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CHAPTER 4

In Search of a Social Model of Disability: Marxism, normality and culture

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Introduction

As my title suggests I do not presume to present a fully-fledged scholarly discourse on social modelling, accompanied by a finished theory of the underlying processes that lead to disability. Primarily I seek here to provoke discussion rather than to prescribe specific societal therapy: ultimately I believe that the formulation of a comprehensive social theory of disability should by its nature be a collaborative and incremental task.

My involvement here arises from an interest in the motivational forces that underlie eugenics (which I use in its widest sense, to include present-day work on human genetics with its avowed aim, at least initially, of 'improving' humanity - to coin a phrase, 'eugenetics'). For example, in the words of Sinsheimer:

the new eugenics would permit in principle the conversion of all of the unfit to the highest genetic level (cited in Kevles 1992: 18).

In order to do any sort of justice to the topic, I have found myself drawn into a consideration of which theoretical approach may best explain this most fundamental form of disability discrimination. In the course of this musing I have come to the opinion that Marxist-

inspired ideas of the ‘oppression’ and ‘exploitation’ of disabled people do not necessarily explain tendencies to use genetic knowledge to *eliminate* certain categories of impairment and, with them, people as yet unborn.

Materialist approaches

I take as my reference point here Finkelstein’s paper *The Social Model Of Disability Repossessed* (2001), and in particular what I interpret as his stance that the original social model, that of Oliver (1983a) built upon the thinking of the Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation (UPIAS 1976), should stand unrevised in tribute to its authors and their particular ‘insight’ into the topic of disability. Finkelstein does not object to ‘people devising and promoting new social models in their own name’ (Finkelstein 2001: 3), but strongly resists what he sees as a revisionist tendency within disability studies. Ultimately he nails his colours firmly to the Marxist mast:

disabled people must find ways of engaging in the class struggle where the historical direction of society is fought, won or lost (Finkelstein 2001: 5).

Finkelstein depicts a model as being the middle stage of a three-step process that begins with the ‘interpretation’ of a phenomenon and ends in the formulation of a theory to ‘explain’ the processes in train. For him,

[t]he disability movement still awaits an explanation of the social laws that make...people with impairments into disabled people (Finkelstein 2001: 3).

However, his position is unclear when he calls for a social theory, or explanation of disability formation: is he referring specifically to an explanation of the insight provided by the UPIAS-inspired social model, or does he seek a broader treatment? If the former, does he not

himself lay the theoretical foundations with his claim that,

Our society is built on a competitive market foundation and it is this social system which disables us (Finkelstein 2001: 4). If the latter, the tone of the paper indicates that Finkelstein will reject any attempt to apply non-Marxist theory to the existing UPIAS-inspired model. This would seem to render his call for a social theory of disability rhetorical.

It is doubtful that disability studies is as bereft of theoretical approaches as Finkelstein appears to suggest. After all, as Abberley has it:

The first thing you need to do when talking about disability today is to clarify your terms, and this immediately gets you into the realm of theory... (Abberley 1999: 1).

Tregaskis (2002) and Priestley (1998) both argue that there are a number of perspectives which have been applied to social modelling by researchers and commentators from within disability studies, several of which are ostensibly non-materialist. These latter include psychoanalytic and cultural approaches (Tregaskis 2002), whilst Priestley (1998) contrasts materialism with idealism.

My aim is to reply to the Marxist-materialism of Finkelstein (2001) in a similar vein. This is not to deny 'culture' as a potential source of disablement, nor is it to eschew the effects of the human psyche in moderating social intercourse. Indeed, as I proceed, I will suggest that the concept of 'normality', which some may wish to appropriate for culture (Hughes 2002: 572), is itself a product of materialist forces. I will further suggest that the material world may affect the inner psychological lives of members of modern society.

Finkelstein is very clear about the UPIAS social interpretation of disability: it is 'a materialist approach' (2001: 4) which, with its talk of oppression, may appear to owe much to Marx and has been from the outset an 'angry' approach to disability - it emphasises the perceived inequity, indeed iniquity, of societal constructions of disability. The social model, or rather the UPIAS-derived one, is effectively a political manifesto and as such is consciously contentious and pugnacious. This approach speaks, then, of a state of conflict between a minority group of disabled people and a host society that is at best uncaring, at worst deliberately oppressive:

Disability is something imposed on top of our impairments, by the way we are unnecessarily isolated and excluded from full participation in society. Disabled people are therefore an oppressed group in society (UPIAS 1976: 3-4).

