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Does philosophy disable?: the epistemological model of disability, and the influence of the process of knowledge construction on people with impairments

Conference paper abstract

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ABSTRACT

This article examines how the process of constructing knowledge has affected the institutional treatment of people with impairments and the construction of an ethic of disability. Its primary finding is that the process of creating knowledge in a number of contexts is influenced more by traditions and the biases of authors in order to signify moral and intellectual superiority, than by a desire to improve the lives of disabled people. Furthermore, this article finds that certain impairments are theorised using very particular methodological assumptions, as they hold what are felt to be greater intellectual value, and are associated more with morality through the perception and understanding of what is felt to be nature. The article presents a case study of such an epistemological process, which discusses the development of philosophies on a Western understanding of three impairments: blindness, deafness and learning impairments. It is argued that knowledge leading to the development of separate institutions for these impairments was based on severe forms of reductionist materialism and metaphysics, which were heavily influenced by social and cultural prejudices.

Keywords: disability, impairment, epistemology, ontology, reductionism, materialism, metaphysics, inclusion, exclusion, enlightenment.