a particular instance within a category and not just categories themselves.

Jon would not find the same kind of value even in another instrument other than viola. He uniquely values playing the viola and not the cello, piano, guitar, etc. Even if he were able to participate in various other musical forms, he would still find it a detriment that he could not play his viola.14

Token incommensurability tracks what it is to love something or someone. This is clear when we consider not only the love of activities like viola playing but especially the love of

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13 I suppose the mere-difference advocate could claim that there are some cases where one does not lose their particular enjoyed activities and therefore, cases like Jon are not relevant. In response, I am not so sure that disabilities do not take away capacities that every individual at least has some proclivity to. However, lest I commit the particularist error, all I need to say here is that there are at least some cases that appear like Jon’s. If so, T1 and T2 fail to apply to every case.

14 Notice that I have not argued that viola playing is intrinsically valuable. There are intrinsically valuable activities for human engagement but not at the level of specificity of viola playing.
another person.\textsuperscript{15} It is a good to an individual to love a particular person not simply in virtue of that particular love belonging to a general category of “relationships” but also because of that particular, unique person. It is absurd to think that one can compensate for losing a loved one by simply replacing the beloved with another suitably qualified person. The lover’s enjoyment and satisfaction are not dependent only on the category from which the object/subject is but the particular object/subject which he centers his love.\textsuperscript{16}

This is not to say that we love another or an activity simply in virtue of the beloved. Surely the lover appreciates both the qualities of the category generally and the particular beloved individual or activity. The lover loves the beloved because he sees in her beauty, grace, kindness and other qualities. However, the lover loves these qualities not only for themselves since, if that were the case, he could easily find them in other activities, persons, and objects. Rather, he has a particular love for these qualities because they are manifested by a particular unique individual. That is, the lover does not only love the universal of beauty, but he loves the-beauty-of-the-beloved. This quality and others receive its value from the bottom up, so to speak, from the particular individual.

Applied to the case of Jon, Jon loves playing his viola not because it is an exemplification of the general category of “artistic expression” of which he can find in various other artistic activities like sculpting and painting. Rather, he loves playing the viola in a particular manner that cannot be exchanged with some other artistic activity. Jon values artistic expression in general and, in some sense, he values playing the viola because of this more general good.

\textsuperscript{15} I realize that the love of an object or activity is different even from the love of a person (at least the beloved hopes so!). However, the differences here do not concern me.

\textsuperscript{16} Moller briefly brought up this point in Moller, “Wealth, Disability, and Happiness,” 201–2.
However, in addition to this general good, he also values and enjoys the particular good of the viola.

The consideration of love also leads us to another aspect that is unique to love that does not easily allow one to exchange its goods for another. When an individual is in a love relationship, it is not only what the lover receives from the beloved but also how the lover can contribute to the good of the beloved. Healthy romantic relationships often begin as a way for the lover to receive from the beloved. As the love matures, the relationship progresses to the lover seeking not what may be received but what may be given. Thus, love becomes the unique opportunity to contribute to the flourishing of an individual that cannot be translated or exchanged by another suitable candidate.

The self-giving of love does not translate as easily to the case of Jon and his viola but there are at least some tenuous parallels to draw. Jon cannot strictly contribute to the “flourishing” of the viola itself as an instrument. However, he can contribute to the good of music composition, music performance, and the various musical societies of which he is a part.\textsuperscript{17} The contribution to these activities and endeavours are not easily replaced because Jon has a unique relationship to them and desires to uniquely contribute to their betterment.

With these two kinds of incommensurability in view, it is difficult to see how deafness would not be a detriment to Jon’s life. While it certainly would not entail that Jon cannot participate in other goods of any sort, my account suggests that Jon would no longer be able to participate in goods that are uniquely valuable to him. And because he has the unique relationship with these goods, deafness would be a detriment to his life.

\textsuperscript{17} All analogies break down and this one is no different. The case of romantic love and viola love is not the same although they are relevantly the same for my purposes. I suspect that Jon would be satisfied to play a variety of violas and so the specificity is not upon a particular viola itself. Of course, this kind of particularity holds for romantic love.
Barnes anticipates cases like Jon’s and responds that it is not the disability itself that is causing Jon to have a diminished life. Rather, it is Jon’s particular attitude toward music in addition to the disability that diminishes his life. Thus, the detriment occurs in virtue of his attitude and not simply the disability itself.  