Finkelstein, throughout his many writings on disability, has consistently employed Marxist analysis. Likewise Oliver, credited by Finkelstein as the author of 'the' social model of disability, is specific about his personal inspiration: 'My own theorizing on disability is located in Marxist political economy (Oliver 1994: 1). An equally clear acknowledgement of a debt to Marx is found in the work of Abberley who informs us that: 'Oppression is complementary to exploitation, extending Marxist analysis' (Abberley 1987: 8). He then discusses the role of capitalism in producing certain forms of impairment, and in acting upon these and other impairments to produce disability. Perhaps ironically, given his espousal of a mid-nineteenth century politico-economic doctrine, he ends with a call to explain disability by the use of 'the tools of today's social science, rather than those of the day before yesterday' (Abberley 1987: 18).

There is an inherent theoretical problem, in the social

model context, with Marxist analysis that is immediately apparent. As Abberley points out, the preeminence accorded to work, either as an economic necessity of capitalism or as some metaphysical expression of humanness in a Marxian Utopia, 'implies that impaired people are still deprived, by biology if not by society' (Abberley 1999: 9). Thus Abberley seems to acknowledge that Marxist theory, when taken to its Marxian conclusion, runs contrary to the fundamental precept of a social model: biology has the ultimate power to disable. The Marxian Utopia is fundamentally an able-bodied construction. This contradiction, of itself, is sufficient to raise serious questions about the applicability of Marxist analysis to the social modelling of disability.

Another important tenet of Marxist-inspired disability theory, as Oliver, Finkelstein and Abberley each make clear, is that certain specified groups within capitalist society are oppressed by a dominant elite, so that the,

disadvantages [*experienced by disabled people*] are dialectically related to an ideology or group of ideologies which justify and perpetuate this situation. ... [*This idea*] involves the identification of some beneficiary of this state of affairs (Abberley 1987: 7).

Abberley at least is specific: the development of a Marxist analysis of disablement demands both the demonstration of active oppression and the identification of a beneficiary of such oppression - no oppression or no beneficiary, no Marxist explanation. It is not sufficient to merely adduce evidence that disabled people are badly situated in economic society. In short, this is a conspiracy theory: a detective story with identifiable culprit(s) and victim(s) and a plot centred on greed. Whilst this may well make for a gripping yarn we must, as disabled academics, ask ourselves just how convincing this account is as a

faithful reflection of the real world which we inhabit.

There are others within disability studies who are uncomfortable with Marxist analysis, for example Shakespeare, who bluntly states that, 'monolinear explanations, reducing everything to economic factors, are misguided' (Shakespeare 1994: 225). His point is that disability is a complex issue: one that is not readily addressed by reductionist analysis. This does not necessarily mean that he ignores material causes and effects, simply that he does not place economic activity at the forefront of his analysis. However, Shakespeare tends to champion cultural factors as a major part of his explanation of disability, whilst here I wish to concentrate upon more overtly materialist views.

In particular the Marxist construction of 'oppression' with its call to identify the winners and losers, or culprits and victims, may appear to be a blunt instrument rather than a surgeon's scalpel when used to delve beneath the surface layers of contemporary society in a search for the causative factors underlying disability. Speaking immediately of disability, but within a broader social policy context, the writers of a recent text conclude that:

as a basis for developing a theory about differentiation and power, oppression is vague, too universal in its incidence within human interactions, and yet not comprehensive enough.... The concept of oppression cannot easily embrace or elucidate the variety of circumstances and distributional issues that need to be considered (Harrison with Davis 2001: 59).

Important additional concepts refer to 'structured selectivity' within contemporary society leading to the 'differential incorporation' of ideas and people within society. With an emphasis on the differential distribution of

goods and life chances within a structured social world-view, Harrison with Davis (2001) operate within a materialist paradigm, but one that deviates markedly from most Marxist-inspired writings on disability.

The underlying theme of the latter is that people with impairments are considered expensive and inefficient workers and thus discarded from the workforce (Ryan and Thomas 1980; Oliver 1989: 10; Finkelstein 1993: 12; Davis 1997; Gleeson 1999: 102), and thence from a position of full socioeconomic inclusion, as a direct result of market forces. This to me is a rather outmoded argument that is no longer sustainable. It ignores the pace of technological innovation, and particularly the effects of IT/ICT. Given the reported change in contemporary western society from an economy based on manufacturing to one based on the supply of information (Hall *et al* 1992 ch4), there is no inherent economic, or 'market', bias against the employment of people with impairments *per se*.

