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Coherent Inclusivity Through Accessibility: Exploring the Application of Life-Value Ethics to Disability

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COHERENT INCLUSIVITY THROUGH ACCESSIBILITY:
EXPLORING THE APPLICATION OF LIFE-VALUE ETHICS TO DISABILITY

by Emily Dobson

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Exploring the Application of Life-Value Ethics to Disability

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Abstract

This project takes a comprehensive approach to the application of life-value ethics to matters of disability. I overview the philosophical foundation of my approach, life-value ethics, in its different dimensions. I explore the distinction between life-requirements and need-satisfiers. Life-requirements are the fundamental needs shared by all human being whereas need-satisfiers are the tools by which we access our life-requirements in specific circumstances. After exploring this philosophical groundwork, I address the social, medical, and value-neutral models of disability. I support a synthesis of the social and medical models of disability, but I believe that Elizabeth Barnes's value-neutral model in its rejection of the idea that being disabled is necessarily bad helps to overcome the medicalized belief that the only way to fully realize life-value is to eliminate disability. Hence, it is primarily the value-neutral model that I use to show how a life-value approach can address matters of accessibility and accommodation.

As a way of demonstrating the merits of a life-value approach, I apply life-value ethics to the recent policies banning single-use plastic straws. Even though plastic straws do not represent the biggest threat to the environment, they are a primary target of environmentalist initiatives to reduce the amount of plastic waste entering our oceans. It can be shown that plastic straws act as need-satisfiers for disabled people with neurological and muscular impairments. In addition, I contend that by using the concept of coherent inclusivity, we can show that making these need-satisfiers accessible to the public will not only avoid causing harm, but will also help to provide alternative need-satisfiers to our ageing population.

Table of Contents

Introduction

Disability is largely left out of philosophical discourse. Though Philosophy of Disability is a growing field, it does not receive the same level of explicit theorization as Philosophy of Race and Philosophy of Gender. That is, "Philosophical work on disability is often assumed to be 'applied ethics' or 'bioethics'" instead of its own viable category.[1] The purpose of this introduction is, first, to show that disability is worth philosophical analysis. There is a long history of using disability as a justification of discrimination. Hence, if exposing to critical scrutiny illegitimate grounds of discrimination is a central philosophical task, it is important to develop a philosophical understanding of disability as the basis of a critique of the oppression that people with disabilities have suffered. This thesis will use life-value ethics to start this important task. Ultimately, the purpose of this paper is to demonstrate the necessity of informing life-value ethics with disability theory and the applicability of a life-value approach to issues of accommodation and accessibility.

Douglas C. Baynton notes that though disability is "one of the most prevalent justifications for inequality, [it] has rarely been a subject of historical inquiry."[2] "When historians do take note of disability," Baynton states, "they usually treat it merely as personal tragedy or an insult to be deplored and a label to be denied, rather than as a cultural construct to be questioned and explored."[3] Similarly, Elizabeth Barnes notes that

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[1] Elizabeth Barnes, *The Minority Body* (United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2016), 1.
[2] Douglas C. Baynton, "Disability and the Justification of Inequality," in *The Disability Studies Reader*, ed. Lennard J. Davis (New York: Routledge, 2017),18.
[3] Baynton, 31.

the idea that disability is inherently negative is an assumption that philosophers have left unquestioned: "It's often taken for granted within philosophy that some version of the bad-difference view is the default or common-sense position."[4] Disability, then, is routinely left out of academic social and political analyses of marginalization and oppression. It can be shown that much of the absence of interdisciplinary disability research is due to the 'cut and dry' perspective that disability is only a personal tragedy.

The importance of the topic of disability (and of disability studies as a field) can be seen first in the disassociation minority groups have undergone in order to separate themselves from disability. Since disability has historically been a *justification* for the marginalization and oppression of people of colour, women, and LGBTQ+ people, these minority groups have sought to separate themselves from disability overall. The political struggles of these groups have been to prove that they are not in fact disabled by virtue of their marginality. For example, as I will discuss in detail shortly, women during their struggle for the right to vote sought to show that they were not in fact disabled and had the capacities needed in order to vote. David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder state that "[a]s feminist, race, and sexuality studies sought to unmoor their identities from debilitating physical and cognitive associations, they inevitably positioned disability as the "real" limitation from which they must escape."[5] The goal was to show that being a person of colour, being a woman, or being gay did not mean that they were disabled or that there was anything inherently 'wrong' with them. This separation of minority groups from disability can be seen as further justification for the idea that disability is inherently

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[4] Barnes, 70.

[5] David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse* (US: University of Michigan Press, 2000), 2.

negative and is therefore arguably a large part of the reason why disciplines such as history and philosophy have ignored the potential social and cultural aspects of disability.

In "Disability and Justification of Inequality in American History," Baynton covers the history of the use of disability both for justifying inequality and for the resistance against oppression. While Baynton notes three key groups that have been discriminated against (African Americans, Women, and Ethnic groups through immigration), I will primarily focus on the discrimination based first on race and second on gender, covering Baynton's analysis of these examples briefly. First, Baynton states that disability was used to justify slavery in two main ways: 1) African Americans were seen as not capable of being on an equal level to white people and 2) people claimed that freedom and equality would simply disable African Americans. In the first case, it was routinely argued "that African Americans lacked sufficient intelligence to participate or compete on an equal basis in society with white Americans."[6] Leading from this argument, the second argument maintains that because of "their inherent physical and mental weaknesses, [African Americans] were prone to become disabled under conditions of freedom and equality."[7] In both instances, disability is used to discredit African Americans and to justify their inequality to white people.

Second, disability was used as a justification for the inequality of women, specifically in arguments against women's suffrage. According to Baynton,

> Paralleling the arguments made in defense of slavery, two types of disability argument were used in opposition to women's suffrage: that women had disabilities that made them incapable of using the franchise responsibly, and that

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[6] Baynton, 20.
[7] Baynton, 21.

because of their frailty women would become disabled if exposed to the rights of political participation.[8]

There is a link here between justification for inequality and innate disability. For both racial and gender inequalities, disability was used at the forefront, if not explicitly, implicitly in the context of ability and capacity or lack thereof. In both cases, people of colour and women were deemed unable to effectively 'compete' at an equal level or would be disabled *by* freedom and equality. In addition, like disabled people today, Baynton explains that women were considered to need their own form of special education, something that was better suited to their own capabilities. Being a woman was "a medical problem that necessitated separate and special care," a position which was consistently held by doctors at the time.[9]

What differentiates the case of women from the case of people of colour is that disability was also used *against* anti-suffragists and women's inequality. Baynton maintains that suffragists made three main arguments regarding disability and inequality:

...one, women were not disabled and therefore deserved the vote; two, women were being erroneously and slanderously classed with disabled people, with those who were legitimately denied suffrage; and three, women were not naturally or inherently disabled but were made disabled by inequality— suffrage would ameliorate or cure these disabilities.[10]

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[8] Baynton, 24.
[9] Baynton, 24-25.
[10] Baynton, 25.

Here it becomes clear that to gain equality for women, suffragists not only separated women from disabled people, they upheld the notion that disability was a justification for inequality, especially political inequality. Whether disabled people are capable of being politically engaged is not up for debate; the suffragists were accepting outright that there is a group of people who are unfit to be participating in politics. At the same time, the suffragists are making a claim that the social structures in place to control women and keep them out of public and political affairs are *disabling them*. The claim is that if they were to be made equal in society, women would no longer be disabled (or be grouped with disabled people). This claim is very similar to the one made by the social model, which is that disabled people are only disabled *because* the social structures in place are not built with disabled people in mind. Disability, under the social model, is the interaction of these social structures with real, embodied impairments. I will discuss the social model more in Chapter 2.

It is important to note that in the context of race, disability's power to discredit someone could bring a white person "to the level of being of a marked race." Baynton quotes Dr. Van Evrie who, in the 1860s, stated that "[i]t occasionally happened that a particular white person might not be superior to all black people because of a condition that "deforms or blights individuals; they may be idiotic, insane, or otherwise incapable." These cases were considered to stem from "the result of human vices, crimes, or ignorance,"[11] which is linked to the belief that disability was a mark that indicated personal fault or moral failing during (especially) the Victorian era. This belief that disability was a result of moral failing stemmed from disability being grouped together

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[11] Baynton, 21.

with others with "'undesirable' traits," such as being a criminal, as a result of eugenics.[12] What makes this particularly interesting is that disability becomes a mark by which any dominant group can be subjected to justifiable inequality. Mitchell and Snyder touch on this:

> But what made disability distinct was its unambiguous ability to impact every other identity category at any time. Even in the least-marked category – the "transparent' state of straight white male – disability clouded an otherwise unmarked social identity...while disability threatened to override other identifying marks, it continued to go unrecognized as a form of cultural alliance in academia and in public life.[13]

Disability is a mark that can affect any social identity at any time. This mark, when clearly visible, sets the disabled person off from the rest of society as somehow automatically inferior, even if they were originally unmarked by any marginality. Still, despite the wide scope of disability in human experience, in academia it is left relatively unexamined.

In the same way that history has overlooked disability, philosophy has also held the assumption that disability is inherently a negative or bad thing. In doing so, social and political philosophy have often left disability out of ethical considerations. In the case of life-value ethics, the distinction between life-requirements and need-satisfiers as it applies to disability has not been explored. This leaves life-value open to criticism to the extent that life-value ethics has not taken disability directly into account in its analysis of harmful systems and social institutions. This project is, for the most part, an exploration

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[12] Lennard J. Davis, "Introduction: Normality, Power, and Culture," in *The Disability Studies Reader*, ed. Lennard J. Davis (New York: Routledge, 2013), 6.
[13] Mitchell and Snyder, x.

of how life-value ethics can be improved by incorporating an understanding of disability theory, as well as how it can, in application, help to provide some insight into problems of accessibility and accommodation.

This project details an overview of both life-value ethics and disability theory while also aiming to show how the two interact through an analysis of the recent move to ban single-use plastic straws. The aim of chapter 1 is to give a comprehensive overview of life-value ethics because of its relative novelty in terms of other ethical systems. Chapter 1 looks at the foundation of life-value ethics and its terminology. I explore the distinction between life-requirements and need-satisfiers, a distinction that is important later in the project for addressing accessibility devices and the language of 'special needs.' Then I examine both McMurtry's and Noonan's approaches to life-requirements before concluding that Noonan's list of life-requirements is divided in such a way as to illustrate the core concerns of human life.

Chapter 2 discusses the medical, social, and value-neutral models of disability. While I do not uphold the social constructivist approach to disability, I examine the value of Elizabeth Barnes's arguments around testimony and adaptive preference in her value-neutral model. What is useful to take away from Barnes is the fact that disability is part of human limitation and that we should not automatically assume a bad-difference view of disability. At the end of the chapter I combine life-value ethics with disability theory and parts of Barnes's approach to disability. In this cross comparison, I outline the problems with 'special needs' language and show how, with the needs-satisfier/life-requirement distinction, the language of 'special needs' contributes to the harm disabled people face from social institutions.

In the final chapter, I look exclusively at the recent bans on single-use plastics, and. specifically, the bans on plastic straws. These bans on single-use plastics are a much-needed effort to reduce the amount of plastic waste entering our oceans; however, the large focus on plastic straws may cause harm to disabled people who require the straws *as need-satisfiers*. I maintain that the focus on single-use plastic straws does not take disabled people into consideration and places emphasis on consumers instead of corporations and policies. Focusing on certain consumer items and the ways that consumers can reduce their own environmental impact takes away from the larger contributors to the plastic waste crisis: inadequate waste management and the policies around the distribution of plastic that have allowed the production of single-use plastics to go unregulated. What we ought to work toward are policies that enable the satisfaction of life-requirements in a sustainable way without harming already vulnerable groups in the process.

Chapter 1: An Overview of Life-Value Ethics

1.1. Introduction

In order to show how life-value ethics and disability studies (or, more broadly, the disability civic movement) can mutually benefit each other, it is necessary to define and outline the basic concepts relevant to the discussion. It is especially important for the development of the ideas and arguments in this essay to draw attention to the language and arguments of both life-value ethics and disability studies because of their inherent novelty, both in their respective fields and within the discipline of philosophy.

Regarding life-value ethics, the terminology, coined by Canadian philosopher John McMurtry, is rather new and not as well recognized as other branches of ethics, such as a Kantian deontology or an Aristotelian virtue-ethics. However, while the systematization of life-value ethics is quite recent, the founding principles are derived from historical, social, and political struggles. McMurtry and Jeff Noonan, taking up life-value ethics as McMurtry's student, have both developed a conception of human need taken from our bio-social nature as human beings by first asking the question "what, above all, do people strive to avoid losing connection with?"[14] In answering this question, life-value ethics

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[14] Jeff Noonan, *Materialist Ethics and Life-Value* (Quebec: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2012), 47.

looks to the historical struggles of oppressed and marginalized peoples, which overlap in their demands to avoid "harm, whether to their organism or to their humanity."[15] Historically, then, we recognize needs as resources and institutions that must be satisfied since failure to satisfy these needs results in objective harm. These basic needs make up the bio-social nature of human beings. Human beings historically have struggled to maintain connection to these needs because we are seriously harmed if deprived. Consequently, I shall show that while life-value ethics is new in terms of its language, it has a foundation that is firmly entrenched in the historical struggles for basic physical and social needs, giving life-value ethics a practical and real-world ground for its system. The next section will also cover the ways in which a life-ground further ties these historical struggles to basic human needs, thereby providing an objective ground for social justice struggles.

I have chosen to divide this chapter into three main subsections. In the first section, I outline the general principles of life-value ethics. In the second section, I explore the life-requirements as established by McMurtry. In the third section, I outline Noonan's life-requirements which focus on the bio-social nature of human beings.

1.2. An Account of Life-Value Ethics

It is important to note two things before discussing the general assumptions and terminology of life-value ethics: 1) the contents of life-value ethics terms are relatively simple and, once explained, their meaning should be readily apparent and, as a result 2) life-value ethics' aim often subsumes in a more comprehensive way the values of other

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[15] Ibid.

ethical theories. The contents of the terms used by life-value ethics, or a life-ground system, revolve around the general concerns of all living things. That is, life-value ethics is not only concerned with human conduct and interactions with other human beings, but the ecological systems on which human beings and all living organisms mutually depend. With a focus on the inherent value of life itself, life-value ethics seeks to establish its ground in the needs and concerns of all living organisms. Life-value ethics extends its list of needs beyond the scope of those of human beings, acknowledging that an ethical system must be sustainable. Hence, the terminology used by life-value ethics reflects the central concepts and concerns that have been employed and evoked historically in social justice movements and the development of citizen, political, and economic rights, as well as contemporary concerns arising with the growing threat of climate change. While the terms initially may seem convoluted, at their core are historical sentiments and a growing scientific awareness of what living-organisms require, what human beings require, and a human responsibility for our environmental life-support system, in addition to the common ethical question of 'what constitutes a good life for a human being.' In this way there will be some clear overlap in terms of life-value ethics' aims and general system framework, since many ethical systems, especially contemporary ones, look to give an account of human needs or capabilities, human dignity, and the environment.

1.2.1. General Principles of Life-Value Ethics: Life-ground, Life-value

What makes life-value ethics stand out is its outline of human needs and the framework by which we can test their value and universality. Life-value ethics seeks to do

what other theories of social justice have simply avoided: ground itself "in the life-and-death necessities of human existence,"[16] in the requirements of life itself. More recently, there is a growing trend in ethics to focus on other potentially objective bases for ethical systems, grounds that avoid needs as a foundation, such as the capabilities approach outlined by Sen and Nussbaum. The capabilities approach, while a promising system, mixes needs and capabilities together, bringing about confusion. However, the avoidance of directly looking at needs is not a recent trend in philosophy. According to McMurtry, "Philosophy seeks to understand the ultimately regulating principles of the human condition, but has avoided this ultimate issue from the beginning."[17] A common assumption is that human needs (beyond the fundamental physical needs like water and food) are so widely variable between nations, ethnic groups, municipalities, communities, etc., it is impossible to find enough of a common ground to act as a foundation for an entire ethical system, at least one that seeks to cover a global scale. I intend to show briefly, as McMurtry and Noonan have shown to a larger degree, that this assumption is false and based on a limited conception of needs, and that life-value ethics itself can be seen as a concrete or historical universal system.

This basis of life-value ethics is the life-ground, which can be summarized and said to be the foundation and ultimate value of life itself. According to Giorgio Baruchello and Rachael Lorna Johnstone, McMurtry refers to the life-ground in a glossary as "Concretely, all that is required to take the next breath; axiologically, all the life-support systems required for human life to reproduce or develop."[18] In "Human Rights versus Corporate

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[16] John McMurtry, "Human Rights Versus Corporate Rights: Life Value, the Civil Commons and Social Justice," *Studies in Social Justice* 5, no. 1 (2011): 20.

[17] Ibid.

[18] John McMurtry, "What is good? What is bad? The Value of All Values Across Time, Place and Theories," in *Philosophy and World Problems*, ed. John McMurtry (United Kingdom, EOLSS Publishers, 2011),

Rights," McMurtry explains more simply that the life-ground, as the basis of life-value analysis and understanding, is the fact that "life is good, and is better the more coherently inclusive its life-fields and ranges in thought, felt being, and action."[19] It is the basis of an ethical system that, at its core, is concerned with sustaining all life and allowing it to thrive to the extent that it leaves room for other life, and new life, to do the same. The life-ground is nature and the social institutions through which natural resources are turned into need-satisfiers; if we ground an ethical system in life itself, it becomes rooted in the very conditions required for life to persist and thrive. The ethical system is not abstracted from the conditions in which it is intended to be applied or carried out, but firmly entrenched in the concrete circumstances of the living organisms and ecosystems on which all life relies. Since "life-value understanding re-grounds thought and analysis at the level of human life necessities and capacities and, therefore, in the ecological support systems that make them possible at the same time,"[20] life-value ethics is amendable. It can include more extensive and diverse ranges of life into its system. Life-value ethics derives its principles and framework from this life-ground and, in application, derives what is and is not of value without being ignorant of the life it seeks to preserve.

The most important principles of life-value ethics is, according to McMurtry, expressed in the primary axiom of value, which is stated as follows:

X is value if and only if, and to the extent that, x consists in or enables a more coherently inclusive range of thought/feeling/action than without it

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quoted in Giorgio Baruchello and Rachael Lorna Johnstone, "Rights and Value: Construing the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights as Civil Commons," *Studies in Social Justice* 5, no. 1 (2011): 95.

[19] McMurtry, "Human Rights Versus Corporate Rights: Life Value, the Civil Commons and Social Justice," 1: 13.

[20] Ibid., 20.

Where these three ultimate fields of value are defined as:

thought = internal image and concept (T)

feeling = the felt side of being (F)

/ senses, desires, emotions, moods

action = animate movement (A)

across species and organizations

Conversely:

x is disvalue if and only if, and to the extent that, x reduces/disables any range of thought/experience/action.[21]

This axiom is a framework in which we can fill in variable X and test its value. What is of value within life-value ethics and, more broadly, what is of value to life, is that which maintains life and allows it to flourish. More specifically, what is of value is that which enables a broader and more diverse range of thought, feeling, and action for all life. In contrast, what is of disvalue is what either does not contribute, or actively inhibits the growth and development of these fields of life value. We can think of making a place accessible as an example. Building ramps, installing elevators, making washrooms fully accessible all take resources that could be allotted elsewhere, so it is important to show that they have enough value to warrant inclusion. An accessible space, with all its amenities, allows disabled people to enter and leave spaces freely. Accessible spaces allow disabled people a degree of freedom that would otherwise be unavailable to them. If a building lacked proper ramps and an elevator, those with mobility devices would not be able to have full access to that space. This could consequently decrease their ability to

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[21] John McMurtry, "The Primary Axiom and The Life-Value Compass," in *Philosophy and World Problems*, ed. John McMurtry (United Kingdom, EOLSS Publishers, 2011), 1: 213.

form and maintain social relationships as well as work. It is difficult to maintain healthy social relationships when we cannot easily navigate social settings such as public institutions, businesses, and other people's homes. If we were to make spaces accessible, on the other hand, we would *increase* disabled people's experiences, allowing them to move freely throughout social spaces and to better maintain social relationships. Since an accessible space enables a broader range of thought/feeling/action, they can be said to be of value.

Perhaps most important here is the aspect of coherent inclusiveness, which in part helps to provide parameters by which we can measure the extent something enables (or reduces) these fields of value. For life-value ethics, it is not a matter of increasing the *quantity* of life, but a matter of developing our own fields of life-value while leaving, or creating space for other, more diverse ranges of life to do the same. If we take our accessibility example, an accessible space is more coherently inclusive than an inaccessible space because it allows disabled people as well as others to more fully participate in social life. Accessible spaces allow disabled people to be more active in social roles, allowing them to contribute to their communities while doing no harm to anyone else. Thus, the constraint of coherent inclusivity is one that allows for a higher quality of life for all while safeguarding against harm or exploitative growth. As Noonan states, this axiom is not "an external constraint which narrows the space of feeling, thought, imagination, or activity, but an internal constraint which rules out *only what confines feeling/thought/action* to established life-blind value systems."[22] That is, the constraint is on that which threatens to limit or reduce the breadth and depth of life. If something is

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[22] Noonan, *Materialist Ethics and Life-Value*, 202.

of disvalue, it is likely life-destructive toward living organisms specifically, or life-support systems generally. If something is of value, or coherently inclusive, it is something that is *coherent* within not only the current range of *inclusive*, or diverse ranges of life, but coherent with the continuation of diverse life generationally into the future. It allows for a diverse range of life to develop their own fields of live-value without constraining the freedom of other life to do the same. The extent to which something is coherently inclusive can be measured in degrees. Something is more or less coherently inclusive, or better/worse "by the greater/lesser range of life value it bears or enables in the fields of life value."[23] Consequently, choices that we make can be evaluated as better or worse within a life-value framework in the same way, which, in turn, means that we may have a duty to others to, at the very least, not make choices that constrain the fields of life-value of other living beings.

The primary axiom of value as a principle allows us to derive not only what is of value and other life-value principles, but, as an example, obligations and duties we have to other living organisms. McMurtry maintains that any and all "valid duty entailments follow from [this] principle."[24] Duty can be said to be "good or bad, that is, to the extent of life's being violated or supported, disabled or enabled through time, by the duty's prescription," and, as such, "the greater the difference to life loss or gain by it, therefore, the stricter the duty is."[25] Again, the aspect of coherent inclusiveness plays a role here: when we act in life valuable ways, we are obligated to leave room for others to do the same. We are also obligated, as I will explain in a subsequent section of this chapter, to act in

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[23] McMurtry, "The Primary Axiom And The Life-Value Compass," 1: 213-214.
[24] John McMurtry, "Natural Good and Evil: Beyond Fitness to Survive," in *Philosophy and World Problems*, ed. John McMurtry (United Kingdom, EOLSS Publishers, 2011), 1: 151.
[25] Ibid.

ways that contribute back, to create space for others to act in life-valuable ways. So societies are obligated to make spaces accessible for as many people as possible without causing harm.