At this point, I am unsatisfied with the abstraction Barnes applies to persons with disabilities. It is surely the case that we can conceptually distinguish Jon’s disability with Jon’s attitudes. Yet, to abstract Jon’s desires and attitudes away from his disability is to disregard Jon himself as an individual. Indeed, to separate any physical disability from the desires and concerns of the individual who has it rings with artificiality. That is, when Barnes makes this move to distinguish the disability itself from the attitudes of the individual, I get the sense that she is employing a conception of disability that is “thin.” That is, thin in the sense that it is abstracted from the typical instantiations we find disability in the world and individuals. To abstract the disability away from the individual does not represent what is likely to occur, even if it is conceptually possible.

From this discussion of the incommensurability of goods both categorically and particularly, it is clear why T1 and T2 must at least be modified (or even discarded). The first thesis states that local bads do not impact one’s overall well-being. This depends on what kind of local bads are in question. In the case of Jon and his deafness, it does not seem to hold, for his deafness severely affects him. The reason why it affects him is the irreplaceability of his relationship with music and his viola. This relationship casts significant doubt on T2 since it is not only important that Jon have goods in his life but goods of a certain kind.

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18 Barnes, *The Minority Body*, 60, 85, 95, 112.
19 One might also conceive of a case where the individual, say Sally, becomes deaf but does not care about music. While I am skeptical as to whether someone could truly have no delight in music, I consider on conceptual grounds. (See Wolf for an interesting discussion of this: Susan Wolf, “Good-for-Nothings,” *Proceedings and*
Limitation and Causing Disability

Up until this point, my examples have involved disabilities that develop later in someone’s life, after they have developed desires and attitudes towards certain goods. This may suggest that if a disability occurs in infancy or as a fetus, then the disability will not be nearly as detrimental or perhaps, not detrimental at all. In what follows, I develop another detriment of disability: limitation. Many disabilities, if not most, inhibit and limit the individual from participating in particular goods. Because of this limitation, it is a detriment. You will recall that Barnes explicitly denies that limitation is a differentia of disability (T3). In my account, I will also show that T3 is mistaken.

Recall that Barnes does not think that limitation is a sufficient differentia of disability since it does not carve disability at the appropriate joints. She gives several examples of limitations that are not typically understood as a limitation. I select three of the most persuasive. The first is that of maleness and how it too has its limitations and yet we do not think of it as a disability. I do not think this is a good analogy. This confuses the difference between limitation broadly construed and limitation in reference to an entity’s nature. Broadly construed, limitation means nothing other than difference. Every natural kind has a difference from every other natural kind. This difference can be recast in terms of limitation. A bird is “limited” in this broad sense since it cannot photosynthesize like a plant. A rock is broadly limited in that it cannot reproduce like an animal. I suggest that this broad understanding of limitation does not capture the essence of limitation as it applies to disability. A proper understanding of limitation considers an entity’s

Addresses of the American Philosophical Association 85, no. 2 (2011): 47–64.) In this case, Sally’s life in deafness will go better than Jon’s. However, Sally’s deafness is still a detriment to her because it removes even the possibility to participate in those goods. This elimination, I suggest, is still a detriment to Sally even if her attitudes are less focused on music than Jon’s. That is, deafness is not an equal opportunity difference on an individual. I develop this idea of limitation and possibilities in the next section.
nature and the capacities it *naturally* has. When a capacity in an individual is frustrated from achieving its natural end then we can say that the individual has a limitation in the relevant respect.20

On a bare-bones view of what being male entails, being pregnant is simply not one of the ends it aims toward.21 Thus, while it is a limitation in a broad sense, it is not a limitation insofar as we consider the nature of human maleness. There is nothing *frustrated* in the nature of human maleness that bars it from being pregnant as this is not its natural order. Likewise, it is not a limitation (in the restricted, nature-sense) in a hammer that it cannot function as a medicine for cancer. In a certain broad sense, it is limited in this way. However, in the relevant sense of limitation as a frustration of an entity’s natural end, the hammer is not limited in virtue of not functioning as a medicine.

The second example she mentions is inflexibility. This example also fails but for different reasons than the example we considered with maleness. Barnes notes that an inflexible individual is limited because he cannot be a ballet dancer.22 While I agree that inflexibility is a limitation I do not think that it is a limitation to the degree that deafness, quadriplegia, or other disabilities are.23 In the case of the inflexible dancer, the individual may not be able to participate in some style of dance like ballet. However, if the inflexibility is all but the most extreme case, the dancer will likely be able to participate in ballet but never to an excellent degree. In contrast, the

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20 I am employing a kind of teleology for organisms. Some may think that all teleology is dead but at least some philosophers still appeal to it in some sense, even if it is less than its original Aristotelian iteration. For example, see Thomas Nagel, *Mind and Cosmos* (New York: Oxford, 2012).
21 I am not engaging the gender debate with this definition. I am only considering the biological sex of maleness, not what it means (or does not mean) to be the gender of a man.
23 This brings up the issue of when a limitation becomes severe enough in order to be classified as a disability. I discuss this briefly at the end of this essay.
quadriplegic cannot even participate in the form of ballet. Quadriplegia prevents the individual from participating to even an imperfect degree.