It is potentially more cost-efficient to provide a home PC and telephone line than expensive inner-city office space (Handy 1990: 84); meanwhile, the use of IT can help negate many alleged effects of physical or sensory impairment in relation to employment. On a lower level of technology, the increasing development of power tools and aids has progressively reduced the physical demands of much economic activity. In many (but not all) cases people with various impairments are able to compete in the labour market on equal terms: that they are often not allowed to do so suggests to me that factors other than market economics are in play. This point is acknowledged by UPIAS:

in the last fifty years or so developments in modern technology have made it increasingly possible to employ even the most severely

physically impaired people and to integrate us into the mainstream of social and economic activity (1976: 15).

The suggestion that market economic factors alone cannot fully explain the socio-economic exclusion of people with impairment is not merely an invention of mine; nor is it simply a product of the disability studies 'liberal right' of Finkelstein (2001: 4). The argument for employing disabled people at standard rates of pay has already been made, on solid economic grounds, by that arch-capitalist Henry Ford:

Charity becomes unnecessary as those who seem to be unable to earn livings are taken out of the non-productive class and put into the productive.... there are places which can be filled by the maimed, the halt, and the blind. Scientific industry need not be a monster devouring all who come near it (Ford 1923: 208).

Ford argues that it is to the advantage of capitalist society (by reducing the call for 'charity' or, in a welfare state setting, 'benefits') to fully incorporate people with impairments into the workforce *via* the open labour market. This account runs directly counter to Marxist-inspired theories current within disability studies that such people are excluded from the world of work precisely to bring economic advantage to capitalist society, by reducing employment costs or increasing worker efficiency. This is not to deny that such an argument may have had merit in the early days of industrialization, but it is to suggest that, as early as 1914, the nature of technology had already changed to the extent that very many people with impairments were not *necessarily* debarred, on purely economic grounds, from full participation in the labour market and hence in the wider social world (Ford 1923: 106). That they were, and

continue to be, discriminated against in socio-economic terms I accept - it is the explanatory theory I question.

The UPIAS interpretation of disability concentrates on the special case of 'physically impaired people' (1976: 3), at a specific time, the 1960s and 1970s. Given that the practice of the day was often to confine these people within a closed environment subject to petty and restrictive rules (Hunt 1966), the appeal of ideas of their oppression is clear. However,

it is clear that our social organisation does not discriminate equally against all physical impairments and hence there arises the appearance of degrees of exclusion.... Nevertheless, it is the same society which disables people whatever their type, or degree of physical impairment, and therefore there is a single cause within the organisation of society that is responsible for the creation of the disability of physically impaired people (UPIAS 1976: 14, 15).

What is not so clear is how a theory of oppression coupled with market exclusion, in the sense employed by Abberley (1987), is readily adapted to explain the differential experiences of people with non-locomotive impairment, for example facial disfigurement. Marxism may offer some form of market explanation in special instances of discrimination: of the 'would you employ this person to sell cosmetics?' line of argument. At least as promulgated within disability studies, Marxism does not explain why facial disfigurement should be considered socially repulsive, and hence socio-economically disadvantageous, in the first place.

What then of people with the label 'learning difficulties'? They are often able to play a full part in the world of work - there are still many jobs which, although they may require

physical strength and mobility, are well within their capacity. Yet there is much evidence that where such impairment is readily apparent, either from behaviour or physical appearance, these people are subject to discrimination. Marxism cannot fully explain this, for there is no clear evidence of a benefit accruing to capitalist society. There are no doubt many other examples. My point is that whilst Marxist-inspired theory may appear to explain certain *special* cases of disablement, it fails to explain the *general* case.

The discourse of 'normality'

One potential general explanation here is the idea of 'normal', for it may be argued that people subject to, for example, physical or sensory impairment, facial disfigurement, learning difficulties or stature which deviates markedly from the statistical mean are, in some way, not 'normal'. I do not intend to analyse with, or appeal to, 'normalization theory', which relies on a specialist usage of the concept; rather I use the word 'normal' in the sense in which it is understood in everyday language.