The life-ground acts as a basis from which to derive principles that can be used to prioritize problems and solutions, as well as a foundation from which to derive ways to incorporate more inclusive and diverse ranges of life into explicit consideration. This coherent inclusiveness of life-value analysis is one of the main features, as I will discuss later in this chapter, that makes life-value ethics particularly well-suited to addressing the issues put forward by the disability civil rights movement. If the ultimate principle and goal of an ethical system is entrenched in the life-ground, it becomes readily apparent that to address ethical dilemmas arising directly out of real-world, material conditions, we must look to tangible, situational means for solutions. We cannot address global crises by abstracting away from the social and material circumstances that give rise to social and natural disasters, just as we cannot solve issues of accommodation and accessibility without looking directly at the physical and social causes. As I will demonstrate throughout this paper, approaching the problems and systemic oppression disabled people face through a life-value framework grounds the analysis in the ethical circumstances themselves and provides solutions that do not abstract from the ongoing material and social barriers disabled people face. A life-grounded approach looks at what disabled people are being deprived of, the real barriers that are causing this deprivation, and the possible solutions that can be flexible enough to be implemented in various societies.

1.2.2. Life-Requirements as Needs and the Necessity of Life-Support Systems and Civil Commons

The value of life is shown in the struggle that all living things demonstrate during moments of vulnerability. Even the worm attempts to struggle free of a predator's grasp. While most will try to brush this off with explanations of instinct and denounce the importance of this struggle by purporting that worms have no real cognitive abilities (like that of human beings), it is hard to deny the fact that living organisms *struggle* and actively *try to stay alive*. In reproduction, in fighting or fleeing from predators, in protecting their young, all living things demonstrate a basic desire to continue living. Regardless of whether it is based within the body's natural inclinations, or what kind of cognitive capacities they may have, we see universally that living organisms continue to try to survive. The human body itself tries to force us to breathe: no matter how long we try to hold our breath, eventually our body will take over and force us to breathe, to obtain what is necessary for survival. What is essential, or what becomes readily apparent in simple observations of living creatures is this *persistence of life itself*.

From the life-ground we come to understand that the basis of all struggle and solution is whether the needs of living organisms and, more broadly, the ecological systems they rely on are being met. Noonan states that the life-ground of value "is found in the observable fact that all living things, and not just human beings, struggle to maintain connection to that which sustains their lives."[26] These needs within a life-value framework are referred to as life-requirements. They are what is *required* or necessary for life to exist and maintain itself. All living organisms, in this way, have their own

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[26] Noonan, *Materialist Ethics and Life-Value*, 46.

inherent life-requirements in order to live and, should all requirements be met to a high degree, thrive.

However, a major criticism of approaches to needs-based systems of ethics, as well as criticisms of needs as a foundation of human rights, is that it is not possible to come up with a comprehensive list of needs that is truly universal. In this regard there seem to be two major concerns: 1) cultural, historical, and individual differences in perceived needs vary too widely to find enough common ground for a universal set of human needs, and 2) it is difficult to determine what needs actually are because our individual use of the language around them is vague. Several examples of these criticisms can be drawn from Len Doyle and Ian Gough's *A Theory of Human Need*. In regard to the threat of relativism, many criticisms revolve around the idea that needs themselves are culturally, historically, or socially construed to the extent that only groups or collectives can determine what they need.

Relativist positions stem from a resistance to limiting human expression and growth, as well as from a fear of a neo-imperialism. For example, in the case of historical relativism, a universal set of needs as the *foundation* of an ethical theory could be said to be reducing human nature to something static, which in turn means that "individuals are arbitrarily constrained in changing those aspects of their physical, personal and social environment."[27] A universal set of human needs, in this case, would mean turning that set into something that bridges social and historical epochs, and thereby threatens to limit the extent to which human beings can change those needs over time. Another, perhaps more crucial, example is the case of cultural relativism, where it is not simply that

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[27] Len Doyle and Ian Gough, *A Theory of Human Need* (New York: The Guilford Press, 1991)*,* 13.

different cultures have different ways of life, but that insisting on one universal set of needs could simply be a form of neo-imperialism. For historically marginalized peoples, Western Capitalist nations have dictated what they see to be best for all, imposing specific preferences on other societies and cultures as well as depriving them of their basic needs and enslaving them, if not outright killing them. Western Capitalist nations use their global and economic power as justification for these actions. In turn, marginalized peoples have come to equate human liberation "with reclaiming the right of oppressed groups to determine what preferences *they* will designate as needs."[28] Marginalized and oppressed groups have also historically struggled for control over vital resources they need to live. Hence, some may argue that "the concept of *universal* needs inevitably favours the dictatorial oppressor" and that, since these oppressors cannot be bothered to understand the needs of marginalized peoples, only the oppressed peoples themselves can know what they need.[29]

In the second general criticism, the social aspects of needs further complicate the extent to which we can adequately determine what constitutes a need and how to distinguish it from a want. In these examples, needs seem to be based in particular social contexts and are best left decided by the individuals themselves, whether that be via the market through the consumer's freedom of choice or by coming together to collectively decide what is best for the group. For example, needs are seen as socially constructed, since they "are partly defined by virtue of the obligations, associations and customs which membership of a society entails" and deprivation of these needs "varies over time and is

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[28] Ibid., 14.
[29] Ibid., 14-16.

dependent on the social situation...in which it is experienced."[30] This position is similar to a cultural relativist argument, in that we need to look to a particular group's circumstances in order to see what it is that they need, which points to the importance of the social in human life. Since individuals are formed out of social groups and relations, needs can also be seen as being "inevitably linked to the common aims and beliefs—the preferences—of collectives about how they should be satisfied,"[31] but with specific individualistic formations that allow for creative expression. If needs are more individualistic in this way, we might come to the conclusion that, in diverse capitalist societies, the market is the only thing that can regulate the satisfaction of human needs, since any sort of imposed universal set may lead to a suppression of individual difference and freedom.[32] This assumption would thereby entail that there is no set of universal needs, only individual and collective interests that vary between groups and historical periods of time. However, as I will address in subsequent sections, life-value ethics maintains that there are only human needs, of which there are different expressions of those needs tailored to our individual situations.

As Doyle and Gough point out, "when people express outrage at injustice, somewhere in the background is the belief that basic human needs exist which should have been satisfied but were not," and that, along with this background belief, there seems to be a 'common sense' distinction between needs and wants in these instances.[33] Historical struggles are often motivated by the "deprivation of basic physical requirements of life and health," as well as social conditions that enable individual

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[30] Ibid., 20.
[31] Ibid., 17.
[32] Ibid.,10.
[33] Ibid., 3.

freedom and development: "In both cases, what humans are struggling to avoid is harm, whether to their organism or to their humanity."[34] Oppressed groups do not simply struggle for money; they struggle for the means by which they can feed and clothe themselves and their families. So what the above criticisms amount to is that any account of needs that would be successful would have to not only be able to distinguish needs from wants, but also demonstrate that these needs are truly universal without, for example, imposing one specific culture's conception of need on all other cultures. They are not criticisms that ultimately shut down the possibility of universal human needs, but, rather, can be taken to set a high standard that a needs-based ethical system must achieve.

Life-value ethics provides a criterion of need which, along with the overall life-value framework, presents possible solutions to the threat of relativism as well as problems arising from balancing individuation and sustainability. First, regarding a criterion of need, McMurtry provides a criterion that can be used as a framework for plugging in a variable and testing to see if it is an actual, universalizable life-requirement. This criterion is as follows: "N is a need, if and only if, and to the extent that, deprivation of n always results in a reduction of organic capability.[35]" That is, a need is that which, if a living organism is deprived of it, the organism will be negatively impacted to the extent that its organic capability is reduced. Hence the definition of a need can be tested and verified. In some circumstances, this could be as drastic as resulting in the death of the organism. If we look more narrowly at human beings, it would be anything that, should any individual human be deprived of it, would cause significant damage to that

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[34] Noonan, *Materialist Ethics and Life-Value,* 47.

[35] John McMurtry, *Unequal Freedoms: The Global Market versus the Life Economy* (London: Pluto, 2002), quoted in Jeff Noonan, *Materialist Ethics and Life-Value,* (Quebec: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2012), 47.

individual's ability to live and thrive *as a human being* or *as a biological organism*. Certainly, we can, without controversy, maintain that a human being can only live so long without food, and even shorter still without water. Basic physical needs are, for the most part, readily agreed upon and, as recent history has shown, global collectives have sought to protect and ensure these needs through a human rights framework. Where life-value ethics differs from something like the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UNDHR), in terms of seeking to ensure that human needs are met, is that human needs are not based in the concept of human, but on the bio-social nature of human beings. Still, McMurtry believes that human rights overall cover our basic needs. As I will discuss, both McMurtry and Noonan have their own extensive lists of life-requirements, though both lists aim, initially, toward the fulfillment of the life-requirements of human beings in ways that are ecologically aware and sustainable. In addition, these life-requirements cannot simply be reduced to each other "because none can be provided for by any or all of the rest.[36]" To ensure that this is the case, any purported life-requirement can be put through the axiom of need and have its validity tested.

In terms of relativism, there are a few responses we can draw on to both reaffirm the necessity of universal human needs as well as further demonstrate life-value ethics' advantage in using life-requirements as a foundation. As stated above, Doyle and Gough assert that most criticisms of social injustice revolve around, at the very least, a rudimentary set of unmet needs. Similarly, they maintain that criticisms revolving around the threat of cultural imperialism, or other oppressive groups imposing their determined needs on oppressed groups, still revolve around some kind of conception of "who and

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[36] McMurtry, "Human Rights Versus Corporate Rights: Life Value, the Civil Commons and Social Justice," 1: 24

what is to be regarded as good or bad."[37] In consequence, this particular claim of relativism collapses under the realization "that cultures of oppression are still cultures with their own internally consistent moralities or 'principles of validity'" and critics upholding strict claims of relativism may avoid condemning the "violations of human need in the context of societies or communities with which they have some cultural affiliation."[38] It becomes difficult to defend against imperialism when the justification for it can be considered 'valid' within the imperialist culture's framework. I am hesitant to accept this sort of criticism against relativism fully, since it seems to be open to further criticism; however, it reveals, in the resistance to accept cultural relativism because of these sentiments of imperialism, some sort of ground by which we refuse to accept oppression as valid. As Doyle and Gough have said, there is some form of a standard, or measure by which we distinguish between good and bad, justice and injustice. We can directly point, using a life-value framework, to the objective harms human beings face when they are deprived of their life-requirements.

Life-value ethics proposes that it is the life-ground that ought to be recognized as this measure by which we can understand harm, injustice, and even progress. Noonan states that we can only abstract from the life-ground in theory, because doing so in actuality would mean "to abstract oneself from the field of life-requirements, and thus from life altogether."[39] That is, theories that suggest that human needs are too diverse to be universal abstract away from the real conditions that make up their lives as well as the lives of all other living beings: the life-requirements that enable them to draft these

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[37] Doyle and Gough, 30.
[38] Ibid.
[39] Noonan, *Materialist Ethics and Life-Value*, 50-51.

theories in the first place. What theories that deny the universality of human needs are doing, in a sense, is confusing human ends with human needs. So, while we must be sensitive to the extensive global history of oppression against all minority groups, as well as be vigilant against imposing a dominant group's own specific approaches to needs, we do not have to abandon a universal conception of needs so long as these needs are truly universal.

This universality of life-requirements bridges all cultures. In acknowledging the historical struggles of oppressed peoples, we come to see a consistency between their demands for, at the very least, freedom from harm. As McMurtry claims, "each [life-requirement] is a universal life necessity and good because no-one across cultures can be deprived of it without losing life capacity towards disease and death."[40] If this is the case, then each life-requirement cannot be left unsatisfied without resulting in some form of harm. It can be said that human beings have some shared physical and social life-requirements. For example, we understand that human beings require some form of food, water, and shelter in order to survive, but we can also assume that human beings, in order to live a *good* life, require freedom from harm within their social circumstances. Hence, we can, at the very least, assume that in terms of social life-requirements, individuals require some form of general protection, either from other members of the society or from the governing body in place.

If we can agree that there are certain life-requirements that human beings share, then we can measure the degrees by which these life-requirements are individually being satisfied within the society or culture. McMurtry elaborates:

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[40] McMurtry, "Human Rights Versus Corporate Rights: Life-Value, the Civil Commons and Social Justice," 24.

> The defining principle of all universal human life necessities and what social justice provides by society's true development is (1) that without which the life capacity of anyone is reduced (2) by the degree of the good's necessity, (3) to the extent of its deprivation when (4) the means are available to provide it. This is the exact line and measure between social justice and injustice across life domains...Once social justice is thus defined with principled life coordinates, we are able to understand how it is in fact won or lost in the world.[41]

It seems difficult to deny, at the very least, that human beings require certain things at the base level in order to live as human beings. As Doyle and Gough indicate, individuals from across different cultures have to, at the very least, have certain basic needs satisfied in order to participate in those cultures at all, and any loss in this respect results in an inability to fully engage within the culture "and an inability to create or to share in the good things in life, however they may be defined."[42] Within a life-value framework, however, we can determine the degree to which a society is life-destructive by the degree to which its members are incapacitated by the lack of access to life-requirements, especially in cases of affluent nations where resources are not as scarce, such as Canada and the U.S.. With this in mind, we can begin to measure social justice at a global scale by looking at the degrees to which affluent nations are depriving other nations of their life-requirements, or the degree to which these affluent nations may be required to assist struggling nations. From a global perspective, we can use a life-ground framework to understand and work against threats of cultural imperialism, though for the purpose of this paper I will be looking at a much narrower perspective.

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[41] Ibid., 33.
[42] Doyle and Gough, 69.

But what about cultural differences in satisfying those basic needs? Some may point out that different cultures and religions have restrictions in terms of the types of food they eat (a primary example being the Muslim custom of not eating pork). Choices around basic needs may be simply preferences that are "subjective and culturally specific," but these cultural habits can be so binding "that some people will suffer gross deprivation in order not to violate cultural taboos, especially concerning food."[43] Since there can be large differences in something as simple as food, and since food is often a significant component of cultural and familial bonding, it would seem unjust to prescribe a limited set of life-requirements. However, an important distinction that life-value ethics upholds is the distinction between a need and need-satisfier. Defined by Doyle and Gough, need-satisfiers are "the objects, activities and relationships which can satisfy our basic needs."[44] Noonan states that an advantage of the criterion of a need is that it "is to be *applied* by real people reasoning in the definite contexts in which they find themselves about what is and is not a real life-requirement satisfier."[45] While a need is non-negotiable, a need-satisfier may be selected or replaced given particular social, environmental, and cultural circumstances. In this way we can avoid imposing cultural-particular need-satisfiers while upholding that all cultures see to their members' need satisfaction to the extent possible. Cultural difference is taken as assumed, but not to the extent that injustice is left uncriticized. This is especially important since it allows individuals to openly criticize the practices of their particular cultures and societies since they are the ones best suited to see which of their life-requirements are left unsatisfied.

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[43] Ibid., 70.
[44] Ibid., 69.
[45] Noonan, *Materialist Ethics and Life-Value*, 51.

In addition, while symbolic difference is important, it does not fully change the natural world. As Noonan explains, "Human activity modifies and transforms substances, but this modifying and transforming activity, while productive of a truly human world out of the givenness of nature, never entirely "socializes" the natural world."[46] Pointing to the historical example of the (ongoing) oppression of indigenous peoples, Noonan maintains that this "symbolic richness dies with loss of control over the life-sustaining land and waters."[47] The symbolic richness of cultures comes often through the way we interact with the natural world and *how* we draw our life-requirements from it. Hence the struggles of indigenous peoples have been struggles for "reclaiming control over the natural bases of life-support" and thus control over practices of satisfying life-requirements.[48]

From the criterion of a need, we can also draw distinctions between needs and wants. In the case of mistaking consumer goods for needs, Noonan states that we can distinguish clearly between the two when we look at whether the deprivation of one can be taken as an objective harm. He maintains that "the key difference between life-requirements and objects of consumer demand is that deprivation of the latter might produce subjective *feelings* of harm in some people in wealthy societies, but these feelings are not objective harms."[49] So while someone may feel harmed at the removal of some form of luxury, such as not having an additional car, these feelings of harm can be reevaluated, unlike objective harm, which is not so easily, if at all possible to, overcome. Objective harm, based on the criterion provided above, can be distinguished from

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[46] Ibid., 56.
[47] Ibid., 57
[48] Ibid.
[49] Ibid., 47.

subjective harm by direct reductions in the individual's capabilities, which can never simply be reevaluated.

In addition to the distinction between subjective and objective harm, Noonan goes on to distinguish life-requirements from instrumental requirements in the case of an individual's project or goal, which helps to illustrate the distinction between an individual's freedom to choose themselves and potentially life-destructive individual goals. While Doyle and Gough's semantic examination indicates that need statements assert that a particular condition must be met in order for a connected goal to be reached, Noonan believes that this does not account for *which* goals are objectively life-valuable.[50] This is a particularly important problem to resolve, "since if the goal of life-grounded materialist ethics is to enable the free realization of life-capacities, it would seem obligated to include under the set of life-requirements *any* object instrumentally required by any project through which life-capacities are expressed and enjoyed."[51] That is, if life-requirements are as such that they enable human capacities, how do we distinguish between actual life-requirements and things that are simply required in order to achieve individual goals? Here is, most importantly, what makes the criterion of need distinct from other ethical bases. As Noonan states, the difference is "in the fact that the realization of some projects can have life-destructive consequences."[52] He continues:

> While it is of course true that even destructive projects presuppose life, and
> therefore the satisfaction of life-requirements, it is not the case that a good society
> is obligated to satisfy life-requirements *for the sake of enabling some people to*

[50] Ibid., 48-49.
[51] Ibid., 48.
[52] Ibid., 49.

destroy the life or life-conditions of others. On the contrary, the goal of satisfying *universal* life-requirements is to enable everyone to express and enjoy their capacities, a goal which presupposes that the projects people engage in are consistent with the health of the natural field of life-support and other people's projects.[53]

If we recall the primary axiom of value from the last section, the aspect of coherent inclusiveness once again surfaces as a limiting factor on the extent to which individual actions and goals can be expressed. Individuals can expect to have their life-requirements met to the extent that the projects they engage in are *coherently inclusive* of other life. Individual projects within a life-value framework must be able to be carried out in a sustainable, non-life-destructive way that leaves or *creates* space for others to do the same. In this way we can make the distinction between life-valuable projects and life-destructive ones, thereby separating life-requirements from a more general, and somewhat ambiguous understanding of needs.

Hence, we can see that 'life-requirement' is a deliberate shift from 'need' despite the two terms denoting the same sort of sense of a 'necessary condition.' Since "the word 'need' is employed in everyday language in such diverse ways,"[54] referring to not only what we would call life-requirements, but also desires and wants, a shift in language is necessary. The word need itself can denote an instrumental need, something that is needed to accomplish a goal, or a need as what is necessary for life. 'Life-requirement' works as a more direct and unambiguous term, referring directly to only that which is required for life, and, as I have discussed above, McMurtry's criterion gives us a way of

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[53] Ibid.
[54] Doyle and Gough, 35.

isolating what we can call life-requirements from all other supposed needs (that is, what are actually consumer demands or instrumental conditions of a given project). When we look at living organisms broadly, this would entail some form of nourishment, shelter from uninhabitable environmental effects, and clean air and water. We of course see organisms living in environments previously assumed to be uninhabitable, but we have yet to see any living organism subsist without some kind of nourishment. We also know that there are clear threats that can negatively impact organisms, and that a freedom from these threats, or freedom from harm, is part of maintaining the life of the organism. So, when we use the language of life-requirements, we can look at more than just a human-centred perspective as well as look to the source of those life-requirements: life-support systems.

Life-support systems are ecological systems "that enable the reproduction of all"[55]; they are the environments in which all life is found and necessarily depends on. An elementary school education addresses the importance of ecological networks, usually construed simplistically as a food web, demonstrating how, at the very least, different animals rely on each other and plants for nutrition. However, what simple forms of these 'webs' do not show is a more complicated set of effects. Typically, human beings are depicted as being at the 'top of the food-chain' and thus are not directly affected by any other animal. What is left out in this depiction is the how human beings directly affect ecological systems. A life-value approach emphasizes the importance of life-support systems as well as human responsibility, since "Ultimately, human life depends on

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[55] McMurtry, "Human Rights Versus Corporate Rights: Life-Value, the Civil Commons and Social Justice," 15.

definite relationships to the natural world as the foundational life-support system."[56] Being aware that the environment is not just some abstracted concept in need of protection, but a life-support system, the ground of all living beings, entails a responsibility to that system. Responsibility does not only come from the enormous impact that human beings have on other life, or from our awareness of the extent of the damage human beings have caused to, for example, the habitats of animals, but also from the very fact that life-support systems are a source of the life-requirements of human beings. McMurtry states that "Humanity's common life interest is thus understood to begin with the universal life support systems that all human life, life conditions and fellow life depend on, the ultimate bottom line of terrestrial existence."[57] In this way the language of life-requirement makes explicit the fact that a needs-based approach to ethics must take into account human responsibility to and awareness of the environment and that ethics must proceed in a sustainable way.

However, since human beings are also social animals, a life-support system can also include a social field of life-development, something which McMurtry refers to as the 'civil commons':

An economy is productive and efficient in fact to the extent that it provides life goods which are otherwise scarce to its members through generational time. What ensures that a society does this, rather than merely produce more luxuries for some and life-means deprivation for the many, is what life-value research designates as the civil commons. The civil commons is amnesiac in this era, but it is the social

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[56] Noonan, *Materialist Ethics and Life-Value*, 59.

[57] McMurtry, "Human Rights Versus Corporate Rights: Life-Value, the Civil Commons and Social Justice," 15.

basis of all valid human rights and social justice—that is, any and all social constructs which enable universal access to human life goods without which people's capacities are always reduced or destroyed…Lest this moving line of social development continue to be blocked out within the reigning system which dismantles them, civil commons functions still sustain the human condition everywhere we look beneath the surface of private commodification. As I sit now in my home, there is nothing I experience and need that is possible without the civil-commons infrastructures enabling it.[58]

These civil commons are the social infrastructures that underlie the foundation of society, ensuring that the basic life-requirements (or life-goods, as McMurtry refers to them) are being met. This infrastructure can be broadly referred to in terms of civil planning, especially when we note the public works projects that revolve around providing water and electricity throughout communities, but we can also think about regulations that help to maintain the safety of those living within society. We can also look to community-funded groups and spaces that foster community relationships as well as often enable support for vulnerable community members as examples. Civil commons form the basis of the social networks that ensure that individuals have access to life-requirements and connect individual members to each other within society, as well as to the natural life-support systems. Their necessity in the social sphere of human life is one that is becoming increasingly threatened by corporatization, particularly because the civil commons are things that we often take for granted without actively acknowledging their existence. Things like sidewalks are used daily, but are rarely actively acknowledged as civil

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[58] McMurtry, "Human Rights Versus Corporate Rights: Life-Value, the Civil Commons and Social Justice," 27-28.

commons, which are actively constructed and maintained for the good of the community. Similarly, when we look at public institutions as civil commons, we can see the need for them to be accessible. If civil commons are to be shared and invested in by the community, they ought to be accessible so all members of the community can take part in them. We can see the effects that occur when individuals go without consistent heat in their homes during the winter, something that occurred recently in the UK.[59] Similarly, we can look to Canada's universal health care system, which is under the considerable threat of becoming, at the very least, a two-tiered system, something that will have a largely negative impact on society's most vulnerable

In the next section I will begin to go over a more precise list of life-requirements, beginning with McMurtry and, in the subsequent section, following with Noonan's more human-centred set. The discussion of life-requirements, life-support systems, and civil commons in general, however, will be one that I return to throughout this project and, thus, was necessary to cover in appropriate detail.