I anticipate that the advocate for mere-difference will respond by asking why those with disabilities are not able to participate? Even if they cannot participate in the form as it is, this does not mean that they cannot participate in a form that is more accommodating to individuals in wheelchairs. To say otherwise warrants the charge of ableist. In response, of course, we can incorporate those with disability in ballet. However, I maintain that there will be a variety of forms, techniques, and dance procedures that the quadriplegic will be unable to do or able to do only to a limited degree. Again, the inflexible individual will also be limited in participating in these kinds of activities, although their limitation will be much less frustrated than the quadriplegic.24

In her last example, Barnes notes that parents limit child’s possibilities of goods in several ways and we do not typically think of these limitations as negative.25 Parents choose which school the child attends and which neighborhood to live in, etc. Again, if these are limitations (and surely they are in some sense) and we do not see them as negatives or detriments then we can neither judge a parent causing a limitation of deafness in her child.

I think this example with parents limiting their children is different from causing a disability. The first difference is again one of degrees. Of course, the child will go to the school his parents send her but presumably, this could change. Furthermore, as the child grows in self-sufficiency, she will have a larger role in her higher education and career. Thus, while the

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24 Notice how also the abled person can do a variety of forms that the disabled can by sitting in a wheelchair and participating in ballet this way. However, the inverse is not possible, the quadriplegic cannot perform all the acts of the skilled ballet dancer. The asymmetry further suggests that the quadriplegic is limited in some way.

parents limit the child in some sense, it does not seem like the same degree and finality of
limitation that a disability like deafness introduces.

The second relevant difference in the cases specifically with the child’s school,
neighborhood, etc., is that these choices are directed toward a good end. Namely, of educating
and nurturing the child in a particular environment. Of course, this goal will prevent the child
from participating in some goods, but the parent typically makes these choices because, all things
considered, the child will be better off. The mere-difference advocate cannot appeal to a better
end in the case of disability since it is a mere-difference. Without this motivation, it appears to
be a disanalogous case.

If my arguments against Barnes’ analogies are plausible, then understanding disability as
a limitation in the sense of a frustration of a nature’s end is reasonable. Deafness is a frustration
of the ear’s proper end to hear. An analysis of the ear’s construction and the intricacies of the
outer, middle, and inner ear all suggest that the physiological structures aim at hearing instead of
non-hearing. Thus, when a part of that structure does not serve that end, it is reasonable to judge
it as a defect in that structure. This defect limits the individual’s capabilities in how they are to
engage with the world. Thus, I think it is reasonable to reject T3 and conclude that limitation is a
differentia of disability.

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26 I say “all things considered” because the parent presumably only chooses for the good of the child up to a
point. For example, it seems reasonable to choose an education for the child that puts a little financial strain on the
parents. It seems foolish to choose an even better education that will empty the parent’s savings and subject them to
financial bankruptcy.

27 Barnes claims that some disabilities have unique pleasures of their own and therefore, one might think
that disabilities do open up unique pleasurable experiences that cannot be obtained without the disability. Barnes,
The Minority Body, 58. I do not think this example of disability pleasure, though, makes disability analogous to the
school example. First, I am skeptical whether disabilities truly have these unique pleasures or if they are simply
uniquely enjoyed by the disabled given their heightened sensitivity in a certain area. Second, it is unlikely that there
are species of pleasure that have their own specific kinds of goods. Rather, it is likely that hedonic monism is correct
and that there are simply various means to pleasure.
Recall that one of the unwanted implications of Barnes’ view was that if disability is merely a difference then there seems nothing to block causing a disability in an infant or fetus. Barnes’ attempts to block this by appealing to non-inference rules that have been severely criticized. I think it is clear to see how my view blocks this implication.