Language may serve to obscure rather than enlighten, and Oliver is certainly aware of potential problems arising from confusion between the word 'normal' and the specific concept of 'normalization'. Nonetheless, he remains adamant that,

the social structures of late capitalist societies cannot be discussed in a discourse of normality/abnormality (Oliver 1994: unpagged). This statement appears to represent a clear divorce between Marxist political economy and any idea of the 'normal'.

Whilst (disability studies) Marxism, then, eschews 'normality' as an aid to analysis, the concept of 'the

normal' itself has a central place in contemporary society. It is, so to speak, normal to talk of normality, and this hegemony, to use a term of Gramsci's, may be seen as a product of industrial society, despite Oliver's comments. The idea of normality, I suggest, has an important place in a (non-Marxist) materialist analysis of disability.

For Davis (1997: 9-11) the words 'norm', 'normal', and 'normalcy' did not enter the English language until around 1840, at least in their current meaning as something approximating to 'average' or 'common'. Although Davis notes that it had its roots not in industrial processes but in French medicine (in its inception, Davis informs us, 'normality' was an attempt to define a physiologically average person), there are good grounds to suppose that the concept of normality was readily assimilated within the ethos of industrialisation. For Finkelstein the move to factory work, an integral part of modern society,

raised the importance of 'normality' ... Being normal... became a dominant criterion for employment in industrial societies (Finkelstein 1993: 12).

Hughes goes further, relating modernity, which he describes as a 'normalising culture', directly to the adoption of:

narrow norms of human authenticity [*which*] have played havoc with the lives of those who have been marked with 'incidental variances' from the ideal (Hughes 2002: 572).

Thus, modernity creates disability *via* the medium of normality, a medium which modernity has at the least appropriated for itself, if not directly manufactured. Once the concept of 'normality' is established, 'abnormality' is a logical progression. Although in its origins abnormality simply implies a state different from the norm, which could

be either above or below the datum, the generally understood meaning is one of inferiority or subnormality.

Davis (1997) makes the point that, before the rise of the concept of normal, the state towards which people might have aspired was an ideal, and hence unattainable. That being the case, although there was merit in approaching the ideal, there was little shame in failing to match it. In contrast, to fail to match the new industrial norm led to a categorisation as inferior to most other people - an important change in thinking and, as a product of modernity, one with distinct materialist antecedents.

There is, I suggest, a further outcome of the application of ideas of normal within modern society: by providing a means of differentiating between people other than by the cultural distinctions between one tribe or caste and another, normal arguably facilitated the rise of 'heterophobia' (Bauman 1989), (relating to 'different'), as a divisive social process operating alongside an earlier notion of *xenophobia* (relating to 'alien').

It is relatively easy to trace the development of inter-group divisions, of the type referred to here as xenophobic, and such divisions appear firmly based on material considerations. The clearest examples of such an us/them dichotomy are to be found in inter-group conflict. There is archaeological evidence of the existence of human warfare between small hunter/gatherer groups at least 50,000 years ago, but it may be that technological advances were the key to the successful domination and subsequent enslavement of one group by another (Lenski et al 1991). History seems to suggest that, whatever the 'diplomatic' reasons advanced, a prime cause of warfare is the search for material advantage, be it in terms of slaves, treasure, '*Lebensraum*' or oil. Be that as it may, the coming of warfare as a human activity marks the clear establishment of a xenophobic division between 'us' and

'them'. If one is to have enemies one must be able to identify them.

Another form of inter-group division that leads to xenophobic ideas is found in religious observances. Perhaps the most famous is the Old Testament appointment of the Tribes of Israel as 'God's Chosen'. However, this quickly gave rise to intra-group, heterophobic, divisions based upon non-compliance with religious rites seen as having potentially dangerous material effects upon the larger society (Exodus: 32, 33). In turn, heterophobic notions of ritual uncleanness sprang from ideas of the need to strictly observe religious rites (Leviticus).

Material influences are not always immediately obvious in religious matters, but as the Old Testament unfolds the Israelites alternately sought material advantage - the Promised Land of Exodus (3:17) - from their special status on the one hand, or excused their lack of progress by reference to a failure to strictly observe their religious obligations on the other. Similar ideas of the material consequences of the observance or non-observance of religious rites are to be found in pre-modern or non-western societies (perhaps the most famous being the Native American Rain Dance rites used to avert drought).