1.3. McMurtry's Life-Requirements

McMurtry approaches life-requirements from a more general standpoint, looking broadly at the life-requirements shared by all life. What has been essential to life-value ethics is its emphasis on more than just human conduct, which is what McMurtry's life-requirements draw our attention to: human needs, the environment, and our

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[59] While the case behind this was more complicated, since it involved a lack of social benefits and thus a lack of funds to cover heating costs, it still stands as an important example of the necessity of not only having adequate heat during the winter, but of the importance of social assistance programs. Luke Traynor and Lucy Clarke-Billings, "Mum-of-Four Died Alone in Freezing Home 'Wrapped in Coat and Scarf After her Benefits Were Stopped,' Mirror, No. 7, 2017. https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/mum-four-died-alone-freezing-11489069

interdependency. While addressing the life-requirements of human beings specifically, McMurtry gives attention to human reliance on life-support systems and the value of life itself. The importance of this becomes evident when we contrast it with the western capitalist individualistic conception of humanity, which largely states that individuals can get by on their own and must continuously buy into the next big trend. The end result is a toxic construction of a mythological radical autonomy fueled by unsustainable consumerism—all in all a life-destructive concoction. If we instead understand that each human being exists necessarily within a life-support system, then it becomes impossible for human beings to be radically autonomous, just as it becomes harder to ignore the responsibility of humanity's impact on life. We rely on social organization, as well as the environment, in order to satisfy our needs.

Seven general life-requirements are outlined by McMurtry, ranging from natural and social environmental goods, to bodily goods and vocational goods. Each, as stated in the previous section, is distinct from the next and none are reducible to each other. For McMurtry, "provision of these universal life goods, and only access to such life goods, enables the "good life" for anyone" and denying any of these life goods consequently is a detriment and social injustice.[60] These life-requirements are as follows:

(1) the atmospheric goods of unpolluted air, sunlight, climate cycles, and seeing-hearing space; (2) the bodily goods of clean water, nourishing food, fit clothing, and waste disposal; (3) the home good of shelter from the elements and noxious animals/materials with the means to sleep and freely function; (4) the environmental good of natural and constructed elements contributing to a life-

[60] McMurtry, "Human Rights Versus Corporate Rights: Life-Value, the Civil Commons and Social Justice," 25.

supporting whole; (5) the social goods of reliable care through time by supportive love, work-day limits/safety, accessible healthcare, and security of person; (6) the cultural goods of language, the arts, participant civil rights, and play; and (7) the vocational good of enabling and obliging each to contribute to the provision of these universal life goods consistent with the enjoyment of them.[61]

While I will not go over these in extensive detail, each life-requirement can be shown, according to McMurtry, to be distinct from and not reducible to each other. In addition, all of these life-requirements or life goods are collectively required for a human being and can be satisfied universally without excluding concerns for non-human life and life-support systems. In addition, these life-requirements can be justified according to the criterion of need. For example, while atmospheric goods and environmental goods both directly appeal to the environment, they are not in themselves the same thing. Atmospheric goods denote the importance of maintaining clean air for living beings that need to breathe in order to live, as well as implicitly pointing to the ways in which pollution can harm living beings directly by causing harm through short and long term effects of exposure to pollutant agents, or indirectly, such as the disruption of climate cycles we currently see in regards to climate change. Environmental goods, on the other hand, have to do more with natural physical spaces than with natural cycles. Protecting and ensuring environmental goods, in this context, means in part preventing the privatization of natural spaces and the destruction of constructed social spaces, such as historical buildings. It expresses the importance of an aesthetic and communal component of natural and constructed environments that cannot be reduced to simply

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[61] Ibid.

the need for an environment free from pollution that can continue to act as a life-support system for the organisms residing within it.

Yet both life-requirements of atmospheric goods and environmental goods extend to a broad range of life; the needs expressed within these life-requirements are not just goods for the individual, but goods for all human beings and living things. These two life-requirements in particular force us to recognize the scope of need-satisfaction that ought to be achieved. Each life-requirement ought to be met by a particular society for all its members in a coherently inclusive way, meaning that the needs of all human beings must be satisfied, but that this satisfaction must be done in a sustainable way.

All the life-requirements McMurtry lists are meant to be satisfied broadly within varying cultural and societal circumstances. Regardless of culture, McMurtry maintains that these life-requirements are necessary for human beings to not only survive, but to attain a good life. However, not all societies can, for one reason or another, necessarily satisfy all their members' life-requirements to the same extent as another society. According to McMurtry, for this reason there are "degrees of sufficiency which is definable by the margin gain, or loss, of life range with, or without, provision" of these universal life-requirements.[62] He calls this the life-value calculus, which "denotes infinitesimal differences of more or less."[63]

From a highly individualistic point of view, which is often taken in discussions about universal human needs, there would seem to be no unifying motivation that would compel an individual to work toward satisfying the life-requirements of others within

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[62] John McMurtry, "Deep Principles of Justice Grounding in Life-Value Meaning," in *Philosophy and World Problems*, ed. John McMurtry (United Kingdom: EOLSS Publishers, 2011), 2: 85.
[63] Ibid.

society, especially if those other members differed significantly from their own created communities of friends and family. We often see some individuals arguing that they would rather their tax dollars not go to people living on social security, insisting that these other people are 'lazy' or 'cheating the system.' Or, more pointedly, it could be argued that if all life-requirements were to be satisfied (i.e., if we were to, instead of having people compete for work in order to have money to satisfy their basic needs, ensure that all members of our society had what they needed regardless of their financial situation), no one would be motivated to work.

This is why McMurtry's seventh life-requirement is central to his overall life-value framework. According to McMurtry, "The unifying human good denoted by (7) links the good of human vocation to what it requires to be just: the burdens of protection or provision of (1) to (6) which must be borne in life-coherent contribution to ensure these human life benefits."[64] The life-requirement of human vocation acts as an indicator of the necessity of individuals contributing back in some way to their social and environmental life-support systems. In a separate article, McMurtry explains the significance of this life-requirement further:

> The good of human vocation is the ultimate life good for human beings in community insofar as it enables and obliges people to contribute to the provision of universal life goods consistent with each's enjoyment of them. The logic of rights and obligations here follows from understanding the nature of these universal human life goods themselves. To enjoy the atmospheric goods of nature obliges one to not degrade but preserve them. To benefit from the bodily goods of clean

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[64] Ibid.

water, nourishing food and waste disposal requires that each contribute to their provision by sustaining taxation and participation. In a similar way, the universal human goods of home and pleasant environment, civil safety and care when ill, and enjoyment of cultural goods are realized in terms of the same logic of human vocation across differences. At the highest level of abstraction, this means that *the vocation of each individual is to do what s/he can that is of value to others and of interest to self. For none to shirk the duty of giving back in to what enables the humanity of each is the defining obligation.*[65]

Benefiting from the contributions of others and from the life-support systems in which we live obligates us, in turn, to contribute back to these systems so that not only can we continue to benefit from them, but so that others can do the same. Some of these obligations or duties that we have to others and, more broadly, our societies and cultures are as simple as *not* harming the life-support systems we depend on. A small part of our duty is, in this way, being mindful of the impact of our actions on others and the life-support systems. Other duties involve a more active contribution where we are obliged to take on work. But this contribution and work is not so limited in scope as the capitalist view of contribution. As I will articulate in more detail in the next chapter, contribution within a life-value framework is simply a way in which we help to satisfy the life-requirements of others and ensure that we preserve the life-support systems on which we depend in ways that are meaningful to ourselves and engage our concretely individual capacities. This need to contribute, or human vocation, is also how we as human beings

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[65] John McMurtry, "The Unseen Global War of Rights Systems And Its Principles of Resolution," in *Philosophy and World Problems*, ed. John McMurtry (United Kingdom: EOLSS Publishers, 2011), 2: 113.

create meaning for ourselves. Not only is human vocation our obligation to the communities and life-support systems we are born out of and depend upon, but it is *the way in which we come to belong and see our own value.* We see very quickly the life-destructive effects on individuals that become isolated within societies and individuals who find themselves unable to find purpose in their lives. Giving back to a community, to other individuals, allows us to create meaning in our own lives and in the lives of those around us. Human vocation, then, is both a unifying motivator for individuals to give back and a vital part of our humanity.

By making explicit human reliance on life-support systems, McMurtry's life-requirements draw our attention directly to human interdependency on nature and other human beings, and the fact that agency itself is something that can be conceived of as being constructed through togetherness. Within a life-value system, we cannot conceive of the satisfaction of life-requirements as simply a 'human versus nature' motif, where human beings struggle to control nature in order to live. We also cannot construct the problem as a 'human versus human' dilemma, where human beings, stuck in harsh and unforgiving landscapes, must fight each other for scarce resources, or a 'human versus society' conflict, where individuals must radically fight against tyranny. Since McMurtry demonstrates the interdependency all living things have with each other, it becomes difficult to justify one versus one conflicts, which ends in a one-sided, life-destructive victory. In the case of nature, human beings are in part responsible for their actions within their environments. We should not simply receive the benefits of a healthy environment, but actively ensure that we care for this environment so it can continue to provide benefits for all. In the case of human interactions, McMurtry draws attention to another form of a life-support system, that of communities. Within a life-value framework, individuals are

understood not only by their particularities, but also as being part of a group. Individuals are not only raised by and grow out of their communities, they help to maintain and grow their communities, in doing so creating their own life's meanings. In this way, individuals and communities exist in an interdependency. Individuals rely on their communities just as communities rely on individuals, and individuals within communities rely directly on each other. This interdependence will become a focal point in the discussion to come.

1.4. Noonan's Life-Requirements

Noonan's list of life-requirements focuses more exclusively on the life-requirements of human beings, giving attention to the complexities of the social aspects of human life. Noonan divides life-requirements into three primary sections: biological, socio-cultural, and temporal. Noonan draws these categories from three dimensions of human life; we are biological organisms, with the potential for social self-conscious agency, and we live for a finite amount of time. In addition, these life-requirements follow McMurtry's criterion, adhering to what constitutes as a need within a life-value system, and expanding on the sentiments demonstrated in McMurtry's initial conception of life-requirements. While not explicitly addressing the environment within the given set of life-requirements, Noonan does stress prior to exploring his list that the implementation and distribution of any and all life-requirements must be done in a sustainable way. He states the following:

> Hence the main concern of life-grounded materialist ethics is the degree to which any social value system promotes or inhibits materially rational choices and materially rational patterns of collective activity. Choice and collective activity are

materially rational when they comprehensively but sustainably satisfy everyone's life-requirements for the sake of enabling the intrinsic value (i.e. goodness) of their lives.[66]

Decisions made within the life-value framework must not only work toward satisfying the life-requirements of all, they must do so in a way that is sustainable for generations to come. It seems clear that satisfying the life-requirements of everyone should not be done in such a way that it actively destroys the natural life-support systems we heavily rely on. However, as capitalism has progressed, it has contributed heavily to climate change, satisfying the needs of the few and actively exploiting the rest, and because of this it seems important to emphasize the need for sustainability. To draw on a common belief of Canada's First Nations peoples, we must not only consider this generation and the next, but act with the next seven generations in mind.

I will address each of Noonan's categories in turn, but I would like to note first that the three in tandem are the conditions by which, according to Noonan, human beings can not only survive, but flourish. Later in this paper I will address potential problematic connotations or extensions that may arise from this understanding of flourishing, but for now I will simply note that for Noonan, to flourish as a human being is to develop one's potential as a socially self-conscious agent in ways that contribute meaningfully to others and the human project. This takes into explicit consideration not only the individual responsibility of one's actions, or one's responsibility to the moral community more broadly, but an extended view of the self as something actively and continuously constructed from a reciprocal relationship to one's community. For one to be a socially

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[66] Noonan, *Materialist Ethics and Life-Value*, 45.

self-conscious agent, one must be not only conscious of oneself, one's identity as well as one's actions in relation to other moral and non-moral agents but must also take into consideration one's individual relationship with the community. When one is *socially self-conscious*, one is aware of one's identity and actions in relation to other individuals as well as in relation to a community that actively enables the individual to live and thrive. One has an awareness of the self as something that is *inherently dependent* on the social environment and structures that one has been raised in and that one necessarily continues to live within. With an understanding of what this level of human flourishing entails, it can be made clear that Noonan's list of life-requirements is broken down in such a way as to illustrate the *necessity* of different aspects of human life. Noonan states that "social self-consciousness has ongoing natural conditions of *existence* and socio-cultural conditions of *development*."[67] Since human beings are biological organisms *and* social creatures, they can be harmed in a multitude of ways. Human beings must have, in order to flourish and live a *human* life, certain life-requirements met that go beyond simply food, water, and shelter. Indeed, as will be explored shortly, one of the necessities of human life is the emotional and care connections that we create among other human beings, as well as a sense of belonging or a role within our communities.

1.4.1. Biological Life-Requirements

The biological category of Noonan's life-requirements cover the necessities that allow for the maintenance of life: food, water, shelter. These biological life-requirements

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[67] Ibid., 60.

also encompass life-requirements that are often overlooked or under-emphasized that enable human beings to have the potential to thrive:

> The body must be hydrated; it must be able to breathe air that contains sufficient oxygen but is free of fatal levels of deadly toxins. It requires a definite caloric value in the food that it eats, as well as protein, minerals, and vitamins in known amounts. It requires clothing and shelter appropriate to the climate and means to travel the distances required to access the life-requirement satisfiers not immediately at hand. Infants and children require special physical protection from the natural and social environment and humans of all ages require protection from violent traumas. Finally, the maintenance of life can require periodic health care relative to the objective disease problems that arise in the course of life. These resources and forms of protection are material requirements of life.[68]

So while food and water are important, Noonan, like McMurtry, notes the importance of clean air and protection from the adverse environmental conditions. In addition, of interest in this list is the attention given to the protection from violent harm and the specific protection children require from environments. While these seem perhaps obvious (one cannot thrive if one is consistently exposed, as a child or an adult, to violence of course), the importance is in how they are being made explicit.

If we take the categories and lists of life-requirements to be a checklist for determining the quality of life of the individuals in any given community or society, any life-requirement explicitly listed must be satisfied. We can look to the list of human rights as an example, where any human right actively denied is a human right violation and

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[68] Ibid., 53.

therefore something in need of correction. What makes Noonan's life-requirements different, however, is that these are not simply things we require access to, but requirements that, by virtue of being *alive* and existing within a particular social group, ought to be provided. As an example, another biological life-requirement that should be emphasized here is the direct requirement of periodic health care. There may be room to debate the extent to which health care ought to be provided for each member in society, but Noonan is maintaining that a basic level of health care is required throughout an individual's life. In contrast to the UDHR, the health care requirement is not something that, by virtue of our humanity, we ought to have affordable access to, but is something that we ought to be provided with. Noonan's point here is not that a society should make available affordable options of food, water, shelter, health care, etc., but that society should *provide* these life-requirements.

This leads into Noonan's second category of life-requirements, since it is the social structures in place that directly impact how resources are distributed. He states that

> All life exists within definite ranges of tolerance, depends on specific environmental conditions, and requires inputs of natural resources. Each factor is affected by the structure of social organization and ruling value system that legitimates that structure. Every human being will eventually die, but thirty thousand children die of preventable causes every day. Hence, the material conditions of life are not only environmental but include the ruling value systems that legitimate certain uses of environmental resources and rule out others.[69]

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[69] Ibid., 52.

Hence a crucial component of the biological category of life-requirements is its connection to the social frameworks that extracts resources from natural life-support systems and distributes these resources to the members of society. Structures that protect the environment, that provide services like health care and housing, are essential components of biological life-requirements that human beings need to survive. These structures, while blending into those outlined in the socio-cultural category of life-requirements, are distinct insofar as they are necessary for the basic survival of human lives. The life-requirements outlined in the next section are equally valuable, but are separate insofar as they contribute to what a *human* life is and to an individual's ability to thrive as a human being.

1.4.2. Socio-Cultural Life-Requirements

Due to the biological *and social* aspects of human lives, Noonan's life-requirements extend beyond what is necessary to keep the human organism alive. It isn't enough to state the importance of obtaining the physical resources needed to satisfy biological life-requirements when these resources are actively inaccessible because of an inability to pay, among other systemic reasons. As Noonan notes, scarcity of resources is no longer an excuse when technology has allowed us to not only produce enough for ourselves, but to quickly and efficiently bring resources to other communities and nations: "today the basic material conditions of life are not a presupposition of ethics, but the first level of life-grounded materialist ethics...the degree to which these life-requirements are satisfied is the most basic content of the good life."[70] This means that,

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[70] Ibid., 53.

at the very least, human beings require access to social institutions that allow them to actively connect with other human beings and share in resources that satisfy mutual life-requirements. Of course, because of our social nature, human beings also require other things to live a *human* life, such as care and education.

1.4.2.1. Meaningful Work

For Noonan, the biological and socio-cultural "side of human life cannot be coherently separated from each other, i.e., because the life-ground of value for human beings is inextricably natural and social."[71] Human beings are necessarily biological and social organisms and, because of this, "the most basic socio-cultural requirement of human life must be a hinge connecting the natural and social sides of our being."[72] This basic socio-cultural requirement is the economic system, which, within a life-value framework, is "the instituted practices through which human beings work on nature for the purpose of ensuring the satisfaction of organic life-requirements."[73]

The economic system connects the natural and social sides of our being human by allowing individuals to find ways in which they can express and enjoy their capacities, but also in ways that enable the satisfaction of the community's life-requirements as a whole. Thus, it is not just the economic system in general that is important to Noonan, but the opportunities the economic system creates for meaningful work or contribution. In this way, economies are more than simply instrumental systems that allow for human beings to access organic life-requirements from the natural life-support systems; they are

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[71] Ibid., 61.
[72] Ibid.
[73] Ibid.

"spaces of interaction within which intrinsically life-valuable cognitive and creative capacities can be developed."[74] The importance and intrinsic value of work is twofold: 1) work allows us to develop our capacities because, in order to help satisfy life-requirements, it requires a degree of "ingenuity and creativity"; 2) work allows us to have a role within our communities. Contribution, in general, is "the way in which our ethical commitments to others' well-being become real in the contributions our particular work makes to the overall society."[75] This giving back, in a sense, is what allows individuals to feel as though they are part of the whole, part of the community in which they live and hence a sense of belonging.

However, work is only intrinsically valuable if it is "expressed and enjoyed as an individually meaningful human vocation that consciously contributes something that others' lives require."[76] Work that is carried out only for the sake of reproducing a particular system may still produce something of instrumental value, but insofar as it fails to directly contribute to the life-value of individuals, it is most likely to be a source of harm; "For any person or group to be reduced in their labouring activity to a mere tool of system-requirements is to be harmed in their human capacity for creative self-realization and productive commitments to the well-being of others."[77] For work to be meaningful, it must enable expression and development of an individual's creative and cognitive capacities. It must also enable a conscious recognition of the worker's contribution toward and role within their community, facilitating a relationship between the individual and the whole in a life-valuable way. The harm here is most evident when we look to highly

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[74] Ibid., 62.
[75] Ibid.
[76] Ibid.
[77] Ibid.

monotonous work taken out of necessity. Work that does little to foster an individual's capacities as a human being or demonstrate the connection between their labour and the benefits to their community as a whole stifles individual development and self-expression and fails to facilitate a broader sense of belonging. Individuals without meaningful work often feel isolated and without purpose, detracting from the life-value of their lives.

1.4.2.2. Care and Meaningful Relationships

Contribution is not limited to labour. The value human beings have for each other extends beyond an individual's work to the emotional connections and relationships we make. Mutual enrichment of each others' lives through care and the development of "the capacity to identify with others we care about" is a necessary part of the social aspects of human life.[78] To develop this capacity is to ensure that the individual's "own good does not form a world apart from their relationship but crucially involves their connection with others."[79] In this way, the good for the self becomes entangled with the good of others, beginning within close relationships and growing out to encompass the broader community. Developing the capacity to care and identify with others is a crucial part of the social component of being a socially self-conscious agent.

This capacity to care stands in contrast to the belief that social interactions stem from a selfish core, that individuals are only social insofar as other people continue to be instrumental to them. An "every person for themselves" motif, which maintains only a dichotomy between winning and losing, is one that, within a life-value framework, is inherently incoherent and life-destructive, serving no life-value. According to Noonan,

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[78] Ibid., 64.
[79] Ibid.

actual zero-sum conflicts would result in the collapse of human social existence. He elaborates:

> If each really treated his own good as private and others only as threats to this good, human collective life would be incapable of the sorts of co-operation and mutual commitment that enable the growth of higher-level human thought and creation. How could anyone teach others what they know, for example, if others are assumed to be competitors who will employ this knowledge to undermine the teacher?[80]

A model for social relationships and structures that is inherently based on competition and individuals trying to 'win' or 'come out on top' is one that quickly dissolves any form of social sharing. Though it may be possible for a system like this to work to some extent, "zero-sum competition as the dominant mode of social relationship must produce over time less rather than more life-value than co-operation and care."[81] Competition as a model for social relationships contributes less to the growth of communities and their individual members than a model based on care because "in competitions there must be losers, and to lose when life-value is at stake is to suffer a diminution of life-value."[82] A model based on caring relations, instead, contributes to an increase of life-value for the community and its members because in a caring relationship, those involved in the relationship are not trying to surpass the others. All members of the relationship are objects of care, and the relationship itself is focused on elevating each member "to a better life-state without the loss of life-value of the one caring."[83] There is no harm done to the

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[80] Ibid.
[81] Ibid.
[82] Ibid.
[83] Ibid., 64-65.

ones actively caring, or the cared for; instead, the life-value of all members of the caring relationship is increased, thereby resulting in no 'losers'.

Caring relationships are important both for the individuals actively being cared for, in the moment, and the ones doing the caring. It is clear to see that the ones being cared for are having their needs met, since care often involves helping the cared-for to access life-requirements they may not be able to attain on their own. The intrinsic value of care is found in the act of caring as well, since the act of caring increases an individual's "own life-value by expanding the number of affirmative connections between themselves and other humans."[84] Care facilitates reciprocity between individuals, increasing the live-value in each of their lives through enabling each other to express and develop their own capacities.