The main intuition I will appeal to here is that we think it is wrong to unjustifiably limit another’s possibility of enjoying goods by frustrating the natural end of certain capacities. If a parent causes a disability in her child, she is eliminating the possibility of the infant to experience the particular goods associated with that capability. If a parent causes her child to become deaf, she is necessarily blocking her child off from experiencing a wide range of goods associated with hearing. Such an induced limitation also offends the child’s autonomy since the child undergoes a major change in their identity without consent. Notice how the appeal to natural ends and autonomy does not make the particularist error. I am not saying that in order for someone’s life to go well they must participate in the goods associated with hearing and usage of all bodily limbs or whatever. Rather, what I am focused on is the elimination of the possibility of involvement with them by intentionally frustrating their natural ends.

To make this clearer, imagine a case where a mad scientist creates a device that prevents auditory signals to reach someone’s brain from her ear. This scientist is able to monitor all auditory information that is present in the individual’s life. Call this individual Isolde.

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28 Barnes does not discuss the possibility of an individual bringing about a disability in his own life. Is it permissible for an individual to make a surgical incision on himself so that he can no longer use his legs or ears? There seems nothing to block this on Barnes’ account. However, this seems like a stretch to me. Surely there is something wrong with an individual bringing about such harm to themselves that distinguishes it from changing hair color. Perhaps someone in Barnes’ position could appeal to the massive amount of literature on physician assisted suicide and how the individual has a right to choose to end their own life. But even if euthanasia is permissible it is a disanalogous case compared to causing a disability. Presumably, if euthanasia is permissible, it is in virtue of the fact that the patient is in great pain and suffering. Such a motivation appears to be lacking in the case of causing a disability in oneself. If our intuition holds that causing severe disabilities in oneself is impermissible, then Barnes’ characterization of disability as mere-difference cannot capture this.
Fantastically, the scientist is able to anticipate when the environment around Isolde will produce sounds. At every instance of sound production in Isolde’s environment, the scientist flips the switch to block the auditory information to Isolde’s brain. Every time an individual says hello, every beautiful song by a morning blue jay, and every peaceful purr of rain on windows, the scientist flips the switch to block the signal. When Isolde returns to a quiet or silent environment, the scientist unblocks the signals between ear and brain, allowing them to function normally.\textsuperscript{29}

Given this fantastic story, I think we view what this scientist does as wrong. He is unjustifiably restricting the opportunities and goods that Isolde can experience. I think this intuition holds even if Isolde never develops the kind of appreciation and involvement in music as Jon does. The intuition is not so much the particular relationship that Isolde has with sound and music, as it was with Jon, that leads us to conclude the removal of hearing is a detriment to Isolde. Rather, it is the restriction on Isolde’s autonomy and freedom to explore sound and music if she so wishes. I think there is very little that separates Isolde’s case with the cases of a parent causing a disability in her child. The intentional causing of a disability is impermissible and therefore, morally wrong.

\textbf{Clarifications and Closing Remarks}

Just like Whack-a-Mole, as I discussed my understanding of disability, I ran into a problem of how to classify disabilities. Some limitations, such as being inflexible, appear not to be a disability because although it is limiting in some regard, it is not severely limiting. When do limitations become disabilities? I do not think I can offer necessary and sufficient conditions for what it is to be a disability. If my understanding of disability is at all plausible, then it suggests

\textsuperscript{29} Every analogy and example breaks down at some point. I doubt whether Isolde could really ever experience true silence, except if she routinely visits an acoustic anechoic chamber. For sake of argument, assume that she experiences levels of relative silence in which the scientist turns off the switch.
that limitations, at least in the extreme cases, are disabilities. There is a certain amount of
vagueness when we consider mild or moderate limitations of an individual’s or physiological
system’s natural end and I do not claim to offer the taxonomical boundary lines for it.\(^{30}\)

In closing, it should go without saying that my view here in no way says that those with
disability are less than full persons or have less than the full dignity of a human. Simply because
one has a condition that restricts the possibility for goods does not in any way detract from their
worth or value. This is simply because an individual’s value and worth is not determined by how
many goods one has access to or can produce. Thus, despite some of my potential critics, I reject
the charge of ableism.

In this paper, I have considered a popular definition of disability as mere-difference by
Barnes. I proposed that her view does not consider the variety of ways that we uniquely value
categories and particular goods and thus should be rejected. I also rejected her dismissal of
limitation as a differentia of disability. I then showed how, given my view, it can easily justify
the claim that causing disability is impermissible, another virtue over Barnes’ position. Of
course, this does not do justice to the mass of work Barnes has given to the study of disability.
However, I think it puts significant pressure on key parts of her theory.

\(^{30}\) As we investigate this issue further, I suspect that a good deal of disabilities will require reclassification.