The sub-division of complex societies into more or less discrete strata or socio-economic groups, such as status groups, classes, or castes (Weber 1999: ch.5), is explored in detail in the sociological literature. Likewise rivalry and exploitation between such groups is, most famously, dealt with in depth by Marx throughout much of his life's work. There is, then, little novelty (although much interpretation) attaching to the sociological topic of intergroup relationships. The situation of intra-group heterophobic divisions is more problematic.

Although direct evidence of the status of individuals in very early human society is absent, some have sought to extrapolate from studies of contemporary non-modern societies and apply those lessons to early premodern ones. Lenski (1966) suggests that a non-differentiated state of social equality was the standard within hunter-gatherer groups. Against this, however, must be set reports of the abandonment, by at least some of these groups, of weak young or old tribal members at times of famine. Such 'elimination of the unproductive members' (Lenski 1966: 104) has clear material origins, but also indicates that social differentiation is practised even in relatively homogeneous societies. It is, indeed, an extreme example of the 'structured selectivity' and accompanying 'differential incorporation' referred to by Harrison with Davis (2001). Similarly, the fatal exposure of 'imperfect' infants to the elements practised by at least some of the Classical Greek city-states, and Sparta in particular may be seen as having materialistic roots, in this case arising from the militaristic nature of Spartan society and its need for armed defenders (Barnes 1996). This also represents a division of male neonatals into 'acceptable' and 'non-acceptable' proto-citizens.

This materialistic differentiation between otherwise equals marks the beginnings of the 'normal/abnormal' dichotomy: in a hunter-gatherer society it is normal to provide first for one's own needs, then for the group in general (Lenski 1966), in Classical Sparta it was 'normal' for young male citizens to perform military duty in defence of the city-state. In either case, and especially at times of austerity, the evidence is that deviance from these norms may have fatal consequences.

Thus people with a shared cultural heritage (or social class) may still be differentiated by means of heterophobia from what is considered 'normal' for their peer grouping. This has an important consequence for Marxist

approaches to disability production, for these explicitly seek to establish the transnational homogeneity of, for example, proletariat and bourgeoisie. Without class struggle there is no hope of changing, or indeed explaining, the social world. It is perhaps clearer now why it is necessary for Marxist disability analysts to avoid 'the normal/abnormal dichotomy' (Oliver 1994: unpagged).

As noted above, Harrison with Davis make use within a materialist analysis of the concept of 'structured selectivity' (2001: 73, 191) to explain, in part, the differential value assigned by society to particular discourses. Although the actual process is not fully analysed there, the consequences are frequently manifested in material terms; in enhanced or damaged life chances and in other socio-economic outcomes. I suggest that socially perceived deviance from some norm provides a plausible trigger point for such a differentiating social process.

The value of structured selectivity in this context is that it allows the clearly less eligible position of disabled people within contemporary society to be analysed without recourse to either oppression or exploitation. On the one hand it obviates the burden of identifying some specific beneficiary of a particular state of affairs, whilst on the other hand it moves the discussion beyond Marxist analysis. This facilitates a less emotive, or more objective approach to the topic area. On this basis, disabled people most certainly remain disadvantaged but are not necessarily oppressed.

In contrast, I suggest that disabled people are socially dislocated. I derive 'dislocation' from criminology, where it has been used to refer to 'both [the] physical and psychological distance from home' (Devlin 1998: 75) of prisoners. I propose that the concept may be applied fruitfully to disabled people and their enforced material, social and psychological distance from the mainstream of

modern socio-economic life. It may appear particularly apt that Devlin refers specifically to incarcerated women, whilst UPIAS was originally founded to combat the incarceration of disabled people.

I have rather blithely introduced the psychological here, and this requires further explanation if I am to contend that modernity may influence human psychology. My starting point is the tendency of modernity, noted by several commentators from both within and without disability studies and with very different world-views, to reify 'normality' (Ryan and Thomas 1980; Bauman 1989; Finkelstein 1993; Davis 1997). Thus, I suggest, to be normal in modern society implies a safe and secure identity, one which automatically confers full societal membership - indeed only the normal are able to claim full social status. As a direct result we (including many disabled people) become socialized to respect and value the norm whilst vilifying deviance from it. This has important effects.