It is clear that we cannot care for everyone in the same way that we care for those within our own circles of friends, family, and small communities. However, this does not detract from the importance of a model of social relationships based on care. Noonan states in response that

> The point is to establish caring relations as the model of human relations...such that when we do encounter others, we encounter them as people about whom we care, and not as threats to be destroyed. The general capacity at issue in this dimension of experience and activity is the capacity to live in reciprocity with others, to care about others as unique and unrepeatable bearers of life, to allow oneself to be so cared for, and thus to govern social relationships, as far as possible, by the goal of expanding mutually enriching forms of interaction.[85]

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[84] Ibid., 65.
[85] Ibid.

It is impossible to give each person at a global scale, or even within the scope of a city, our individual time and care; however, facilitating care relationships within our own small communities, that of our family and friends, and basing a model of social relationships off these reciprocal interactions, allows for us to realize the life-value of strangers. Through healthy care relationships we come to recognize individuals as vastly complex, vulnerable, and "unrepeatable" living beings in need of mutual care. We come to see the contingency of these beings who could have been otherwise, their lives a series of choices that could have been made differently, whose presence in our lives is based on the same contingency, and whose vulnerability and finitude makes that presence indeterminately temporary. In this vulnerability, contingency, and uniqueness unlike anything that has come before or will come after, we recognize the inherent life-value of these beings and, in their care for us we see our own inherent life-value reflected. We do not need to actively try to make friends with each individual in our towns and cities in order to see their life-value, only recognize that they are not a threat, that they are other live-valuable beings that contribute to a system of care that helps to ensure each person's life-requirements are met. In contrast with a capitalist system of competition, which draws up arbitrary rules coercively agreed upon that make all others appear as threats and competitors to a scarce set of resources, a model of social relationships based on care indicates each individual as equally life-valuable, part of a system in which all must contribute to ensure that all members' life-requirements are met, and that each individual has the space to grow in life-valuable ways.

In order to develop this care capacity there are particular life-requirements that must be met, which "can be determined by asking which social-institutions are involved

in the development of a caring personality."[86] Noonan believes that the family, or familial institutions, is this life-requirement, acting as the hinge between what could be said to be human instinct "and the social cultivation of human emotions."[87] Here he makes some important clarifications, stating that though all children need caring and loving structures to be raised in, not all adults need to have children. Second, he makes it apparent that the nuclear family is only one type of family which can help to facilitate the growth and development of a child. Thus family units, within a life-value understanding, are not limited to heterosexual couples: "Human beings do not require a nuclear family in order to develop their capacities for caring, non-exploitative relationships with others, but we do clearly require some form of loving adult care while we are young."[88] The goal is for the child to learn to develop "the capacity to interact with others in a way that demonstrates genuine concern for their self-development," something which can be achieved outside of 'traditional' family structures.[89] A person is not harmed by being raised by a single mother, or by a homosexual couple, but they are harmed by a lack of love and care, especially when they are young, because without this love and care their own capacity to love and care for others is degraded. This degradation of their capacity "entails constant conflict and the social pathologies of violence and indifference to suffering it engenders," thereby harming others as well as the individual.[90]

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[86] Ibid.
[87] Ibid.
[88] Ibid., 66.
[89] Ibid.
[90] Ibid.

1.4.2.3. Education

Where family relationships enable the development of our capacity to love and care for others, education allows us to develop our cognitive and imaginative capacities as we grow as distinct individuals. Here education should be understood broadly as "any institution, method, relationship, or practice through which the cognitive and imaginative powers of the human intellect grow in scope, depth, and rigor of employment."[91] Essentially, education within a life-value framework is not simply what we put children in for a minimum of 18 years of their lives in order for them to be able to get a job; education is a formal structure in which we can develop our human capacities that are not fully developed within caring relationships alone. Hence education within a life-value framework can take many forms, from apprenticeships to higher education, and is not limited to following the structures of western education, such as standardized tests and particular learning outcomes.

What is important is not that individuals learn to complete specific tasks, but that individuals engage in "the richer development and more rigorous employment of the cognitive and imaginative capacities of human social self-consciousness."[92] This distinguishes education from a type of indoctrination because education is meant to do more than assimilate individuals into the "way the world works" by enabling individuals to be able to formulate and answer questions themselves, to "think otherwise than is immediately given in experience."[93] The purpose of education is to enable individuals to be able to contribute to "the creation of new and better forms of social relationship and

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[91] Ibid., 67.
[92] Ibid.
[93] Ibid., 68.

activity," which extends beyond technological innovations: "What matters far more is the creation of novelty of insight that enables the solution of collective problems, the deepening of understanding of our world as an end in itself, and the creation of new forms of beauty."[94] Education's purpose is not to recreate the same world over and over again, but to enable the capacities that allow individuals to change and create new worlds, ultimately for the better. Through education the individual comes to understand the world, ask questions, and create something new, rather than simply doing what they are programmed to do.[95]

For Noonan, any individual without access to education of any kind is harmed in their humanity. He states that to be deprived of an education is to be "deprived of the ability to test the given against the possibly better," which consequently harms an individual's "capacity to think and act in creative and novel ways."[96] This also harms the individual's society, since individuals who are only capable of following a program are unable to expand the society's life-value with new ideas and innovations. Education as a life-requirement is, in a significant way, what keeps individuals and societies from stagnating.

1.4.2.4. Aesthetic Experience and Enjoyment

The life-requirement of aesthetic experience and enjoyment is one that stems from the ability of human beings to see beauty in things and to experience that beauty as an intrinsic value and not simply reducing it to its instrumentality. According to Noonan,

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[94] Ibid.
[95] Ibid., 69.
[96] Ibid.

human beings' "aesthetic capacity is an opening of human sensibility and imagination beyond their original food-and-mate-finding function."[97] This capacity has made it so that human beings can experience the world both in its physical and aesthetic realities, broadening the scope of human experience and understanding, which "enriches our lives insofar as it frees thinking and activity from calculating the ways in which things may be useful to us."[98] When we experience the beauty in things, we recognize the intrinsic value in it without trying to assimilate it or transform it for our own purposes: "To see the beauty in something is to let it be."[99]

For this life-requirement to be satisfied, it requires more than just an education to develop the aesthetic capacity. Our experience and enjoyment of beauty requires beauty to be in the world, but for beauty to be in the world it must also be produced, maintained, and preserved. According to Noonan, social policy ought to be structured so that it invests "in the free (i.e., non-commercial) development of art in the widest possible sense," and that there must be a "social commitment to the preservation and creation of beautiful natural spaces."[100] Recognizing this life-requirement in social policy and institutions is necessary since the arts and natural spaces are often heavily affected by social structures. Social policy that takes on a use-value approach to art and natural spaces only sees those things in terms of their instrumental value, thereby putting the arts at risk of under-funding and the environment at risk of being destroyed altogether.

While the individual deprived of this life-requirement may not be harmed physically, and will be able to continue living, deprivation of the development, experience,

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[97] Ibid., 71.
[98] Ibid.
[99] Ibid.
[100] Ibid.

and enjoyment of this capacity is, like the deprivation of all socio-cultural life-requirements, to harm the individual's humanity. To be rendered unable to see the beauty and the intrinsic value in something is to be reduced to only seeing the world in its physical and use-value state, something which reduces an individual's overall experience of the world as a human being. And, as Noonan notes, art has persisted throughout history; "even in the most extreme forms of oppressive social domination" art has persisted, demonstrating "the essential connection between our humanity and our aesthetic capacity."[101]

1.4.2.5. Free and Equal Participation in Government

Noonan's final socio-cultural life-requirement is the need to be able to participate in the government of collective life. He explains that because social institutions have a large influence over and impact on our daily lives, it is necessary for us to have free and equal participation in deciding how these institutions are structured and run. We see the necessity of this life-requirement when we look at the harm that can be, and has historically been, caused: "The general form of harm to which people are liable as socially self-conscious agents is to be reduced to the status of tools or instruments."[102] If people are left out of the collective decision making process, they are forced to comply with the rules they had no hand in creating, put in place without complaint, and easily become tools for the ruling value system that organizes the social institutions. To phrase this in a positive way, individuals' agency is better expressed and developed when they can

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[101] Ibid., 73.
[102] Ibid.

participate "in the ongoing process of determining the regulating principles of collective life."[103]

The versatility of application of this life-requirement may not seem readily apparent, since it points to a type of democracy for it to be satisfied. However, it is not the case that the only need-satisfier must be the liberal, capitalist democracy that we currently see in place in many countries globally (and even these instances of liberal democracy have variations to them). In fact, Noonan maintains that these types of democracies are only partial realizations of the life-requirement for participation in governing and organizing of collective life. He states that liberal capitalist democracies in place are "not sufficient because they have evolved on the basis of separating the institutions of government (political democracy) from the basic means of life-maintenance and the economic institutions that convert these means into social wealth."[104] Even though a liberal democracy attempts to include the public in collective decisions, it does not do so in a way that actively seeks to satisfy the life-requirements of all citizens under said democracy or structure social institutions in life-valuable ways.

As it stands, we currently do not see more than partial satisfaction of this form of life-requirement and thus have no operating ideal form of government that is intrinsically life-valuable. Still, we have grounds on which we can begin "to work together to ensure that all social institutions are governed by policies and laws that ensure the ongoing sustainable, and comprehensive satisfaction of the requirements of life and human life."[105] We see in our societies smaller collective organizing and participation, as Noonan

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[103] Ibid.
[104] Ibid., 74.
[105] Ibid., 75

points out, in unions and regulatory boards, "which at least acknowledge, if not fully realize, the principle that all affected by an institution ought to participate in its governance."[106]

1.4.3. Temporal Requirement of Free Human Life

Noonan's final category of life-requirements is a temporal life-requirement, which is derived from the foundational assertion that human life is finite, and that this finitude, the mortality of all life, "is itself an essential condition of life's being recognized as valuable."[107] That is, life-value understands that human beings situate themselves and frame the content of their lives in relation to their own mortality and vulnerability. Since life is finite, the question of how we ought to organize and fill the content of our lives is one of high importance and prompts life-value ethic's "inquiry into the relationship between the extent of life-time, the organization of life-time in existing society, and the free expression and enjoyment of life-valuable capacities."[108] This inquiry leads, according to Noonan, to the conclusion that there is a third, temporal life-requirement on which human life and freedom depends.

This temporal life-requirement includes not only "sufficient life-time for the comprehensive development of the intrinsic live-value of our capacities," but also "an experience of life-time as an open matrix of different possibilities of expression of those capacities."[109] In order for an individual's temporal life-requirement to be satisfied, they must not only have the life-span to develop their own life-valuable capacities, but they

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[106] Ibid., 74.
[107] Ibid., 75.
[108] Ibid., 76.
[109] Ibid.

must be able to develop these capacities of their own choosing, their own way, and in their own time.

Life-value ethics maintains that death is an inescapable part of life, however, and sees the body's natural mortality as a frame in which things have meaning and individuals define themselves. Death also allows for the cycle of bringing new human beings into existence in order to enjoy life-value. Hence

> For human beings, the problem of a fulfilling life is thus less a problem of endlessly extending the quantity of life-time and more a problem of the structure of life-time within the societies they inhabit and the quality of the experience of those structures.[110]

What this entails, exactly, is that without a certain amount of openness to the ways in which individuals organize their lives and development, human beings experience a degree of harm in their freedom and thus humanity. According to Noonan, "people can be harmed even when their lives are rich in expressed capacities if those capacities are expressed within coercive routines."[111] Harm is incrementally caused by the degree to which individuals' capacities are left undeveloped, unexpressed, or expressed within prescribed routines outside of their uncoerced influence. This is especially important to note since the biggest form of coercion seen in capitalist societies is the necessity to spend most of one's life working as a matter of survival. In order to freely express one's capacities, to experience free time, one must be able to freely choose not only how and when one's capacities are expressed, but to freely choose to work.[112]

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[110] Ibid.

[111] Ibid., 78.

[112] Ibid., 80.

Noonan goes into detail about how the experience of free time differs from that of the money-value system's understanding of time as money, but for the current discussion it is important to note only that the experience of free time opens further possibilities for human beings. The experience of free time within a life-value system does not only allow individuals to do something rather than something else, but it opens up the possibility "of being able to do in the present what we decide is most life-valuable, unconstrained by temporal pressure generated by the ruling value system over our activity."[113] When we understand our actions within a life-value framework, how we spend our time becomes understood in light of what would be the most life-valuable: "to act in ways whose intrinsic present value at the same time opens up possibilities for even richer activity in the future."[114] By acting in ways that contribute to richer life-valuable activities in the future, individuals are not only free to express their capacities in meaningful ways, they are able to expand their own possibilities. Thus, harm to one's temporal life-requirement becomes a harm to one's individual freedom and ability to grow in life-valuable ways.

1.5. Life-Requirements Explored

I would like to make clear that both accounts of life-requirements share in the acknowledgement of the same life-requirements. While Noonan's account of life-requirements focuses on those of human beings and makes explicit the intricacies of human social and political lives, McMurtry makes it explicit in his account of life-requirements that life-value ethics, in its theoretical framework and application, must take into account wider and more inclusive ranges of life. Noonan's version follows from

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[113] Ibid.
[114] Ibid., 81.

McMurtry's as an attempt to use its insights for the specific purpose of criticizing the specific problems of liberal-democratic-capitalist society. In this way, it is in life-value ethics' very nature to be constantly evolving and critically evaluating itself as well as any and all ruling value systems. So while I will take a preference in terms of whose work I will be primarily drawing from when it comes to an account of life-requirements, I am not concerned with objections of the universality of life-value ethics, insofar as these objections point at the changes between McMurtry and Noonan's accounts. Life-value ethics, as a *concrete* or *historical* universal system draws its universal applicability from the fact that it grounds itself in life and makes explicit its ever-growing awareness of the scope and brevity of life itself. It could be argued that Noonan's list of life-requirements takes into account the need for a shifting scope and the goal of broader inclusivity into account since Noonan is exploring the life-requirements of human beings and their societies explicitly. While it is not his intent to exclude the needs of animals and the environment, for his work in social and political philosophy it was necessary to compile a list of life-requirements that demonstrates the intricacies and vulnerabilities of human life. Hence, Noonan's work, while significantly different than McMurtry's at times, falls into the same framework of life-value ethics as construed by McMurtry, making both philosophers' works consistent within the framework and with each other.

There are benefits from using either McMurtry's list of life-requirements or Noonan's list that takes a narrower scope. However, while I believe that both lists have their particular uses, Noonan's list of life-requirements, because of its focus on social and political concerns of human beings, is more pertinent to the concerns of this project. While my arguments will, at times, discuss issues of sustainability and a growing concern for the life-support systems we all depend upon—issues and concerns which, I believe, are

emphasized to a larger extent in McMurtry's list of life-requirements—I will primarily draw from Noonan's list of life-requirements. Noonan's detailed list of human life-requirements takes into account the necessity of social and political action in the face of late-capitalism, a system that, at its core, is inherently life-destructive. For my purposes, unless stated otherwise, all uses of the term 'life-requirements' will be referring to those included in Noonan's conception.

The social political aspects of Noonan's work help to illuminate the ways in which disabled people can be harmed. If spaces are inaccessible, disabled people become unable to fully participate in their communities and cultures. This means that they are not able to access their socio-cultural life-requirements and are thereby harmed. For example, if a voting station is inaccessible, a disabled person becomes unable to participate in their democratic society. A disabled person who is unable to participate freely and equally in their government, which influences the structure of their daily life, is unable to give voice to their own specific circumstances. This makes them susceptible to further harm since they are unable to draw attention to any circumstances that may already be threatening their life-requirements. Some governments, to point to a more specific example, may cut disability funding where others may maintain or increase that funding. A disabled person who relies on this funding ought to have a say in what happens with the distribution of those financial resources. If they are unable to participate in the voting process because of a lack of accessibility, not only is the disabled person being left out of the democratic process, their voice in the matters that directly affect them is being erased. In the next chapter, I will go over the necessary disability theory before demonstrating how a life-value approach to matters of disability can give us better insight into accessibility and accommodation problems.

Chapter 2: Life-Value and Disability

2.1. The Medical and Social Models of Disability

The society in which we live is not built with disabled people in mind. Life-value ethics provides a necessary framework that allows us to analyze and critique the social structures in place that affect disabled people. However, life-value ethics can also help us to understand different aspects of disability, and the application of life-value ethics to matters of disability helps to widen the scope of this approach. I will discuss the importance of a life-value approach to disability in the third section of this chapter. In order to understand the application of life-value philosophy to matters of disability, we need to first understand prevalent disability theory and disability activism.

The terminology of disability studies, the philosophy of disability, and disability activism is ever evolving. Given the relatively recent nature of, at the very least, the philosophy of disability, many concepts are bound to change after this paper has been written and submitted. For this reason, I will not dwell on going through an extensive list of terms related to disability. For now, it is important to go over how disability is largely defined or understood within the broad field of disability. This chapter will primarily cover three main models of disability: the medical model, the social model, and the value-neutral model of disability. I will spend more time going over the value-neutral model of disability because it is one of the newest disability models to come up within the last five years; however, I will also address some criticisms of the social and medical models.

There are two main models discussed regarding disability and the disability civic movement: the medical model of disability and the social model. The medical model defines disability as the impairment of the individual, something that must be fixed or cured in order to return the individual to normalcy. In contrast, the social model views disability as being the result of the relationship between an individual's impairment and disabling aspects of a given society. I will explore each of these models before discussing a newer model, the value-neutral model, that I aim to use throughout the rest of this project.

The medical model of disability is centred exclusively on the individual. Disability under this model "is regarded as an individual misfortune, and people with disabilities are assumed to suffer primarily from physical and/or mental abnormalities that medicine can and should treat."[115] There are not necessarily explicit proponents of the medical model, but in many ways dominant beliefs within capitalist society play a role in perpetuating beliefs that are collectively referred to as the medical model. Beliefs around normalcy and productivity in general often contribute to the idea that all disability must be cured, or the individual must return to a semi-normal state in order to be independent and return to work. Focus on independence, in the radical sense of being dependent on no one, and having to fit within ideals of productivity often influence the medical field in general. This is not to say that disabled people do not want independence of any kind; as I will discuss later on, disability activism often aims at independence through changes in social structures. The problem lies in the idea that this independence should come from medical intervention alone and that the problem of disability is a problem only for the

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[115] Susan Wendell, "Unhealthy Disabled: Treating Chronic Illnesses as Disabilities," in *The Disability Studies Reader*, ed. Lennard J. Davis, 4th ed. (New York: Routledge, 2013), 161.

disabled person. Sarah Goering explains that since the standard approach to disability "involves viewing it as a problem that exists in a person's body," disabled people are "thought to require treatment or care to fix the disability to approximate normal functioning, or perhaps as a last measure, to help the individual adapt and learn to function despite the disability."[116] The result is, as previously stated, that the disability becomes the individual's sole concern, thereby leaving out potential social aspects that contribute to any exclusion or difficulties the disabled individual may face.

The consequences or effects of the medical model are found in a variety of places. First, "the medical model of disability still today structures too many cases of patient-practitioner communication.[117]" A large focus of medical practice is on curing the disabled person or returning them to some form of normal functioning. While a doctor is meant to help alleviate and, in some cases, attempt to cure health concerns, there are many cases in which efforts of medical professionals ignore or undervalue the testimony of their disabled patients. According to Reynolds, the understanding or interpretation of disability can affect how we communicate about disability. For Reynolds, it is likely that "a vast range of medical thinking is based not in its lived experience, but in misguided aversion to and fear of it."[118] Many of our interpretations of disability are guided by fear of disability rather than the actual lived experiences of disabled people. The consequence is, then, that "a medical practitioner who uncritically conceptualizes disability will actively...contribute to disability stigma and to the epistemic and practical injustices that

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[116] Sarah Goering, "Rethinking Disability: The Social Model of Disability and Chronic Disease," *Current Reviews in Musculoskeletal Medicine* 8,no. 2 (2015): 134. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12178-015-9273-z

[117] Joel Michael Reynolds, "'I'd Rather Be Dead than Disabled'—the Ableist Conflation and the Meanings of Disability," *Review of Communication* 17, no.3 (2017): 150. https://doi.org/10.1080/15358593.2017.1331255

[118] Ibid.

people with disabilities have historically and still face today."[119] By attempting only to cure the disability, the medical practitioner may ignore the social aspects that contribute to the disability, and/or may assume that a disabled person who has not been able to return to a relatively 'normal' life is simply not doing enough 'to get better.'

Second, when it comes to the job market and employment, the person's impairment is seen as the only "negative influence on the position of [the] disabled person in the labour market."[120] Any physical or social barriers that are constructed against the disabled person, such as an inaccessible workplace or stigma, are often not fully considered when attempting to address the disabled person's unemployment. The disabled person is required "to adapt in order to 'function' within the labour market,' the consequence of not adapting being 'dependency, lower productivity and legitimated exclusion.'"[121] A high value is placed on productivity and work within a capitalist system, often conflating a person's value or worth with their productivity. In combination with the medical model that regards "disabled people as 'having something wrong with them' and hence the source of the problem,"[122] a disabled person's unemployment is equated with their own laziness or inability to perform certain tasks. The problem, whatever it may be linked to, is dependent on the disabled person to solve or else remain unemployed. However, if we understand these problems affecting disabled people through a life-value approach, we come to understand that the solution to problems of accessibility and

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[119] Ibid., 151.

[120] Cecilie Bingham, Linda Clarke and Elisabeth Michielsens, "Towards a Social Model Approach? British and Dutch Disability Policies in the Health Sector Compared," *Personnel Review* 42, no. 5 (2013): 614. https://doi.org/10.1108/PR-08-2011-0120

[121] Mike Oliver, "The Social Model in Action: If I had a hammer," in *Implementing the Social Model of Disability: Theory and Research*," ed. Colin Barnes and Geof Mercer (Leeds: The Disability Press, 2004), 20.

[122] Ibid., 20.

accommodation is not technological miracles, but public investment in accessible spaces. If more places were fully accessible, more disabled people would be able to work or participate in society, thereby satisfying their life-requirements.

As a final example, it is important to note that even government assistance programs often subscribe, in part or whole, to a medical model of disability. Smith-Carrier et al state that though the definition of disability under the Canadian Survey on Disability (CSD) "recognizes the fluidity and mutability of impairment, social assistance policy in Ontario typically reinforces dichotomized understandings of dis/ability, sick/well."[123] While certain definitions of disability recognized by Canadian officials recognize that impairment, and via impairment disability, are not simply a matter of being sick or not, policies like the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) "use the traditional medical model of disability to distinguish biologically driven impairments in the body that render individuals employable or unemployable."[124] Instead of looking at the individual's situation holistically, taking in both their impairment(s) and their social situation, ODSP relies entirely on the degree to which the individual's impairment renders them able or unable to be employed. Hence there may be some disabled people in need of ODSP due to social factors (such as an inability to access places of employment) that may be denied ODSP due to their perceived ability to work. These individuals, by ODSP standards, are not considered 'disabled enough' to work.