Psychologically we all have a need to be accepted as part of our peer group. This was demonstrated empirically fifty years ago by the psychologist Asch (1952), who devised a deceptively simple experiment ostensibly centred on the ability of a group to perceive straightforward differences in straight-line images. In practice, all but one of the group was briefed to give a manifestly wrong answer in concert, with the single naive subject left to disagree. As predicted in the research hypothesis, the naive subjects (over a series of experiments several different dupes were introduced) experienced feelings of extreme discomfort, self-doubt and rejection. However, there was also an unpredicted group reaction. The knowing actors reported feelings of anger and animosity towards the non-conformers, despite the knowledge that they were reporting honestly: the majority felt that the dupes were distancing themselves

socially. Meanwhile the dupes began to feel ostracised - in both subjective and objective terms they experienced social dislocation.

The inference is not only that deviance from some norm, even an artificially imposed trivial one, has psychological effects on all parties, but also that there is a two-way interaction between psychological and sociological effects with the deviant becoming distanced from the 'mainstream' both internally and externally. Deviance from the norm, whether inadvertent or deliberate, is both uncomfortable and potentially dangerous.

Ideas of the 'abnormality' of non-productive members of society found their echo in early-modern times with the writings of Malthus, and in particular in his warnings of societal collapse should an allegedly under-productive labouring group be allowed to become non-self-supporting. As explained by Max Weber: the development of modern capitalism depends, in part, upon the availability of free labour. An important consequence of this is that 'the costs of reproduction and of bringing up children fall entirely on the labourer' (Weber 1999: 236).

In other words, it is a 'norm' of modern society that workers are not only to be self-sufficient, but are also to provide for their dependants: they must be capable of fulfilling a duty of care towards the greater society. This compares directly with the Spartan obligation on young males to be fit to perform military duty, and with the expectation within hunter-gatherer societies (at least at times of austerity) that individuals will feed themselves or starve. To fail to perform these roles is to be regarded as deviant or abnormal.

The growth of such ideas in the modern era is charted by Stone (1984) who notes the origin of a 'disability category' consisting of people granted, in her word, a

'privileged' position as non-workers. With her talk of the distribution of goods outside of the primary (work-linked) market, Stone envisages both the disability category and the 'privileging' of disabled people in material terms. However, 'privileged' or not, such a status differs markedly from the norm of a self-supporting worker. However, Bauman (1989) demonstrates that modernity shows a great reverence for normality in the abstract - it is a conservative force seeking to preserve social structures. In this way, norms that sprang from purely material sources may acquire a cultural meaning – as noted earlier, 'Modernity is a normalising culture' (Hughes 2002: 572).

Another major danger is that societal reverence of normality within modernity can give rise to:

a garden culture. It defines itself as the design for an ideal life and a perfect arrangement of human conditions... there are weeds wherever there is a garden. And weeds are to be exterminated. Weeding out is a creative, not a destructive activity (Bauman 1989: 92). It is easy to find correspondences between the urge to reinforce normality on the one hand, and to remove unwanted 'weeds' which may detract from the balanced composition of a modern 'garden society' on the other.

What emerges, is a picture of disabled people forcibly estranged dislocated - from their host society. As a result, they experience socioeconomic (and often psychological) disadvantage within modern society. The causative factors which I propose within this materialist analysis differ sharply from the disability studies 'orthodoxy', at least as defined by Finkelstein, Oliver and Abberley. Where a Marxist approach seems to look for something which may have the appearance of a malevolent collective

consciousness (capital) deliberately seeking to oppress disabled people for its own benefit and ends, I stress a social world (modernity) thoroughly imbued with ideas of 'normality' and demonstrating a consequent abhorrence of deviation. Rather than an economic process of oppression grounded in capitalist ideology and driven by the search for profit, I see a social process rooted in normality and leading to social dislocation, as the primary cause of disability.

'Abnormality' and culture

In this way, the abnormality of disabled people has progressed from an edifice constructed on material foundations to a societal concept that now has a very large cultural component. Although Ford (1923: 208) and UPIAS (1976: 15) both argue that there are few, if any, remaining material reasons for the large majority of disabled people to be removed from the mainstream of contemporary society, they continue to be excluded in socio-economic terms. For me, this continuing exclusion is no longer due primarily to material forces – it has become encapsulated within culture.

On this alternative analysis the modern obsession with normality gives rise to a notion of the 'otherness of the abnormal'. This differs both from xenophobic ideas of differentiation along cultural or caste lines, and from Marxist ideas of societal fracture lines associated with class boundaries. It serves to distinguish one member of an otherwise peer group from another: it is an intra-, not inter-, group process. A material manifestation of this process may be seen in the form of structured selectivity, wherein the interests of some (the normal) are institutionally preferred over those of others (the abnormal). As a direct result of this selectivity, disabled people experience a social dislocation which isolates them in material, social and psychological ways from mainstream, normal, society.

The point raised by UPIAS (1976: 16) regarding the 'appearance of degrees of exclusion' may now be addressed. Since the normal is a fixed reference point, an individual's degree of deviation from it may, in principle, be measured. (This is the basis of I.Q. testing.). Put simply, a person who walks with the aid of sticks is more nearly normal than a wheelchair user: someone whose visual impairment is corrected by spectacles is more nearly normal than another with no sight. In terms of social dislocation, the distance from the 'normal' centre varies in direct relationship to the apparent degree of impairment.

However, there is evidence (Caplan 1992) that in the case of genetic testing of fetuses a 'non-standard' genetic endowment, of itself and without reference to degree of variation from the norm, may well lead to a diagnosis of genetic disease with a consequent recommendation to the mother to abort. According to Bauman (1989: 92), genetic abnormality places a foetus at risk of being 'weeded-out' from the carefully tended garden of modernity.

Initially, my alternative materialist analysis leads to a conclusion which is not markedly different to that of Marxism: at least some socially produced differences should be eliminated, and corrective action must take place at the societal, not individual, level. The means by which change may be achieved is, however, very different. In Marxism this is to be gained by the elimination of the bourgeoisie, by extinction or amalgamation within an expanded proletariat. Hence, in order to overthrow disablement, disabled people must find ways of engaging in the class struggle (Finkelstein 2001: 5). However, this does not indicate whether or not they should become subsumed within one or another class. Marx did not allow for a third party to engage with the essentially bipartisan class struggle, and it is doubtful that disabled people could

demonstrate sufficient coherence to become a class in and of themselves.

For Marx emancipation from oppression will only be achieved once the proletariat is awakened from a state of false consciousness, becoming fully aware of itself as a class with shared interests, characteristics and socioeconomic position - by becoming aware of its essential homogeneity. However,

there is a great deal of variety within the disabled population as a whole - differences in social class, age, sex, family circumstances and clinical conditions (Oliver 1983b: unpagged). In other words there is an essential lack of homogeneity within the community of disabled people. This represents another theoretical problem for disability studies Marxism.

I do not personally think in terms of revolutionary social upheaval, preferring to seek more incremental change: pragmatic considerations suggest that the Marxist revolution may be a long time in coming, especially in the contemporary western world. I do not see capital as the primary enemy, rather this role is filled for me by the concept of normality. In my world-view normality is a product of modern society, despite Oliver's refusal to incorporate it into a Marxist analysis. This being the case, a manufactured item may be modified. Not an easy task, but not inherently impossible. Indeed society has already begun to move in this direction, largely at the behest of disabled people themselves, with moves on the one hand to educate society into a revision of its norms, and legislation to enforce some degree of change on the other. Both need to be taken further and faster, but this relatively unexciting approach, for me, holds out more hope of success within a reasonable timescale than does the road of revolutionary Marxism.

Conclusion

The model of disability which Finkelstein guards so jealously, and which rests so firmly upon Marxist thought, has shed much light on the modern condition known as disability. It has brought about a distinct and perhaps epochal shift in attitudes both about and among disabled people - but is this sufficient cause to seek to fix it into something resembling the fossilised remains of a dinosaur, fit only for exhibition in some museum tableau of mid- to late- twentieth century disability politics? Surely, and despite Finkelstein's assertions to the contrary, a model, any model, makes implicit theoretical assumptions. To freeze such a model at any particular stage of its development is to deny the possibility of any future evolution in its theoretical underpinning. Dinosaurs may well tell us something of the consequences of arrested evolution.

I believe that it is a mistake to extrapolate from the position and experiences of a single small group of people with a narrowly defined and specific range of impairments and life experiences and attempt to impose their (UPIAS) ideology, in a 'one size fits all' manner, on the much broader and disparate constituency of disabled people. The UPIAS model has generated considerable insights into the reality of disability production. However, its value as a basis for a social theory of disability is much less clear. Ultimately we should ask whether we seek a theory to explain an economic model of disability, or a social one - the two are potentially very different.

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