What these examples contribute to is a social exclusion of disabled people. The medical model, according to Steven R. Smith

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[123] Tracy Smith-Carrier, Don Kerr, Juyan Wang, Dora M. Y. Tam and Siu Ming Kwok, "Vestiges of the Medical Model: A Critical Exploration of the Ontario Disability Support Program," *Disability & Society* 32, no. 10 (2017): 1573. https://doi.org/10.1080/09687599.2017.1359495
[124] Ibid.

...in assuming disabled people should be excluded and 'cared for' because of their medical condition, although it meets certain needs arising from impairments, in the process, undermines their rights to social participation and activity, so maintaining their socially caused 'passive dependency.'[125]

That is, under the medical model the disabled person is conceived as needing care until the person is able to return to 'normal functioning' and therefore return to society. Until this point, disabled people are considered dependent, "defined as targets or 'objects' of activity with their 'special rights' being met through the 'care' offered by the welfare state and charity."[126] This highlights the importance of the push for independence by disabled activists: disabled people want to be active in their societies. Disabled people, insofar as they are conceived of as passive citizens, or inactive citizens because of their specific impairments, are unable to be fully active participants in society. This conception contributes to a lack of social development (that is, the removal of participation barriers) that would otherwise enable disabled people to become active citizens.

Since the medical model focuses exclusively on an individualistic view of disability, it ignores potential social factors that contribute to the formation of disability. Susan Wendell maintains that a focus on "[p]revention and cure both focus public attention on the medical model, which can lead us to ignore the social conditions" that factor into disability.[127] She continues, stating that "given the history of eugenics, there is reason to be skeptical about whether prevention and cure are intended primarily to prevent

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[125] Steven R. Smith, "Citizenship ad Disability: Incommensurable Lives and Well-Being," *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy* 16, no. 3 (2013): 406. https://doi.org/10.1080/13698230.2013.795708
[126] Ibid., 407.
[127] Susan Wendell, "Unhealthy Disabled: Treating Chronic Illnesses as Disabilities," in *The Disability Studies Reader*, ed. Lennard J. Davis, 5th ed. (New York: Routledge, 2017), 160.

suffering or to eliminate 'abnormalities' and 'abnormal' people."[128] Thus the medical model not only contributes to a lack of social development and the social inclusion of disabled people, the medical model could arguably be seen as actively contributing to or carrying on the notion that disabled people ought not to exist.

In contrast to the medical model, the social model constitutes disability as the social exclusion of people with impairments. This conception of the social model began in the UK, emerging "from the intellectual and political arguments of the Union of Physically Impaired Against Segregation (UPIAS)" whose aim was to create "opportunities for people with impairments to participate fully in society, to live independently, to undertake productive work, and to have full control over their own lives."[129] This group inspired a need "to create an academic course which would promote and develop disability politics," which led to Mike Oliver coining "the term 'social model of disability' in 1983."[130]

Mike Oliver states that the goal of the social model was to shift the "target for professional intervention and practice" away from people with impairments toward society.[131] According to Tom Shakespeare, there are two "key elements of the social model: the distinction between disability (social exclusion) and impairments (physical limitation) and the claim that disabled people are an oppressed group."[132] Impairment here "relates to an embodied difference in terms of the functioning of the body or

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[128] Ibid.
[129] Tom Shakespeare, "The Social Model of Disability," in *The Disability Studies Reader*, ed. Lennard J. Davis, 5th ed. (New York: Routledge, 2017), 196.
[130] Ibid.,197.
[131] Oliver, 19-20.
[132] Shakespeare, 197.

brain."[133] Instead of focusing on impairments like the medical model does, "the social model concerns itself with the real conditions of disablism,"[134] the social and structural barriers that exclude those with impairments. These barriers may range from a lack of physical access to spaces, such as a building with no ramp or elevator, to policies in place that may make it difficult for disabled people to be included in, say, the workplace. The social model brings to light the social conditions by which disabled people are oppressed, emphasizing that "these conditions are material, as real as stone, hard-hitting and potentially fatal."[135] This position is very similar to the way in which life-value ethics looks at the oppressive social structures in place. It is not the life-requirements of marginalized groups that are the problem; the problem exists with the systems in place that deny these groups access to those life-requirements.

Returning to the example of employment, we can see how the social model conceives of the issue in a different light than the medical model. Oliver states that "government policies are, by and large, targeted at equipping impaired individuals for the unchanging world of work rather than changing the way work is carried out in order that more people might access it."[136] This results in a great number of resources "currently spent on employment rehabilitation, training, and so on...rather than on removing the barriers to work or on attempting to prevent the labour market from operating in a non-discriminatory manner."[137] The focus on the individual, on trying to mould said individual to fit what is considered to be the typical or 'normal' employee, directs attention away

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[133] Dan Goodley, *Dis/Ability Studies: Theorising Disablism and Ableism* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 7.
[134] Ibid.
[135] Ibid.
[136] Oliver, 22.
[137] Ibid.

from "problems cause by disabling environments, barriers and cultures."[138] The social model, in contrast

> ...refuses to see specific problems in isolation from the totality of disabling environments: hence the problem of unemployment does not just entail intervention in the social organization of work and the operation of the labour market but also in areas such as transport, education and culture.[139]

Barriers disabled people face when it comes to employment are not located simply in a personal inability to complete employer-mandated tasks. If the person is unable to get to work due to inaccessible public (or private) transportation, it is unlikely that any type of employment 'rehabilitation' centred on the individual will enable the disabled person to go to work. If the problem is located in the transportation available to the individual—for example, the only accessible transportation available to the disabled person often makes them late for work and thus makes them an unreliable employee in the eyes of the employer—no amount of employment rehabilitation will help the disabled person to find and hold a job for the long-term. The solution to this type of problem lies in modifying, in the case of transportation, the built environment to be accessible (and reliable) for disabled individuals for them to have the opportunity to work. Only by accessing the problem from a social perspective, like the social model does, or from a life-value approach can we see that the problem is broader than simply individual impairments. As I will continue to discuss later on, when we publicly invest in accessibility, we expand the life-value of those within our society not only by allowing disabled people to fully participate in society, but also by creating spaces that are beneficial to more than just

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[138] Ibid., 21
[139] Ibid.

disabled people. Limited public resources are better spent on solutions that expand the life-value of all members of the community.

The social model maintains that disability exists as a result of barriers that society constructs that keep disabled people from fully participating in social situations. The physical aspect of disability, impairment, is separate from the social oppression. Without these societal barriers, disability would not exist, but there would remain impairment. Thus, the difference between the social and medical models of disability comes down to a simple dichotomy: within the medical model, the problem is the individual; with the social model, the problem is in the society. In summary, "[w]hile the medical model requires 'treatment' for improvement, the social model requires 'political action.'"[140]

Still, the social model has had many critics. I will not go over the criticisms of the social model in detail, but one of the most prevalent criticisms is that the social model does not (or cannot) account for the need for medical intervention. Specifically, the social model explicitly distances itself from the need for any kind of medicalization of the disabled body, and those who need medical intervention are often left out of political discussion. Wendell notes

> Because disability activists have worked hard to resist medicalization and promote the social model of disability, activists sometimes feel pressured to downplay the realities of fluctuating impairment or ill health.[141]

Wendell discusses the case of those with chronic illness, whose level of impairment can fluctuate on a day to day basis, and who often need medical intervention in order to maintain their daily lives. To move away from the medical model that only views the

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[140] Cecilie Bingham, Linda Clarke and Elisabeth Michielsens, 615.
[141] Wendell 2013, 164.

disabled person in an isolated, tragedy-centred way, the disability civic movement, using the social model, is criticized to have also ignored the medical needs of who Wendell calls the "unhealthy disabled." Using the social model, the disability civic movement can claim that once all social barriers against them have been removed, disabled people can freely and fully participate in society. But this would only be the case for the "healthy disabled," those whose "physical conditions and functional limitations are relatively stable and predictable."[142] So in an effort to de-medicalize disability and use the social model to draw attention to the social issues of accessibility and accommodation, disabled people whose lives are heavily medicalized have been ignored.

Despite the social model's shortcomings, it is still in a way "simple...and effective."[143] As Shakespeare notes, the social model "has been effective *politically* in building the social movement of disabled people" and has been effective in identifying, thereby removing, social barriers.[144] It has also been effective in terms of "building a positive sense of collective identity."[145]

However, the social model from the UK is a particular social construction model. Shelley Tremain notes that there are two senses of the social model that are often conflated: 1) a broadly understood type of approach to disability and 2) the specific UK social model.[146] As Janine Owens states, these different understandings or conceptions of a social model of disability originate "from similar time frames, but from diverse

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[142] Ibid., 163.
[143] Shakespeare,198.
[144] Ibid.
[145] Ibid.
[146] Shelley Tremain, *Foucault and Feminist Philosophy of Disability* (United States of America: University of Michigan Press, 2017), 9.

historical, intellectual and political positions, creating contrasting interpretations.[147]" However, it is important to keep in mind that "all forms of the social model of disability is the issue of participation...in disabled people's everyday lives and health care or in policies"[148] and that they bring a social element into the conception of disability.

Some disability activists and scholars argue that neither the medical model nor the social model adequately account for all the experiences encountered by the disability community. While the medical model ignores the social and oppressive aspects of disability, rendering disability an isolated, individual affair, the UK social model ignores the real limitations that come with disability. Other social construction models following the UK social model are likely to encounter the same or similar shortcomings and criticisms. If none of the prominent models accurately account for the experiences and struggles of disabled people within a capitalist society, then there is a growing concern about the overall effectiveness of the disability civic movement overall. How we conceptualize disability, the experiences of being disabled, and the problems within a disablist/ableist society ultimately feeds into how we politically address those problems. The medical model and the social model taken individually are problematic, since medical intervention is necessary, but should not be provided at the exclusion of social investment in accessibility. Both models taken together through a life-value synthesis may have something to contribute to the problems created both by impairments and a society that is not built for disabled people.

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[147] Janine Owens, "Exploring the Critiques of the Social Model of Disability: The Transformative Possibility of Arendt's Notion of Power," *Sociology of Health & Illness* 37, no. 3 (2015): 387. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9566.12199

[148] Ibid., 388.

While the criticisms of the medical and social models of disability illustrate different components of the experiences of disability, none of them adequately create a unified conception of disability. It may not be possible to create such a unified conception of disability without potential problems arising from the conceptions themselves. Still, as I will detail in the next section, Elizabeth Barnes attempts to unify disability under her value-neutral model which conceives of disability as a mere-difference. I outline her model in its own section not only because of its novelty, having been recently published in her book *The Minority Body*, but also because of its potential for being a model of disability that can best influence, and be influenced by, life-value ethics. While her conception of disability is heavily flawed, there is merit to certain aspects of her model.

2.2. The Value-Neutral Model of Disability

What the social model and its variants seem to get right is that there is a social component to disability that cannot be ignored. Unlike the medical model, the social constructivist accounts of disability can explain the cultural creation of disability, what it means to be disabled or abled according to a given society, as well as advocate for political change when it comes to the oppression of disabled people. This is in contrast with the medical model which can, at best, advocate for better health care and treatment options for disabled people. As we saw in the previous section, however, a social constructivist model is inadequate insofar as it ignores the physical aspects of disability. To quote Wendell, "some unhealthy disabled people, as well as some healthy people with disabilities, experience physical or psychological burdens that no amount of social justice

can eliminate."[149] We cannot advocate for social change when it comes to matters of disability unless we acknowledge the real physical and social conditions that affect the lives of disabled people.

However, the social model makes a necessary distinction between what Noonan refers to as intrinsic and extrinsic limitations. I will discuss the distinction between the two in more detail in the next section, but it can be summarized as follows: intrinsic limitations are the limitations we face as human beings, which impairment falls into, whereas extrinsic limitations are oppressive forces that put constraints on human life. Insofar as the social model distinguishes between the (intrinsic) impairments of disability and the (extrinsic) inaccessible social structures, its conception of disability is in line with a life-value framework. Still, the social model places so much emphasis on the social aspects of disability that it has been criticized to have ignored the real physical limitations that disability presents. For this reason, I believe that a synthesis between the social and medical models of disability is necessary. Disability is both an intrinsic limitation via impairment that, especially in the case of chronic illness, may require periodic or frequent medical intervention; disability also involves an interaction with external social structures that are not built with disabled people in mind and thus require social and political changes in order to make them accessible to disabled people. I believe that the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic limitations presents a distinction that is valuable to the social model's conception of disability and as such adhere to this conception for the remainder of this project.

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[149] Wendell, 162.

For Barnes, disability can be considered to be a mere difference; that is, disability is not inherently bad or good because whether it is bad or good depends on what it is combined with. This is, according to Barnes, much like other minority identity categories. In line with the social model, a mere-difference view of disability holds that disability is not itself a defect and that much of the negative aspects that come with disability extend from the social environments that disabled people must interact with—environments that are rarely built, initially, for disabled people. What makes disability especially interesting for Barnes is how people have come to socially and politically organize themselves around this category. Since I am not interested in her ontology of disability, preferring a synthesis of the social and medical models of disability, I will not cover Barnes's conception of disability in this section. Rather, I am interested in the way she rejects the idea that being disabled is necessarily bad and how this rejection helps us overcome the medicalized belief that the only way to fully realize life-value is to eliminate disability. In the next section, I will return to life-value to show how it can build on this key insight of Barnes.

Barnes is against what she calls the bad-difference view of disability, which is the view that disability can only ever be a bad thing. Since disability and discourse around disability exist in a social context, one "in which disabled people face profound barriers, stigma, and prejudice," the bad-difference view of disability could only be obviously true if "disability would still be bad-difference even in the absence of such prejudices."[150] This is not to say that the mere-difference view holds that, like the social model, disability is only bad because of its social context. Disability can, and often does, involve "the loss of intrinsic goods or capabilities."[151] The mere-difference view simply holds that disability is

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[150] Barnes, 71.
[151] Ibid.,56.

not "*merely* a loss or a lack,"[152] that there may be *good* things about disability, and that a significant portion of the negative aspects of disability extend out of social contexts. This does not mean that there is no lack or loss involved in disability, only that disability is more complex than a mere lack or loss. Since our perceptions of disability are framed by these social contexts, we should resist automatically adopting a bad-difference view of disability. Our intuitions about disability as a bad-difference are likely to be intuitions "about something that is a subject of prejudice and stigma."[153] If disability is something that is highly prejudiced and stigmatized, we should, cautions Barnes, "have good reason to think our intuitions about disability aren't going to be particularly reliable, and aren't going to be a good groundwork on which to construct a theory of disability."[154]

One of the positions of the bad-difference view of disability is that even in a world without ableism, where disabled people were fully accepted, "it would still be the case that for any given disabled person x and an arbitrary non-disabled person y, such that x and y are in relevantly similar personal and socio-economic circumstances, it is *likely* that x has a lower level of well-being than y in virtue of x's disability."[155] As stated above, we can still assume under the mere-difference view of disability that disability can be in part bad for one's well-being. There are physical limitations that affect disabled people's lives in ways that don't affect non-disabled people's lives. It is possible that a disabled person's well-being will not be as high as that of a non-disabled person. That doesn't mean that disability is inherently bad for you, or that disabled people are always worse off *by virtue of* their disability. When non-disabled people make assumptions about disabled people's

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[152] Ibid., 57.
[153] Ibid.,72.
[154] Ibid.
[155] Ibid., 60.

lives, they are coming not only from a place of inexperience, but from a position influenced by prejudice and stigma, so any assumptions we make about disability are likely to also be influenced. We have empirical evidence to suggest that the intuitions of non-disabled people about disabled lives are largely incorrect. According to Barnes, "there is a vast body of evidence that suggests that non-disabled people are extraordinarily bad at predicting the effects of disability on *perceived* well-being."[156] That is, non-disabled people tend to think that disability has a large negative effect on disabled people and believe that, consequently, disabled people view their own well-being as being substantially worse off. The testimony of a large portion of disabled people suggests, however, this is not the case: "Even in our actual, very non-ideal world, disabled people routinely report high levels of life satisfaction and it is increasingly common...for disabled people to say that their disabilities were something they value and would not change about themselves."[157] A large factor in a disabled person's perceived well-being and happiness is dependent on social contexts. Social factors "like family support, social integration, and accessible employment are more strongly correlated than 'severity' of disability to at least perceived well-being."[158] Hence the form of the bad-difference view as stated above is likely to be false if we hold that social factors play a more significant role than a person's impairments.

False assumptions non-disabled people have about disability extend into what non-disabled people believe disabled people, particularly disabled activists, want. Many believe that all disabled people must want a cure for their disability. Yet disability activists

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[156] Ibid., 71.
[157] Ibid.,100.
[158] Ibid.

are fighting for more than just a cure. Many disabled activists advocate for increased research on different disabilities, but that research is not necessarily geared towards a cure. Barnes gives an example: "What many people want, [disability activist] Hershey argued, is to live with their disabilities for longer and with better adaptive technology— not to have a magic bullet that turns disabled bodies into non-disabled bodies."[159] If we listen to the testimony of disabled people, we are exposed to stories of people who value their experiences with disability. The mere-difference view of disability "can maintain that the very same thing that causes you to lose out on some goods (unique to disability) allows you to participate in other goods (perhaps unique to disability)."[160] Barnes brings up the example of the Deaf community. The ability to hear can still be considered an intrinsic good, even under the mere-difference view. So becoming Deaf or being born Deaf can be viewed as lacking an intrinsic good, the ability to hear. But being Deaf is not simply a lack: "There are other goods, perhaps other intrinsic goods…experienced by Deaf people and not by hearing people."[161] An example of one of these goods is "the unique experience of language had by those whose first language is signed rather than spoken language."[162] This is a unique experience that, especially those born Deaf, share in. So Deafness can be conceived of as a lack, but being Deaf creates new possibilities that those with hearing cannot have.

Intuitions about disability being inherently bad, or intuitions about what disabled people *must* want, stem from a normative approach to bodies and a highly medicalized view of disability. Disability can be conceived of as partially a lack of an ability, and many

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[159] Ibid., 76.
[160] Ibid., 57.
[161] Ibid.
[162] Ibid.

disabilities entail the lack of abilities we can value as intrinsically good. What Barnes is concerned about is the jump we make from valuing a certain ability to assuming that "'those without this ability are worse off—at least with respect to that ability.'"[163] For Barnes, this jump likely comes out of norms and our ideas about normalcy. There are many examples of people lacking certain abilities that we are simply fine with. For example, as Barnes points out, many people can roll their tongues.[164] Not being able to roll one's tongue may be out of the ordinary, but it is not seen as something that the lack of which makes the person inherently worse off. However, in the case of disability where the person lacks the ability to see, walk, or hear, "that's something we see as entirely abnormal, and we're much less comfortable with the idea that people could possibly lack such abilities and not be worse off as a result."[165] If we're comfortable with accepting that certain abilities are good or valuable, such as, for example, the ability to sing, without holding that a person is inherently worse off without said ability, it becomes unclear why the lack of the ability to hear or see *automatically* makes one worse off. There is a distinct difference between not being able to sing or roll one's tongue and missing a limb, of course. The lack of the former abilities does not require social intervention in order to make a space accessible to them. However, what is important to take away here is that the lack of an ability may not make someone's life inherently worse off. A large factor becomes the society in which someone without a given capacity or ability lives. If we lived in a fully accessible society, missing a limb, or several, would not necessarily impact a person's life in an *entirely* negative way. But our intuitions about disabled lives often lead us to assume

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[163] Ibid., 94.
[164] Ibid., 16.
[165] Ibid., 95.

that disability can only ever be a bad thing. In a similar way, if we conceive of disability from an entirely medicalized view, we find it hard to understand what it means to value being disabled. In the medicalized view, "disability is nothing more than a collection of physical traits and symptoms," making it difficult to understand "what it means to value disability, rather than just valuing particular symptoms or particular trains."[166] Under a bad-difference view of disability, or under a medicalized view of disability, it is impossible to understand how disabled people could possibly value disability for itself.

But many disabled people do value disability, even if there are others who do not. When we listen to the testimony of some disabled people, we find that disability comes with its own valuable experiences; disabled people tend to not view their lives as inherently worse off because of their disabilities and many do not want to cure their disability because they value it. Disabled people claim to value disability, not only because it has shaped who they are, but because disability itself can be seen as valuable without having to produce extra things, such as heightened senses. Barnes gives some examples:

> Disability can make it...harder to feel certain kinds of self-consciousness or engage in types of prejudice, disability can offer a sense of liberation from cultural norms about how your body should look or give you a new and different aesthetic appreciation for the varieties of the human body. Many disabled people even find great value in some of the things non-disabled people assume are the worst aspects of disability—including, as Eva Kittay has discussed at length, dependence on others...But disability can also be...an 'epistemic resource; and a 'narrative

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[166] Ibid., 106.

resource': it can expand the scope of what we can know and what we can experience, in ways that disabled people often find very valuable.[167]

In the first few examples, Barnes is referencing Kim Kilpatrick who discusses how her experiences with being blind have led to some social benefits. Being blind has enabled Kilpatrick to avoid certain types of stereotyping and prejudice, as well as helped her avoid being self-conscious about her appearance.[168] The symptoms of disability can also be actively enjoyed for some disabled people. For example, Sarah Eyre describes her experience of MS as one that allows her to hear music that doesn't actually exist: "The music itself is haunting and distant, like listening to a song being played in the house next door...I can spent an hour just lying on my bed, listening: it's beautiful."[169] Eyre experiences her disability in a way that others without her disability would not be able to experience. Though MS comes with many negative effects, for Eyre there are also positive effects that she enjoys. There are many disabled people who, for them, disability is only a negative thing; however, we must also recognize that for many disabled people, there are things they value about disability.

As Barnes notes, disability can also be an epistemic and narrative resource. This sentiment comes from Rosemarie Garland-Thomson who holds that disability shows us a fundamental part of being human. For Garland-Thomson, disability can also be seen as a narrative resource and an epistemic resource. In the first case, disability can be found throughout narratives as metaphors and moral lessons. First, Garland-Thomson notes that Leslie Fielder believes that, as a narrative resource, narratives about disability and

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[167] Ibid., 96.
[168] Ibid., 95.
[169] Sarah Eyre, "A Few Awesome Things About Being Disabled," *xojane*, May 17, 2012. Https://www.xojane.com/healthy/disabilitys-unexpected-silver-linings. quoted in Elizabeth Barnes, *The Minority Body* (United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2016), 92.

disabled people can "contribute [to] the cultural work of teaching the nondisabled how to be more human."[170] This is in part due to the "shock-value" disabled people can have; those who are outwardly marked as disabled awaken the nondisabled from the mundaneness of life to "their own internal monster" as "an abrupt consciousness-raising exercise."[171] Disability as a narrative resource can also act as a "self-story that leads to inclusion."[172] In this case, disability narratives can benefit other disabled people by helping to make sense of becoming disabled. Disability becomes "an opportunity to develop...the capacity for creating a coherent, causal account from the arbitrary temporal incidents that compose acquiring, adjusting to, and experiencing the transformation of self that is becoming disabled."[173] Story integrates events into a cohesive whole, making sense of becoming disabled in the grand whole of the story through this order-making and "reintegration into the human community."[174] In both cases, "the generative work of narrative is to produce knowledge through rendering life experience into coherent and usable form."[175] Through acting as a narrative resource, then, disability can also be an epistemic resource. Since "our bodily form, function, comportment, perceptual apprehension, and way of mind shape how we understand our world," disability can provide a unique experience and enhance our understanding of our world and social reality.[176] According to Jackie Leach Scully, "Disabled bodies...produce 'experiential gestalts,' or ways of knowing shaped by embodiment that are distinctive from the ways of

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[170] Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, "The Case for Conserving Disability," *Bioethical Inquiry* 9, no. 3 (2012): 344. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11673-012-9380-0
[171] Garland-Thomson, 344.
[172] Ibid., 345.
[173] Ibid.
[174] Ibid.
[175] Ibid., 354.
[176] Ibid.

knowing that a nondisabled body develops as it interacts with a world built to accommodate it."[177] Different embodied experiences of the world give rise to new and valuable understandings of the world. Of course, not all disabled people will feel this way. Many disabled people hold their disability in disdain and see no value in it; at the same time, many non-disabled people will view these narratives in fear. The important aspect to take away here is that disability *can* have value for disabled people as well as non-disabled people through the narratives disability creates.

According to Barnes, disability is similar to other marginalized groups in the way that there are good and bad aspects to being part of that particular group. While it is coherent under the mere-difference view of disability for there to be what Barnes terms 'local bads' (things that are bad in respect to certain aspects of one's life) that stem from one's disability, this is no different, for Barnes, from other marginalized groups. For example, there are some aspects to being female that require medical intervention. Barnes uses the historical example of childbirth. Medical advancements in reproductive health have "largely reduced the negative and dangerous aspects of childbirth" that were once common.[178] Even today there are some aspects of being born female that could be considered bad, but this does not mean that "being female is bad simpliciter or worse than being male, even though these local bads are incredibly common and often quite significant."[179] So the need for medical intervention, or the fact that there are things about disability that are considered bad, do not in themselves make disability inherently bad.

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[177] Ibid., 346.
[178] Barnes, 75.
[179] Ibid., 105.

Barnes believes that disabled people who value disability value it as a unique set of experiences, a complex way of being in the world. However, this type of valuing is not simply in line with the "'I'll be glad I did it' reasoning."[180] That is, valuing one's disability is not the same as a cancer survivor valuing how cancer has changed them for the better. For the cancer survivor, the experience of having cancer is not valued for its own sake: "She may value changes in her life that have been caused, at least in part, by her having cancer."[181] There are some disabled people who value their disability in much the same way. Becoming or being disabled has changed their life in ways that they value. Their life may have, overall, become better because of becoming disabled. Still, there are other disabled people who "claim to value their experience of disability itself and strongly reject the narratives of 'overcoming' disability."[182] Being disabled, for them, is something that has value. There will be those that curse their disability, who find no value in being disabled, but Barnes's focus is on those that do value disability. As I will discuss shortly, the focus on only finding a cure for disability impedes work on social intervention, which harms all disabled people, including those that would rather have a cure.

For us to doubt that there is value in disability, that disability is not simply a bad-difference, we would need some reason to doubt the testimony of disabled people. In order for us to doubt the testimony of the disabled people that claim to value disability, the testimony must be proven to be systematically misleading.[183] Barnes limits her scope of the value-neutral model to those with physical disabilities for this reason. While I will discuss this flaw later on, it is important to note here that, for Barnes, there is no reason

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[180] Ibid., 121.
[181] Ibid., 83.
[182] Ibid., 92.
[183] Ibid., 119.

to doubt the testimony of physically disabled people. She demonstrates this by contesting the adaptive preference model as outlined by Nussbaum and Sen. According to this adaptive preference model, preferences are considered adaptive when the options are constrained and "they are preferences *for something suboptimal.*"[184] Barnes believes that disability as something that is suboptimal is what is precisely up for debate. Against this adaptive preference model, Barnes states that we do not decide what is suboptimal in an abstracted environment. That is, we shouldn't decide whether something is suboptimal without observing, evaluating, and listening to testimony. If we rely on our intuitions and narratives about disability, using the adaptive preference model "can quickly become a way of defending the moral status quo."[185] This can quickly become a case of testimonial injustice, where "a speaker is not believed or given due credence (where others would be) specifically because they are a member of a group that is the subject of stigma."[186] For Barnes, the only way to work through and change "these systematic prejudices, we need to re-evaluate our beliefs" from a position grounded in the lived experiences of people.[187] We, crucially, need to listen to the testimony of marginalized groups in order to "gain new and interesting information about what kinds of lives can be good lives."[188]

This is not to say that disabled preferences are not adaptive in some sense, or that there are no good cases where we should apply the adaptive preference model. In the first case, a disabled person's preferences are shaped by their disabilities in some way. However, Barnes does not believe this is problematic from an epistemic point of view. This is because "all of us—disabled or otherwise—have had our preferences shaped by our

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[184] Ibid., 133.
[185] Ibid., 135.
[186] Ibid.
[187] Ibid., 137.
[188] Ibid.

circumstances, our particular skills, and our particular limitations."[189] I will address this point in more detail in the next section, but to be embodied is to have certain limitations that constrain our options. What would make the preferences of disabled people adaptive, by the adaptive preference model, is if we had some reason to disbelieve the testimony of disabled people and therefore conclude that to be disabled is suboptimal. If we doubt the testimony of disabled people, labeling their preferences as simply adaptive preferences, then we would need some reason to believe that their testimony was systematically misleading. Sometimes, however, we have reason to doubt the testimony of others. Barnes raises the example of a domestic abuse victim. In many cases, someone who is abused will make excuses for the abuser and insist on remaining with them.[190] In respect to an abuse victim, we cannot be charitable interpreters of their testimony when parts of the "testimony conflict, or when parts of her testimony seem in clear conflict with other pieces of evidence."[191] In contrast, the testimony of physically disabled people in most cases does not seem to conflict with itself. Disabled people acknowledge the bad things about disability while emphasizing "that many of these bad things are to the way society treats disabled," while also stating that "there can be good things about being disabled too."[192] According to Barnes, the overall positive testimony of disabled people is consistent "and it coheres with the evidence from the rest of their lives."[193] This means that we would need something outside of the testimony of disabled people to discredit the notion that

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[189] Ibid., 130.

[190] This situation is far more complicated than Barnes addresses. I understand that in many cases abuse victims stay with their abusers for financial and potential safety reasons. This is simply addressing the inconsistency of their defenses of their abusers.

[191] Barnes, 141.

[192] Ibid.

[193] Ibid., 151.

disability is a mere-difference. More importantly, for Barnes it means that the onus for providing that proof is on those who believe that disability is always a bad-difference.

If we believe in the testimony of disabled people that indicates that disability can be valuable, is there a reason to avoid causing disability, or to avoid removing disability? According to Barnes, many of the arguments against the mere-difference view, when arguing that it would permit causing disability or would not permit removing disability, are based on a straw-man that denies the mere-difference view's openness to the local bads of disability. These views see the mere-difference view as holding onto the position that disability is not itself a disadvantage, which is not the case.[194] In the case of arguments arguing that the mere-difference view permits disability, I will only briefly go over two of Barnes's several examples that do not commit this fallacy: 1) causing disability would be an "unjustified interference in another person's life"[195] and 2) the transition into being disabled can still be seen as causing harm. In the first case, Barnes gives an example where one autonomous agent causes another to become disabled without that person's consent. In this example, there is no intent to "achieve some greater good," but there is similarly no malice.[196] Regardless of how the person who is now disabled responds to this disability, this act can still be considered wrong because it interferes in the life of another autonomous agent without justification and without consent. In the second case, Barnes explains that there is "a big difference between *being disabled* and *becoming disabled*."[197] Barnes elaborates: "Many people find being disabled a rewarding and good thing. But there is an almost universal experience for those who acquire disability—variously called

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[194] Ibid., 146.
[195] Ibid., 147.
[196] Ibid.
[197] Ibid., 148.

adaptive process or transition costs—of great pain and difficulty associated with becoming disabled.[198]" Causing someone to become disabled would entail that they go through a period with a potentially high degree of transition costs and, therefore, would be considered causing someone undue harm.

When it comes to curing disability, Barnes believes that it should be a matter of individual choice, but she also worries about the pressures there are on disabled people to seek out cures. According to Barnes there is "nothing intrinsically wrong with 'cures' for disability."[199] It is "compatible with the mere-difference view of disability that, even in an ableism-free society, some disabled people would still want to be non-disabled.[200]" Being disabled can impede many people's desires and goals. This is not inconsistent with the mere-difference view; the mere-difference view allows for the fact that "disability will still be bad for some people."[201] However, Barnes believes that "we *should* worry about what effects a concerted effort to develop such 'cures' for disability has in the actual, ableist world."[202] Even though there is nothing wrong with wanting to be non-disabled, "there *is* something wrong with the expectation that becoming non-disabled is the ultimate hope in the lives of disabled people and their families."[203] This expectation affects how disabled people, as well as non-disabled people, come to accept (or not accept) their disability.

There is nothing wrong with allowing people to choose their own physicality, but in our current ableist society, pressure to find or use a 'cure' stems from our view of

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[198] Ibid.
[199] Ibid., 163.
[200] Ibid.
[201] Ibid.
[202] Ibid., 164.
[203] Ibid.

disability as something that can only ever be a bad thing. This pressure is not only on disabled people to take up a 'cure,' but on medical science to *find* a 'cure,' in abstraction from social efforts to make society more accessible. What this does is place emphasis on the idea that social resources should *only* go to finding 'cures' for disability and, in doing so, detracts from the real social structures that ought to be changed to be inclusive of disabled people. If the focus is only on the future potential 'cures' for disability, the complete eradication of disability, then changes to social structures seem moot since, eventually, all disability will be removed anyway. A heavy focus on 'cures' for disabilities also ignores the real concerns of disability activists:

> It is rather that they think that focus on such treatments is distracting and unhelpful. What they want are things like: research on how to extend the lifespan of persons with Duchenne muscular dystrophy, better wheelchair technology, focus on helping people with muscular dystrophy find accessible jobs, more public awareness about accessibility, etc. These issues—far more than treatment that could make them non-disabled, they argue—are what matter to the day-to-day lives of people like themselves. Research 'for a cure' doesn't help them, and pronounced focus on such research further stigmatizes them (by communicating the assumption that 'a cure' is something they want or need).[204]

So it is not that medical science's focussing on *some* treatments is inherently bad. It serves a purpose for those who require (or want) medical intervention. However, the way society hyper-fixates on finding a way to be rid of disability overall, regardless of whether disabled people want to be non-disabled or not, does nothing to help disabled people now.

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[204] Ibid.

Again, we can expand the life-value of disabled people as well as non-disabled people if we make our societies more accessible or we implement ways in which we can integrate disabled people further into society, disabled people can then fully participate and contribute within their communities. In addition, many accessibility devices become helpful for non-disabled people as well. What we should be doing instead of focusing on a miracle cure is listening to the testimony of disabled people and disability activists in order to know what changes can be made now, not in the future, to include disabled people in society.

A major drawback of this model is Barnes's lack of application of it to cases of psychological and cognitive disabilities. For Barnes, this model cannot automatically include people with cognitive and psychological disabilities because these types of disabilities "raise complicated issues for the reliability of testimony that simply aren't present in the case of physical disability."[205] Since Barnes relies heavily on testimony to support her model, she is wary of including cognitive and psychological disabilities under the mere-difference view. However, she admits that, with more work, the testimony based arguments may work for cognitive and psychological disabilities.[206] While I cannot do the work needed to extend the value-neutral model to incorporate these other forms of disability in this paper, I believe that it is possible to extend the model in future work. For this reason, I will continue to refer to all disabilities when I mention disability, though I realize that the model itself may not adequately encompass all forms of disability. The important aspects to take away from the value-neutral model is its emphasis on our needing to question the bad difference view of disability, as well as the fact that disability

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[205] Ibid., 3.
[206] Ibid.

has over time become a social identity people have used to create political solidarity. I will continue to use these aspects of the value-neutral model, as well as an overall mere-difference view of disability in the following chapters because I believe that these are important features when considering matters of accessibility and accommodation.

What I believe is most important to take away from arguments under the value-neutral model is its political dimension. Specifically, the value-neutral model conceives of disability as a social identity that has been created through the need for social and political solidarity and struggle. In addition, under this political dimension the fact that when we assume a mere-difference view of disability rather than a bad-difference view, we open ourselves up for social and political change. That is, holding a bad-difference view of disability, the idea that disability is only ever a bad thing, is an inhibitor to the political progress of disabled people. The very idea that we should hold out for a cure can stop us from collectively organizing to make spaces accessible for those who need it now. Waiting for a future where impairment no longer exists does little to help disabled people live in current liberal-capitalist societies. Instead, disability as a social identity has helped disabled people to come together and collectively struggle for inclusion, more accommodations, and better accessible spaces in addition to changes in policy regarding disability rights. Underlying this social identity is the belief that disability is more than just a mere lack of ability, the belief that there is value in being disabled, and, in extension from those beliefs, that social institutions need to change sooner rather than later to address the needs of disabled people.

2.3. Life-Value Ethics and Disability

Since the strength of life-value ethics is in its ability to be applied to social and political dilemmas, it is important to demonstrate how life-value ethics can be applied to cases of disability. From a general perspective, life-value ethics must take disability into account if it is to continue to be coherently inclusive in its application. Likewise, the value-neutral model and disability activism would benefit from a life-value ethics approach which can help to strengthen disabled people's claims to life-requirements. In this section I will outline some potential conflicts between disability and life-value ethics, the overlap between the value-neutral model and life-value ethics, and areas where I believe they would mutually benefit each other. In the next chapter I will directly apply a life-value ethics approach to a case study from an issue prevalent in disability activism today: the banning of plastic straws.

First, it is necessary to point out the language around disability needs that has been pervasive in disability accommodation. All language surrounding disability is often prefixed by the word "special." What this does is remove disabled people from full consideration in social and political issues. Helen Meekosha and Leanne Dowse explain:

> Dominant ideologies within the disability arena are changing from welfare to rights, yet people with disabilities still do not appear as active members of the community. Forced to claim 'special rights', their status as citizens with existing rights (albeit unacknowledged/inaccessible) is negated.[207]

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[207] Helen Meekosha and Leanne Dowse, "Enabling Citizenship: Gender, Disability, and Citizenship in Australia," *Feminist Review* no. 57 (1997): 50. https://www.jstor.org/stable/1395801

In an effort to see more social and political change, disability activists changed their push from welfare support to human rights language. This effort was to ensure better access to human rights for all disabled people. However, many of these human rights are labelled as 'special needs.' The language of 'special' needs and 'special' rights further alienates and excludes disabled people from collective marginalized struggles for human rights. By using 'special' as a prefix, we assume that all other rights and needs are separate from disability rights and needs. This allows us to pick and choose whose rights and needs we address. If we assume that disabled people's rights and needs are separate from other rights and needs, we might begin to assume that their needs are not important to satisfy right away. This creates a division between the activism of other marginalized groups and disability activism, a hierarchy that needs to be gone through in order for one's needs to be finally addressed. However, if we use life-value language instead, the language of life-requirements, we can understand that all human beings have the same life-requirements. What varies are the need-satisfiers needed to access those life-requirements. For example, those who walk need shoes in order to get around without causing harm to their feet. Likewise, some disabled people need wheelchairs in order to get around. The need to move in space remains the same while the need-satisfiers differ. As I will discuss in the next chapter, plastic straws can also be considered a need-satisfier. By removing the "special" prefix and by using life-value language, we can begin to form social and political solidarity between marginalized groups. When we view social and political struggles from a life-value perspective, we begin to understand our shared struggle in satisfying our basic life-requirements that are shared by all human beings.

There may be a potential conflict between disability and life-value ethics if we assume that to live a *good* life under life-value ethics one must not be disabled. According

to Barnes, approaches to ethics that can be considered "objective list" views often assume the bad-difference view of disability, that disability detracts from one's overall well-being.[208] Still, Barnes believes that it is consistent for an objective list ethics to "leave out non-disability from their list of things that a flourishing life requires."[209] For life-value ethics to be able to strengthen disabled people's claims to basic human life-requirements without excluding them from potentially living a good human life (which, if we recall from chapter 1, is to develop into socially self-conscious agents that contribute back to their own communities and are free to develop their own meaning), it needs to be shown that the lack of disability is not necessary for a good human life.

According to Noonan, McMurtry "argues that what makes all human life enjoyable and good, to the extent that it is, is the realization of our capacities for experience, thought and imagination, and creative activity."[210] A human life is good insofar as a person can develop and express their capacities for thinking, feeling, and action. Given this, it might seem as if any and all challenges to these capacities would impede a good life under life-value ethics. However, according to Noonan there is a distinct difference between intrinsic and extrinsic limitations. Intrinsic limitations are a part of "our embodied, finite nature."[211]"They "are constitutive elements of our human organism, but also...shape our expectations, goals, and goods."[212] Among our intrinsic limitations are our life-requirements, which we need in order to live, and our susceptibility to diseases, which I will address later on in this section. Extrinsic limitations, on the other hand, "stem from

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[208] Barnes, 61.
[209] Ibid., 61-62.
[210] Jeff Noonan, *Embodiment and the Meaning of Life* (Quebec: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2018), 6.
[211] Ibid., 11.
[212] Ibid.

oppressive, alienating, or exploitive societies that systematically deprive some groups of resources for full human lives."[213] An example Noonan gives for this is the lack of health care: "Lacking health care because it is unaffordable, and thus suffering longer bouts of illness or facing higher mortality rates, is an extrinsic limitation of the goodness of the life of the deprived."[214] These extrinsic limitations are not experienced as "*metaphysical evils*, but as failures of *social organization.*"[215]

Any inability to access health care for a disabled person can be seen to be an extrinsic limitation. In addition, living in non-accessible societies is also an extrinsic limitation that disabled people face. Many of the barriers that disabled people face when it comes to social institutions revolve around spaces not being accessible, lack or inadequacy of transportation methods, and, in the US especially, high cost of health care. The increased cost of prescription medication is also a contributing factor in an inability to receive adequate health care. Many people with diabetes have been found to be rationing insulin due to the increase in costs. Rationing insulin is very risky, often resulting in a highly painful premature death if done for extended periods of time. Diabetic ketoacidosis occurs when there is not enough insulin in a person's body; this causes one's blood sugar to increase to such a degree that one's blood becomes acidic, leading to cell dehydration and a shut down of bodily functions.[216] Better social organization that satisfies the life-requirements of a society's members, which includes health care, would prevent many of these premature deaths.

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[213] Ibid., 12.
[214] Ibid.
[215] Ibid., 38.
[216] Bram Sable-Smith, "Insulin's High Cost Leads to Lethal Rationing," *National Public Radio,* Sep. 1, 2018. https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2018/09/01/641615877/insulins-high-cost-leads-to-lethal-rationing

While we ought to challenge and remove extrinsic limitations, Noonan believes that intrinsic limitations form what he calls frames of finitude. These frames of finitude may be obstacles that human beings must deal with in their day-to-day lives, but they are also the frames in which *good* and *meaningful* lives become realizable. That is, they allow for us to not only understand what makes for a good life, they are the frames in which meaning becomes possible at all. Noonan gives the example of a frame around a piece of artwork:

> A frame around a painting or photograph serves to mark the artwork off from the rest of the world. It is not part of the content of the artwork, but it gives it coherence. Even if the frame is just the edge of the canvas or the photograph, it is a positive limitation that says 'look here, focus here, here is where the beauty is.' Without a frame, there would be no difference between art and the things of the world, which is to say, no art.[217]

Like art, frames of finitude "concentrate attention on our being here as specific persons with a finite amount of time and capacity to do some things and not others."[218] That is, these limitations, by shaping our choices and the ways in which we can develop as human beings, differentiate us from other persons and other forms of life. We become individuated and create our own meaning within these specific frames of finitude because they force us to choose certain possibilities out of larger possibilities.

What Barnes and Noonan explicitly agree on here is that human beings are inherently limited living creatures. According to Barnes:

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[217] Noonan, *Embodiment and the Meaning of Life*, 115.
[218] Ibid.

The simple fact is that, disabled or non-disabled, we are *all* limited and constrained by our bodies. To have a body that is any particular way is to have a body that is limited and constrained in some respects and in comparison to other kinds of bodies. That's just part of what it is to have a body.[219]

To have a body is to be limited in some ways and not others. In much the same way, Noonan contends that to be human is to have certain *intrinsic* limitations, which constrain both our ability to do things and the choices we make. For both Barnes and Noonan, the limitations of our bodies, or the fact that we are organic living beings, cause us to adapt our preferences, desires, and goals to be in line with these limitations since we cannot go beyond them. Noonan goes as far to say as that we need to accept these limitations in order to be successful in our endeavours.[220] If we do not accept that we have certain life-requirements that need to be satisfied and that there will always be certain impossibilities given the very nature of our bodies, we are likely to live our lives frustrated at the fact that our desires, however unrealistic they may be, remain unfulfilled.

One of the intrinsic limitations human beings have is susceptibility to disease. This intrinsic limitation may seem like one that makes life not worth living. In fact, it seems like there would be no life-value in diseases (and, by extension in disabilities) at all. However, Noonan believes that our susceptibility to disease, and our inherent vulnerability and fragility in general, make it possible for us to care about one another and be cared for:

Our liability to disease is a frame within which we build and maintain caring solidarity with others. At the same time, every occasion of caring for someone is an

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[219] Barnes, 132.
[220] Noonan, *Embodiment and the Meaning of Life,* 33.

occasion for that someone to let themselves be cared for. Being cared for is not easy, particularly in a society that normalizes a self-interested drive to impose one's ideas on the world and to always strive to be master of the conditions in which one lives.[221]

Being vulnerable, finite beings that are susceptible to disease and injury makes it possible for us to be cared for in the first place. If we were not vulnerable, we would not need to be cared for and we would not need to struggle for social structures that help to prevent and treat disease. When someone we care about is ill, we take the time to take care of them. At the same time, when we ourselves are cared for, we must take the opportunity to learn how to be cared for since passivity and idleness are things that the capitalist system teaches us to avoid — we are taught to deny our vulnerability, and thus when someone actively cares for us, we must learn to accept this care. Disease provides opportunity for us to learn how to care and be cared for, and it reminds us of our vulnerability and finitude. Without this liability to disease, or even to injury, caring relationships would not be as necessary.

This does not mean that Noonan believes that diseases themselves should be preserved, or that diseases are life-valuable. For Noonan, diseases "are a paradigmatic form of the harms to which living beings are liable."[222] It is the *liability* to disease that is a frame of finitude "that elicit[s] from us forms of non-alienated work" which "produce more life-value than imagined lives without liability to disease and aging would."[223] So while the act of care and the medical profession, which is, for Noonan, primarily about

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[221] Ibid., 136.
[222] Ibid., 128.
[223] Ibid.

"healing and caring for bodies when they become ill,"[224] are life-valuable, disease itself is not. Noonan states that it "is not that disease should be preserved so that we can properly value a fragile life, but rather that disease cannot be eradicated so long as we are finite material beings, and so we need to think of health and health care as other than a 'war on disease.'"[225] We shouldn't treat disease as something that will be eventually eradicated, but we should be actively trying to provide health care for all who need it and not just for those who can pay in a way that is conscious of the social aspects of health. It is not unfair that people get sick, but it is unfair "that some people get sick more often because of corrigible structural inequalities" such as poor living conditions and lack of access to good food.[226]

This seems to promote a bad-difference approach to disability, since many diseases cause (or are, in fact) disabilities. However, I would first like to repeat that the mere-difference view is not committed to the idea that disability is *never* a bad thing. Many disabilities can impede a person's desires, and, in terms of life-value, many impede the full expression of our human capacities. From a life-value perspective, anything that impedes the expression of human capacities is inherently a bad thing. However, I contend that since disability is more than simply about having a disease or an impairment, that it is a *social identity*, we can concede that though there may be *bad things* about disability, that does not mean that living a disabled life is always going to make one inherently worse off than a non-disabled person. Many disabled people find community under this identity and have found purpose in building and maintaining those communities. As I will discuss

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[224] Ibid.
[225] Ibid., 130.
[226] Ibid., 134.

shortly, it is finding meaning in contributing back to the life-necessities of others that partially constitutes a good life under a life-value approach. If this is the case, then it is possible for disabled people to still live a good life regardless or even because of their disability.

In addition, disease is, under a life-value perspective, not life-incoherent since diseases themselves "are as natural to living things as health."[227]"This does not mean that diseases have the same life-value as a human being, "but rather that we must understand the full expression of core human capacities as qualified by the liability to disease that defines us as organisms."[228] That is, our liability to disease, and by extension disability, is something that we must accept as part of being human. Our vulnerability is something that defines us, shapes us as human beings, so it is not a stretch to acknowledge that disability can (and does) shape us in significant and (if we are to believe the testimony of disabled people) positive ways.

It is important to note here that "Life's value or dis-value is not an abstraction that can be determined independently of people's concrete lived experiences, because life's value has an irreducibly subjective dimension."[229] So when we have testimony from disabled people that says that they value their lives *in spite* of the social factors, the extrinsic limitations that deprive people of the goodness of life, we ought to believe that there is value in a disabled life. At the very least, we ought to believe disabled people when they say that their lives are worth living. We can see this value in disabled lives in the struggle for disability rights. For Noonan, the struggle for the protection and

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[227] Ibid., 131.
[228] Ibid., 133.
[229] Ibid., 29.

enhancement of life "are not automatic, genetically programmed behaviours, not naive wishful thinking, but consciously developed projects that bear real fruit in the form of demonstrably improved lives."[230] It is these struggles and the *active desire to live* that demonstrates that people believe that their lives are worth living.

Under a life-value perspective, disability can be interpreted as an intrinsic limitation that presents itself as an experience or event that challenges one's self understanding. According to Noonan,

> ...the goodness or badness of an experience or event is not reducible to the immediate feelings of pleasure or pain it causes. Its goodness or badness must be determined in relation to the contribution it makes to one's achievements and experiences over the entire continuum of one's life...what is good or bad to a human life depends on contribution to present *and* future life, not just for the self, but for others.[231]

What may be initially conceived as something that is *exclusively* bad for us may turn out to have had good effects on our life. Intrinsic limitations "act as *challenges* that turn the self against-itself...They enable self-development: wide forms of self-expression, deeper forms of self and world understanding, and more varied forms of contribution to the good of other's lives."[232] Barnes gives an example where a woman's life ultimately goes better for her after becoming disabled. In this example the woman, before becoming disabled, was "a lonely shut-in, with no friends and no community."[233] After becoming disabled, this woman begins to go "to a rehabilitation center, where she makes a lot of friends,

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[230] Ibid., 28.
[231] Ibid., 31.
[232] Ibid., 32.
[233] Barnes, 65.

becomes involved in sports or the arts, etc."[234] This is in line with Noonan's understanding of how these challenges to our self-identity can ultimately make us grow and change for the better as people. He states that "unexpected trauma can refocus attention on the value of relationships one tended to take for granted" and that "Sparing people these traumas would not necessarily make their lives better."[235] Our intrinsic limitations, when they present themselves as seemingly negative or bad experiences and events—even the realization of our liability to disease and things overall going wrong for us—can make us realize what we find valuable and can motivate us to reconnect with our loved ones and build communities and live more live-valuable lives.

A final tension that I believe needs to be discussed is that of contribution or work. A highly significant portion of life-value ethics is the giving back to the community. For Noonan, "[w]ithout opportunities for serving others through ways we make ourselves real, our lives lack meaningful connection and purpose."[236] Contributing back to others and our community allows for us not only to make meaningful connections with others, but it enables us to make ourselves real to others. Making ourselves, our value, real is essential to the meaningfulness of human life as Noonan elaborates:

> The principle is that human life is meaningful when it is valuable and valued. It is valuable and valued when it makes a real — even if small — contribution to the open-ended unfolding of the human project.[237]

When we give back to our communities and fulfil the life-requirements of other human beings, when we contribute in life-valuable ways, our contributions and lives are valued

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[234] Ibid.
[235] Noonan, *Embodiment and the Meaning of Life,* 32-33.
[236] Ibid., 116.
[237] Ibid., 102.

by others. Our value as human beings can only become real or seen by others through our contributions. This seems to, at first, cause a dilemma for those unable to work, especially since in Noonan's initial discussion of life-requirements in his book *Materialist Ethics and Life-Value* work is expressed as a primary contribution. However, contribution, or non-alienated labour, is not confined to simply standard interpretations of work and contribution. Non-alienated labour

> ...is all experience and activity that is undertaken under the positive constraints of human finitude, that serves a life-necessity, and that is steered by the goals of creating meaning, forging mutualistic relationships, and contributing to the present or future goods of others. Taken together all these forms of non-alienated labour advance the human project, of which each should be a contributing and valued member.[238]

As we saw earlier, care is a form of non-alienated labour that arises out of our vulnerability and need to be cared for. When we actively care for others, we are engaged in an activity that is serving the needs of others (recall that care is a life-requirement, as outlined in chapter 1). Non-alienated labour in this regard also includes changes made to the self or self-growth. Noonan gives the example of being cared for: "Since letting oneself be cared for requires effort, this learning is another form of non-alienated labour. Through it we overcome the false and pathological denial of our own vulnerability."[239] This work that we do on ourselves opens us up to be cared for by others as well as to care for others, to understand human vulnerability and through that understanding to allow us to understand how to contribute to others in life-valuable ways.

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[238] Ibid., 117.
[239] Ibid., 137.

So it is not the case that disabled people are automatically excluded from living a good life under a life-value ethics framework; it is not the disability per se that is the issue, but the imposed barriers and lack of accessible spaces, the extrinsic limitations that are imposed on disabled people. Disabled people can care for others as well as contributing their time in other life-valuable ways. For those who can work, they can find meaning in being able to satisfy certain life-requirements, such as our biological life-requirements. The barriers to work for disabled people are often based on social stigma and a lack of access. This means that for disabled people to be able to contribute in traditional ways, we must work on the social structures that exclude disabled people from pursuing life-valuable work. However, disabled people who are unable to work in traditional ways can still give back to their communities and loved ones. It is not necessary to contribute in standardized ways, only to contribute in ways that are life-valuable to other people.

If disabled people are to contribute back to their society and communities, the social structures around them must be changed in coherently inclusive ways. That is, the spaces and policies in place should be designed with non-disabled *and* disabled people in mind. In the next chapter, we will look at how policies can harm disabled people by making it difficult or impossible to access their need-satisfiers and, consequently, their life-requirements. Specifically, I will look at how policies around banning plastic straws remove disabled people's access to important need-satisfiers.

Chapter 3: Life-Value Application to the Banning of Plastic Straws

3.1. Section Introduction

Plastic straws are part of a growing ecological crisis. A viral video of a straw being pulled out of a sea turtle's nose created widespread public awareness of the impact of single-use plastics on ocean wildlife.[240] This awareness has led to a push for the ban of plastic straws. However, the growing number of bans has met with some resistance from members of disability community who claim that many disabled people need plastic straws in order to drink independently. So, while environmentalists are seeking solutions for a substantial ecological problem, the disabled community is fighting for recognition of their need for the straws.

Some form of a straw has been used for about 5,000 years, though the first 'modern' straw was patented in 1888. This original straw was made from paper and was unbendable. Bendable straws were created in the 1930s with the intent of helping children position straws without breaking them. It wasn't until after the second world war that, in an effort to redirect plastic manufacturer's production, plastic began to be used for "cheap

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[240] Maham Abedi, "Banning Plastic Straws — A Look at How Much It Really Helps, and Who It Could Hurt," *Global News,* July 10, 2018. https://globalnews.ca/news/4320295/banning-plastic-straws-benefits-drawbacks/

consumer goods."[241] Straws were clearly not made for disability concerns, but, according to Sarah Gibbens, "Hospitals were among the first to embrace bendable straws, because they allowed patients to drink while lying in bed" after the creation of bendable straws in the 1930s.[242] When asked what disabled people did before the plastic straw was invented, Shaun Bickley, "co-chair of the Seattle Commission for People with DisAbilities" stated "They aspirated liquid in their lungs, developed pneumonia and died."[243] While this may be a dramatization, the invention of plastic straws, especially bendable plastic straws, has led to increased independence of disabled people who require assistance to drink. Yet the push to ban all plastic straws continues in ignorance to the needs and concerns of disabled people.

Our focus on consumers giving up plastic straws is misplaced and places a large burden on disabled people. The statistics show that straws are only one small component to a growing ecological crisis. While we ought to take steps toward removing our dependence on single-use plastics and cleaning up the ocean, environmentalism must be carried out in coherently inclusive ways. This means that any environmentalist efforts must take into consideration the life-requirements and need satisfiers of all people, especially those who are most vulnerable to harm. I intend to show how we can use a life-value approach to defend the use of plastic straws while still focusing on the problem of plastic waste.

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[241] Sarah Gibbens, "A Brief History of How Plastic Straws Took Over the World," *National Geographic*, Jan. 2, 2019. https://www.nationalgeographic.com/environment/2018/07/news-plastic-drinking-straw-history-ban/
[242] Ibid.
[243] Tove Danovich and Maria Godoy, "Why People With Disabilities Want Bans On Plastic Straws to Be More Flexible," *National Public Radio*, Jul. 11, 2018. https://www.npr.org/sections/thesalt/2018/07/11/627773979/why-people-with-disabilities-want-bans-on-plastic-straws-to-be-more-flexible

3.2. The Scope of the Plastic Waste Crisis

Reportedly, Canada uses about 57 million straws a day.[244] This number is extrapolated from one of the most commonly cited statistics, that in the United States "500 million straws are used every single day."[245] Though widely cited, this statistic comes from a nine-year-old that "got the figure by surveying straw manufacturers by phone."[246] Given that this number was derived from an unscientific source, it's hard to say just how many straws are being used by Canadians on average. This also makes it hard to know the full extent of the plastic waste problem.

We do have some statistics on how much plastic waste enters the oceans and what kind of impact each type of plastic has on marine wildlife. A study surveying experts working with marine wildlife and debris found that the plastic waste generally falls into two categories: fishing equipment and end-use consumer items, which includes plastic straws.[247] The study found that fishing gear caused the most damage to marine wildlife because it posed the risk of entanglement as well as harm from ingestion.[248] In addition, the highest impact estimated of any item "was predicted to be entanglement of birds by fishing line and ropes, with expected lethal impacts on 25-50% of the animals."[249]

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[244] Melanie Woods, "Vancouver to be first major Canadian city to ban plastic straws," *Globe and Mail*, May 18, 2018. https://www.theglobeandmail.com/canada/british-columbia/article-vancouver-to-be-first-major-canadian-city-to-ban-plastic-straws/
[245] Gibbens
[246] Tristin Hopper, "Banishing Straws From $5 Iced Coffees Isn't Going to Save the Oceans," *National Post*, Jul. 23, 2018. https://nationalpost.com/news/canada/the-truth-about-ocean-plastic-why-straw-bans-are-not-the-earth-saving-milestone-you-might-think
[247] Chris Wilcox, Nicholas J. Mallos, George H. Leonard, Alba Rodriguez, and Britta Denise Hardesty, "Using Expert Elicitation to Estimate the Impacts of Plastic Pollution on Marine Wildlife," *Marine Policy* 65 (2016): 107.
[248] Ibid., 109.
[249] Ibid.

Entanglement is predicted to have a higher chance of being lethal to wildlife and, as such, items like those pertaining to fishing gear are seen as having a higher impact.[250] It is estimated that fishing gear alone comprises "46 per cent of the plastic forming the Great Pacific Garbage Patch," which is the world's largest accumulation of plastic.[251]

Despite the degree of uncertainty around the statistics, many cities in the US and Canada have begun to move toward the banning of plastic straws or single-use plastics more generally. In Canada, Vancouver has promised to ban plastic straws in addition to reducing the number of all single-use plastics. The ban on plastic straws is said to occur by the summer of 2019. The policy around the ban also includes "a ban on the distribution of polystyrene foam cups and containers, as well as restrictions on disposable cups and plastic shopping bags."[252] This ban is said to focus primarily on the food-service industry, leaving people free to purchase straws in stores.[253] Meanwhile, Ontario is considering banning single-use plastics. The concern about plastic waste in Ontario stems from the estimated "10,000 tonnes of plastic debris" that enter the Great Lakes every year.[254] The Blue Box recycling program is said to only recover "about 28 per cent of all plastic packaging in the province."[255] As a response to this problem, Ontario is considering "a deposit return system for plastic bottlers and other containers" as well as "banning food waste from landfills and making producers responsible for waste instead of

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[250] Ibid., 110.
[251] Hopper
[252] Woods
[253] Ibid.
[254] "Ontario Government Ponders Ban on Single-Use Plastics," *Canadian Broadcasting Corporation*, Mar. 10, 2019. https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/ontario-plastics-ban-1.5050539?fbclid=IwAR1_LSBmCqaHWE7Ej_9pvyHL-zqS3LJWJ2G9CbD700-OgcrcH2nBntC1bVg
[255] Ibid.

municipalities."[256] In the US, several cities in California, New Jersey, and Florida, as well as Seattle, are reportedly banning plastic straws.[257]

While cities are banning plastic straws (and, in many cases, single-use plastics in general), there are other types of plastic waste that have posed significant problems. 45 million pounds of plastics, half of which consisting of beaded necklaces, enter New Orleans during Mardi Gras every year.[258] These beaded necklaces, beginning to be mass produced and disrupted in 1913 as throw-aways, clog storm drains throughout the city. The cheaply made plastic necklaces also contain "trace amounts of contaminants, including lead" which seep into the water and soil.[259] With "93,000 pounds of beads [being pulled] from just five blocks of storm drains," these throw-away items pose a significant problem to the city of New Orleans as well as to the surrounding environment.[260] Another type of single-use plastic that is often simply a throw away item is the balloon. Balloons, typically attached to ribbon and other thread, can entangle marine wildlife which, as stated above, can be lethal to marine wildlife. We should also be using natural fabrics instead of fleece or spandex, since non-natural fabrics produce microplastics every time they are washed.[261] These microplastics are ingested by marine wildlife and enter the food chain, causing harm to animals and human beings alike.

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[256] Ibid.

[257] Trent Gillies, "How Straws Go From Your Cup to Becoming a 'Really Big' Environmental Problem," *Consumer News and Business Channel*, Jul. 21, 2018. https://www.cnbc.com/2018/07/20/how-straws-go-from-cups-to-a-really-big-environmental-problem.html

[258] Eric Roston, "What Happens to All Those Beads After Mardi Gras?" *Bloomberg*, March 6, 2019. https://www.bloomberg.com/news/features/2019-03-06/what-happens-to-mardi-gras-beads-after-festival-ends

[259] Roston

[260] Roston

[261] Gillies

If plastic straws are not the biggest threat to marine wildlife and there are other forms of plastic that we should be worrying about, why are they the focus of the latest environmentalist trend? Part of it is the assumption that plastic straws are something we don't need. Since most people do not *need* to use straws in their daily life, it is easier for the average consumer to reduce the amount of plastic straws they use.[262] Since straws are also one of the top 10 items found during beach clean up, they stand out in people's minds even if they don't make up, by weight, more than 0.03 per cent of the amount of marine garbage per year.[263] A large factor in their gaining so much public attention, however, stems from the viral video of the sea turtle having a straw extracted from its nose. The video itself spread rapidly on the internet, gaining mass attention and sympathy. Without this video, it's hard to say if the issue would have been as widely discussed, even if people consider it to be of high importance.

Environmentalists are hoping "the movement will stir a larger conversation about runaway plastic pollution,"[264] but for now the major focus is on plastic straws, likely because of their direct association with harming wildlife. It is unlikely, given their small percentage of the total plastic waste in our oceans, that banning all plastic straws will do more than cause a small dent in the problem. The argument being made about straws is not that they will solve the crisis, but that they are a small step toward solving it. Still, it is important to be aware of the potential harm environmentalism can cause to other human beings.

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[262] Gillies

[263] Hopper

[264] James Rainey, "'Banning Plastic Straws Will Not Be Enough': The Fight to Clean the Oceans," *National Broadcasting Company News*, Dec. 30, 2018. https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/banning-plastic-straws-will-not-be-enough-fight-clean-oceans-n951141

3.3. Plastic Straws as Need-Satisfiers

Plastic waste accumulating in our oceans presents a growing ecological crisis. Banning single-use plastic straws has been suggested as a solution to this crisis; however, while plastic straws are not needed for everyone's day-to-day lives, they are an important accessibility tool for disabled people. In response to the resistance to banning plastic straws, many have suggested disabled people use reusable and biodegradable alternatives. In this section I will not only address the inadequacy of the alternatives to single-use plastic straws, I will also discuss how straws act as a need-satisfier for disabled people. While straws themselves are not life-requirements, they provide vital access to life-requirements and therefore should not be so readily disregarded in terms of their importance. Environmentalism should not be at the expense of vulnerable groups of people.

There are many alternatives to single-use plastic straws that are either reusable or biodegradable, but these alternatives are inadequate for the needs of disabled people. In terms of biodegradable options, they are either too fragile or are an allergy risk. First, "most paper and plant-based alternatives are not flexible or suitable for drinks over 40C, therefore increasing the risk of choking."[265] These straws often dissolve and break apart faster than disabled people can use them. Plant-based alternatives often pose an allergy risk since the bulk of them are made from corn, which is an anaphylactic allergy that is recognized by the ADA. On the other hand, reusable straws pose an injury risk as well as are often not as sanitary:

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[265] Laura Paterson, "Plastic Straw Ban Hard to Swallow, Says Disabled Group," *The Times* (London, England), Feb.16, 2018.
http://go.galegroup.com.ezproxy.uwindsor.ca/ps/i.do?id=GALE%7CA527794234&v=2.1&u=wind05901&it=r&p=AONE&sw=w

Metal straws get extremely hot if you are drinking coffee or hot tea, potentially causing lip burns. Glass straws are even more dangerous, especially to someone who has a disability that causes clenching of teeth, which could mean a mouth full of glass shards...Silicone straws are a possible option, but they require thorough cleaning immediately after use, which is not ideal if a person is travelling or has limited hand mobility to use a tiny brush to clean inside.[266]

Many disabled people who need to use plastic straws have difficulties controlling their fine motor movements as well as may have difficulties controlling their muscles in general. This can entail an inability to control their jaws, which can clamp down on straws and glasses which can cause injury, or an inability to use the tools to properly clean straws, posing a possible risk of contamination. This means that in order to drink liquids, many require the flexibility and safety that single-use plastic straws provide. For many disabled people, single-use plastic straws are non-negotiable.

For these reasons, the disabled people resisting bans on plastic straws believe that their own needs are being ignored in favour of environmentalism. James Hicks, a member of the Council of Canadians with Disabilities, believes that disabled people "are being treated as an afterthought in the discussions" around single-use plastic straws.[267] Disability advocates argue that single-use plastic straws are not simply a trivial part of disabled lives, but act as accessibility devices, like "ramps are for users of mobility

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[266] Susan Wagner-White, "Reducing Waste by Banning Plastic Straws Shouldn't Come at the Expense of Accessibility,"
Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, Mar.10, 2019. https://www.cbc.ca/news/opinion/plastic-straw-ban-1.4706376
[267] Abedi

devices."[268] Most people are not aware of how complicated the process of drinking from a cup can be: "While most people take it for granted, getting a drink from your hand to your lips and then tipping liquid in and swallowing requires a complex set of motions."[269] So when we make large-scale bans on particular items, we ought to listen to marginalized voices so that we do not end up creating barriers against inclusion of those groups.

While there are no adequate alternatives to plastic straws, single-use plastic straws are still contributors to an impending ecological crisis. The principal of life-coherence put forward by McMurtry maintains "that materially rational choices, forms of individual and collective activity, public policy, and value systems must 'be governed so as to be consistent with human and biodiverse life-requirements.'"[270] In order for our actions and the satisfaction of our desires to be life-coherent, we must reflect on our life-requirements, "what nature can bear, what existing and future people will require, and purposes that contribute to others and the world beyond the ephemeral pleasures of an atomic ego."[271] We need to consider all life in coherently inclusive ways, especially in regards to the life-support systems on which all life depends, which means taking into consideration what allows all life to thrive and what is life-destructive. According to Noonan, "Human action becomes life-incoherent on the natural plane of being alive when it unsustainably consumes scarce resources and overburdens nature's capacity to act as a sink for wastes."[272] Human beings act in life-incoherent ways when we pollute our life-support systems and take resources without thinking of the long-lasting consequences of

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[268] André Picard, "For Many with Disabilities, Plastic Straws are Essential - Not Frivolous," *The Globe and Mail,* Jun 05, 2018. https://search-proquest-com.ledproxy2.uwindsor.ca/docview/2049796275?accountid=14789.
[269] Ibid.
[270] Jeff Noonan, *Embodiment and the Meaning of Life*, 74.
[271] Ibid., 66-67.
[272] Ibid., 74.

our actions. From this perspective, single-use plastics, especially plastic straws, seem to be life-incoherent. They are not considered life-requirements; we do not need plastic straws in themselves in order to satisfy our biological life-requirements. Plastic straws also pollute the oceans and harm marine wildlife, which makes them to some degree life-destructive. If plastic straws are being used to satisfy frivolous human desires without regard to the potential consequences on our life-support systems, they would be life-incoherent.

However, as stated above, single-use plastic straws are accessibility tools and therefore are need-satisfiers. If single-use plastic straws are in fact accessibility tools, then they can be considered need-satisfiers. Need-satisfiers are the tools, relationships, and activities (if we recall Doyle and Gough's definition from chapter 1) by which we gain access to life-requirements. Accessibility devices act as tools or need-satisfiers for disabled people to obtain their life-requirements. If we look at canes, for example, these devices help those who use them to move around, but they also help cane users to avoid pain and injury. Without canes many people may fall and injure themselves or may not be able to travel nearly as far as they would when using a cane. As stated previously, this is no different from non-disabled people: the life-requirements remain the same while the need-satisfiers differ according to the circumstances that individuals find themselves in.

For plastic straws to be considered accessibility devices or need-satisfiers, they need to be shown to help disabled people access specific life-requirements. Plastic straws are not used by disabled people frivolously; they are used to drink water and (liquid) food, two things that the human body needs to live. Many disabled people report that plastic straws enable a degree of independence when drinking, especially for those with

neuromuscular conditions.[273] For disabled people who require the use of straws in order to drink at all, the straws become need-satisfiers, ways in which disabled people can access their biological life-requirements. To go without straws, for some disabled people, "can mean struggling through the physical motion of putting a drink to a mouth, or leaking liquid into the lungs, or choking."[274] So in most cases, the use of plastic straws helps to avoid injury as well as provide access to biological life-requirements, making them similar to other accessibility devices.

Since plastic straws are need-satisfiers, we cannot simply ban them without considering the potential harm we inflict on the disabled people who use them. As Hicks states, "One need should not trump another. The need for good environmental products should not trump what's needed for people with disabilities and vice versa."[275] It is clear than an alternative to single-use plastic straws *ought* to be explored. We should be doing everything we can to reduce the amount of plastic waste that is polluting our oceans, which means questioning how the tools and technology we use impacts the lives of others and our life-support systems. However, this environmental push should not ignore the need-satisfiers of disabled people. Disabled people need ways in which to satisfy their life-requirements; to deny them access to their life-requirements is to cause them serious harm. In addition, as our population continues to age, plastic straws will become important for those who develop age-related disabilities such as Alzheimer's, thereby increasing the number of people who rely on plastic straws as need-satisfiers. Coherent

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[273] Christy Brissette, "Plastic Straws aren't Just Bad for the Environment — They Can Be Bad for Your Body," *Washington Post*, Jul. 3, 2018.
https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/wellness/plastic-straws-arent-just-bad-for-the-environment--they-can-be-bad-for-your-body/2018/07/02/d682fdfe-7964-11e8-aeee-4d04c8ac6158_story.html?noredirect=on&utm_term=.062e5d03757b
[274] Picard
[275] Abedi

inclusivity, as I will expand on, becomes essential for overcoming the tension between sustainability and ensuring that people have access to their need-satisfiers.

In response to disabled activists resisting the ban on plastic straws, many have suggested that businesses only hand out plastic straws upon request. Some disabled activists agree with this idea; it will help to cut down on the number of plastic straws being used while making sure they are still available for those who need to use them. There are still two primary issues with this solution: 1) requesting a straw often means disclosing or proving one's disability and 2) businesses may be unaware of the exceptions for disabled people. Both issues may be issues pertaining to the lack of awareness on disability and the law, but both result in the disabled person being unable to access, or having to struggle to access, their need-satisfiers. In the first case, those living with invisible disabilities will need to disclose or prove their disability in order to access plastic straws when they may not wish to, since a server may doubt that the disabled person truly needs a straw. This can lead to villainizing the individual requesting a straw, especially since the widespread concern about the impact of plastic waste has led to a trend in people attempting to be more environmentally conscientious. A concern for the environment may lead individual servers to withhold the plastic straw until a degree of proof of need has been provided, which may not be possible for the disabled person. For a policy like this to work without creating a barrier for disabled people requiring straws, plastic straws need to be available on request without question.[280] In the second case, policies like the ban in Seattle include a clause that outlines an exception for disabled people. The Seattle ordinance includes a yearlong exception, which in itself may pose a future problem if not revised. However, though this exception exists, it is still up to the businesses to decide if they wish to

distribute the straws or not.[276] On top of this, many businesses may not comply with or are apparently not aware of this exception.[277] This means that many businesses have and will refuse to give straws upon request. In one sense, both cases are a problem of education: businesses are often unaware of policies protecting the rights of disabled people and those working in the food industry are unaware of the many needs of disabled people. This lack of education creates barriers that disabled people must navigate, often making it harder if not impossible to go out and enjoy public spaces.

Still, educating people on what disabled people need is only part of the larger issue. Policies that fail to recognize the needs of marginalized groups often cause harm, even if their intent is to benefit (in this case) the environment. It is important to make sure that our policies are coherently inclusive of all life. What the current bans on single-use plastics are moving towards is the complete removal of all single-use plastics. This may be ideal for the environment if it is considered in abstraction from the needs of disabled people, but, since the whole point of environmentalism is to improve the well-bring of all living things, disabled people cannot be excluded from plans for social changes designed to improve the environment. At present, these policies are done without considering the full range of human lives that will be affected by these bans. Even if there was an alternative to plastic straws, many reusable and biodegradable options are simply unaffordable for disabled people, a large percentage of whom live below the poverty line.[278] Forcing disabled people to carry around their own disposable straws or to invest in reusable straws is to place further economic burdens on a marginalized group that is

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[276] Ayana Archie and Dalila-Johari Paul, "Why Banning Plastic Straws Upsets People with Disabilities," *Canadian News Network,* Jul. 11, 2018.
https://www.cnn.com/2018/07/11/health/plastic-straw-bans-disabled-trnd/index.html
[277] Danovich and Godoy
[278] Powell

often already forced to pay for extended (or, in the US basic) health care. Accessibility tools that assist disabled people in gaining a higher level of independence may also help to offset some of the cost of caretakers. Expecting disabled people to trade a relatively inexpensive tool for either an expensive replacement or to have their caretakers assist in further tasks could result in further economic hardship.

To be coherently inclusive, policy makers must be aware of how policies affect the lives of those who must live with the consequences; therefore, policy makers must attempt to implement policies in such a way as to ensure that the life-requirements of all people are satisfied in environmentally sustainable ways. What this means is that, if we rely on plastic straws, we must try to implement environmental policies that tackle the issue of plastic waste without creating barriers to inclusion that actively harm disabled people. If there are no alternative need-satisfiers, we must unfortunately rely on the ones that are currently available, even if they may present potential environmental dangers. As I have already shown, though, plastic straws do not present the largest threat to our oceans. Given this, it is likely that we can find alternative solutions to the growing ecological crisis that plastic waste presents while allowing for the use of plastic straws. It is likely that a focus on individual or consumer responsibility is simply not enough to stop the impending ecological crisis. In the next section, I will address methods by which we can attempt to alleviate some of the damage plastic straws do via policy changes while focusing on corporate, rather than consumer, responsibility.

3.4. Corporate vs Individual Responsibility and the Importance of Policy

We ought to examine how technology and the objects we create impact different people and the environment. Noonan states that "All technological developments create fields of possibilities which must be evaluated according to their potential life value."[279] In the case of single-use plastic straws, we see that they are actively involved in the harm of marine wildlife. At the same time, we see that they act as accessibility tools that open up further life-valuable possibilities for disabled people who need to use these straws in order to access their biological life-requirements with a degree of independence. Without the use of plastic straws, disabled people who use them are at risk of injury or need to spend more time and money on care givers to assist with drinking. Still, it is not wrong to examine how plastic straws affect the environment and to consider possible solutions. The fact that we cannot simply get rid of plastic straws only means that we need to find a solution for the increasing amount of plastic wastes entering our oceans.

We cannot put the onus of finding a solution that works entirely on disabled people, or consumers for that matter. Disability activist Lei Wiley-Mydske states that the burden of finding a solution for the plastic straw debate is being placed on disabled people without environmentalists pushing for new alternatives from "companies that manufacture straws."[280] Corporations themselves are seemingly exempt from responsibility, despite their influence on how plastics are created and distributed. This is problematics since corporations in the plastic manufacturing industry have a large

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[279] Noonan, *Embodiment and the Meaning of Life,* 94.
[280] Danovich and Godoy

"influence over countries' various decisions over plastic."[281] Public awareness of the

problem of plastic waste is not overall a bad thing. Individuals can change their habits to

try to lighten their ecological footprints. However, many believe a major crux of the plastic

waste problem is in waste management, and that placing responsibility solely on the

individual takes attention away from this broader issue.[282] When the problem of plastic

straws is framed in a misleading way by placing *all* the blame on consumers and

"individual action will only go so far," there needs to be "an industry-wide change,

[otherwise] vast quantities plastic [sic] will still make it into the oceans."[283] In this section

I will cover how corporations shift responsibility from themselves to consumers as well as

the waste management problem and how a focus on policy and corporate responsibility

may be a better solution for the plastic waste problem.

Corporations have shifted responsibility onto consumers through attempts to

educate consumers on how to be more environmentally aware. This is a consistent

problem of green washing capitalism. Matt Wilkins states that in the US starting "in the

1950s, big beverage companies like Coca-Cola and Anheuser-Busch, along with Phillip

Morris and others, formed a non-profit called Keep America Beautiful."[284] The aim of this

group was (and continues to be) to educate the public "and encourage environmental

stewardship."[285] Through PSAs that appear to be harmless, perhaps even benevolent,

corporations obscure their role in the plastic waste problem, redirecting the blame to what

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[281] Robin Andrews, "The European Union Just Voted to Ban Single-Use Plastics By 2021,"
Forbes, Oct. 25, 2018. https://www.forbes.com/sites/robinandrews/2018/10/25/the-european-
union-just-voted-to-ban-single-use-plastics-by-2021/#ec2482e4b4e5
[282] Gibbens
[283] Andrews
[284] Matt Wilkins, "More Recycling Won't Solve the Plastic Pollution," *Scientific American*, Jul 6,
2018. https://blogs.scientificamerican.com/observations/more-recycling-wont-solve-plastic-
pollution/
[285] Ibid.

consumers can and should be doing for the environment. At the policy level, this has led to imposing fines on litterers and "almost no responsibility on plastic manufacturers for the numerous environmental, economic and health hazards imposed by their products."[286] In addition, Wilkins claims that many of these corporations have "actively thwarted legislation that would increase extended producer responsibility for waste management."[287]

The responsibility to care for the environment is shifted from those producing plastic waste to those consuming it. The problem lies in how policies around plastic waste place the burden entirely on consumers when individual efforts are not enough to combat the growing plastic waste crisis. Individual consumers can only do so much with their limited time, money, and energy. Boycotting certain companies because they don't do enough for the environment only works if you can afford to switch to 'environmentally friendly' products, which tend to sell for more money because they use recycled plastics or simply because companies know they can charge more for these products. These environmentally friendly products also tend to be marketing ploys with little positive impact on the environment.

In addition to trying to raise public awareness of environmental responsibility, many corporations attempt to look as if they are making changes to be more environmentally friendly and sustainable. These efforts are often only an appearance. For example, in reaction to the ban on plastic straws, Starbucks chose to implement straw-free lids. However, these lids reportedly use more plastic than the original lid and straw

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[286] Ibid.
[287] Ibid.

combination.[288] This is excluding the amount of waste made up of paper cups that they send to landfills every year. These paper cups have a plastic interior that requires advanced recycling facilities in order to properly recycle them. Since many municipalities cannot recycle these paper cups, consumers and Starbucks alike are forced to simply throw them out.[289] Yet in many cases Starbucks has recycling bins labeled as if these paper cups are recyclable. These faint attempts at making themselves seem environmentally conscientious and as working towards sustainable practices, do little for the environment while acting as a huge marketing scheme that draw attention and business to Starbucks. There are also many corporations that label their product packages as being made from recycled products. But the process of using recycled products for food and beverage packaging requires heavy amounts of collection, sorting, and reprocessing technology that only "44 of the world's nearly 200 nations" have.[290] So while, for example, Coca-Cola has pledged to use 50% recycled plastic in their packaging by 2030, this is not likely to be an easy feat.[291] This does not begin to look at the failures of waste management systems that, as I will discuss shortly, fail to process recyclable products that are ending up in our oceans. These are corporate attempts at packaging themselves as environmentally aware. What environmental packaging does, ultimately, is falsely give corporations a way to profit off of environmentalism while making themselves seem as if they are making attempts to be more sustainable. If the corporations seem to be doing their part already, the consumer is then expected to also do their part.

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[288] Hopper
[289] Ibid.
[290] Rainey
[291] Ibid.

Corporate responsibility only goes so far when a crucial part of the plastic waste problem lies in waste management. Waste management systems are hugely unequipped to deal with the rising rate of plastics. From 2004 to 2017 the production of plastic bottles alone has doubled.[292] James Rainey reports that even though "most bottles and other plastics are made of recyclable polyethylene terephthalate (PET), very little of the material has been returned for processing or reused."[293] any corporations also "sometimes balk at using recycled plastic, which can be discolored and not as clear as 'virgin' plastic."[294] As I stated earlier, much of the plastic that is reused must be heavily processed in order to be considered safe for food and beverages; however, even if some plastic is being recycled, a large percentage of it is not. Reportedly, "40 percent of all plastic produced is used in packaging, and much of that is used only once and then discarded."[295] Much of the plastic that we use ends up in landfills and, since China is no longer accepting recyclable plastics from other countries, the amount of recyclable plastic being thrown into landfills is ever increasing.[296]

However, the amount of plastic waste in the ocean is largely a result of poor waste management. A study from 2017 showed "that up to 95 per cent of the world's ocean plastic was coming from 10 rivers: Eight in Asia and two in Africa."[297] This study also reported "that some of the lowest levels of floating plastic were in the drainage basin for

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[292] Ibid.
[293] Ibid.
[294] Ibid.
[295] Brian Clark Howard, Sarah Gibbens, Elaina Zachos, and Laura Parker, "A Running List of Action on Plastic Pollution," *National Geographic*, Jan. 17, 2019. https://www.nationalgeographic.com/environment/2018/07/ocean-plastic-pollution-solutions/
[296] Andrews
[297] Hopper

the Great Lakes" despite it being a high population area.[298] What this seems to show, according to Tristin Hopper, is that the waste management in North America is working.[299] However, if North American countries are shipping their plastic waste to other countries that lack the resources to properly manage all of the plastic waste, it seems unreasonable to give countries like the U.S. and Canada a gold star for recycling. We should instead still be concerned that there is a high degree of plastic entering the world's oceans at all and wonder what North American countries ought to do about it. At the very least we can see that waste management on a global scale is not working and that more needs to be done to keep plastic waste from entering the oceans.

Recycling is "not a panacea,"[300] since large quantities of plastic waste are still entering our oceans and a significant percentage of plastic is left. As an alternative to plastic, some recommend using glass bottles which are non-toxic. This would mean putting pressure on companies to shift the type of packaging they use for food and beverages by, as environmental groups recommend, carrying our own water bottles and talking "to restaurant and market operators about plastic alternatives."[301] While this may be a potential solution that individual consumers can actively do to contribute to combating the plastic waste problem, this, like recycling, is not enough to tackle the wide scope of the issue. According to Wilkins, "The real problem is that single-use plastic—the very idea of producing plastic items like grocery bags, which we use for an average of 12 minutes but can persist in the environment for half a millennium—is an incredibly reckless abuse of technology."[302] So for Wilkins the real problem with plastic waste is that

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[298] Ibid.
[299] Ibid.
[300] Ibid.
[301] Ibid.
[302] Wilkins

it should never have been allowed to get to this point without any degree of regulation controlling how we produce plastic items.

A problem of mass production cannot simply be solved by finding ways for consumers to do better when the root of the problem lies not entirely in how consumers dispose of, and municipalities collect and process, the plastic waste. If the root of the problem is in mass production unchecked for sustainability and long-term consequences, we must approach the problem from a policy framework in addition to an individual and waste management approach. For Wilkins, "Our huge problem with plastic is the result of a permissive legal framework that has allowed the uncontrolled rise of plastic pollution, despite clear evidence of the harm it causes to local communities and the world's oceans."[303] Policies around the production and use of single-use plastics are slowly being implemented and coming into effect. Current bans on single-use plastics, as described earlier in this chapter, are focusing on single-use plastics, primarily those such as plastics bags and especially straws. The European Union in particular is aiming to ban many single-use plastics by 2021 as well as cut down on "the use of plastics for which no alternatives currently exist."[304] This policy includes a reduction in plastic waste from food (25% reduction) and beverage (90% reduction) packaging by 2025, as well as a 50% reduction of cigarette butts by 2030.[305] If this policy actually comes into effect as planned, Europe could see a large reduction in its plastic waste.

Again, while we need to change policy in order to properly attempt to resolve the growing plastic waste problem, these policies must take all life as fully into account as

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[303] Ibid.
[304] Andrews
[305] Ibid.

possible if they are to be life-coherent and sustainable. According to Noonan, "Human action becomes life-incoherent on the social plane when dominated by institutions that enable ruling classes to treat subaltern groups as mere objects to be exploited for the sake of the ruling classes' private enjoyment and power."[306] These forms of social organization "are *life*-incoherent, because the ruling ideology denies that the people they dominate are all human beings with the same life-requirements and the same general potential for living meaningful and good lives as those who dominate them."[307] Social institutions, including policies, are life-incoherent when they deny people access to life-requirements and opportunities by which they can build meaningful lives. In this case, policies and practices around plastic waste are life-incoherent insofar as they allow for harmful plastic waste to enter our oceans unchecked in favour of profit. When responsibility for plastic waste is shifted from corporations and policy to the consumer, this is an effort put forward by corporations to protect their profit margins. The fact that there is a push for changes in policy is a result of the clear lack of effect consumer-focused changes are having on the plastic waste crisis. However, these policies remain life-incoherent if they make sweeping bans that do not consider the need-satisfiers required by all people. Plastic straws are easy to ban when we ignore those who need them in order to access their life-requirements. They are also one of the first single-use plastics to be banned because the removal of plastic straws will have the least effect on corporate sales since corporations, like Starbucks as described earlier, will find alternative ways to distribute their products to consumers. Policies will remain life-incoherent as long as their intended goal is to placate environmentalists while doing the least amount of damage to corporations.

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[306] Noonan, *Embodiment and the Meaning of Life*, 74.
[307] Ibid.

Both the environment and human beings are being harmed by plastic waste because the plastic waste that ends up in our oceans is ingested by the fish we eat. This makes it crucial, not only for the environment's sake, but for our own health, that we address the ecological crisis that plastic waste pouring into our oceans presents. However, our solutions for the plastic waste problem should not come at the expense of vulnerable groups. The initial ignorance to the importance of plastic straws for some disabled people extends from the same ignorance surrounding accessibility tools as need-satisfiers and *not* special needs. When we contend that disability is inherently something that *ought* to be removed, we see accessibility devices and tools as things that are exceptions to the rule. Life-value ethics allows us to understand that accessibility tools are need-satisfiers, things that allow disabled people to access the life-requirements needed by *all* human beings. Under a life-value framework, accessibility tools are no longer exceptions to the rule, but are understood as part of the scope of different need-satisfiers that suit different circumstances and different human beings. Within this understanding, plastic straws become accessibility tools, need-satisfiers that should be understood as necessary to a group of people in specific circumstances. While some need-satisfiers may be more life-valuable, if there are no replacements for certain need-satisfiers, we must make do with what's available given a specific set of circumstances. If there is currently no adequate alternative to plastic straws, policies around plastic waste should take the need for single-use plastic straws into account and amend their policies so that single-use plastic straws are not made inaccessible to those who need them. Where individuals should be putting their effort is fighting for more inclusive policies and better alternative need-satisfiers.

Chapter 4: Chapter 4: Conclusion

4.1. Coherent Inclusivity Through Accessibility

While it can be shown that plastic straws are not the highest contributor of the plastic waste crisis and that we ought to look at waste management systems and environmental policy instead of consumers for solutions, it could be argued that we should not focus on accessibility that only benefits a small group of people. The argument rests on the idea that we ought to do what we can to address the growing ecological crisis. In this way, accessibility may be argued to be an exception from the norm, something that only benefits disabled people (a small number of the population) and should be done as an afterthought because we ought to use our limited resources to benefit the larger populace. In this conclusion I will briefly outline the main points of my previous chapters as well as contend that accessibility devices and accessible spaces are coherently inclusive. More specifically, I want to show how accessibility extends beyond including disabled people by providing access to a wide range of people.

In chapter 1 I covered a foundation of a life-value ethics approach. In this chapter I specifically looked at the distinction between a life-requirement and a need-satisfier. Life-requirements are what is required for life to exist; they are the needs on which our organic capacities depend. This contrasts with need-satisfiers which are the tools or vehicles by which we access our life-requirements. Need-satisfiers allow for different people and cultures to access their life-requirements according to their specific situations.

This allows for a universal basis, as all human beings require the same life-requirements, as well as for variation between cultures and situations—not all cultures need to adhere to Western ideals. While I address John McMurtry's approach to life-requirements, I indicate that Jeff Noonan's life-requirements are the ones that I refer to when referencing life-requirements. Noonan's three categories of biological, socio-cultural, and temporal life-requirements outline the core components of human life whereas McMurtry's life-requirements are universal and applicable to all life.

Beginning with the medical and social models of disability, Chapter 2 was primarily focused on outlining disability theory before connecting it to life-value ethics. The medical model views disability as impairment only, focusing on correcting the individual's impairment rather than the social aspects of disability. In contrast, the social model contends that disability arises out of the interaction between impairment and social institutions that create barriers against those impairments. According to the social model, it is society itself that is disabling. In its analysis, however, the social model is criticized for leaving out the real limitations that impairments present.

I move on from the medical and social models of disability to address a newer model, the value-neutral model as put forward by Elizabeth Barnes. While I am not satisfied with her conception of disability since it too seems to glance over the physicality of disability, what is important to take away from Barnes are her arguments on adaptive preference and her adherence to the idea that we ought to question the bad-difference view of disability and, through it, the idea that a disabled life is a life not worth living. She maintains that we ought to believe the testimony of disabled people and, if we believe this testimony, we ought to believe that most disabled people find value in their lives *as disabled people*.

Chapter 2 concluded with me addressing the potential connections between life-value ethics and disability. Noonan's distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic limitations allows us to differentiate between the *intrinsic* limitations that disability presents—that is, the limitations that come with all impairments—while holding onto the notion that there are *extrinsic* social structures in place that create barriers against the social inclusion of disabled people. In addition, under a life-value framework disability becomes, in part, an aspect of human life that we must, in some way or another, navigate. Disability is a potential intrinsic limitation of which all human beings are liable.

In chapter 3 I applied the life-value ethics and disability theory to the recent movement to ban single-use plastic straws. This movement is in response to the growing ecological crisis of large quantities of plastic waste entering the world's oceans. Plastic straws have been a primary focus of public concern due in part to a viral video of a turtle having a straw taken out of its nose. In response to this movement, disability activists and advocates have mentioned their concern about the removal of plastic straws, since many disabled people with muscular and neurological disorders require straws in order to drink fluids. I showed that plastic straws are not the main contributor to the plastic waste problem and that the focus on consumer responsibility detracted from the failure of waste management systems and from possible policy changes that could aid the problem of plastic waste. Most importantly, chapter 3 showed how plastic straws can be conceived of as need-satisfiers. Plastic straws act as need-satisfiers by allowing some disabled people to access their biological life-requirements (food and water) with a degree of independence that they could not otherwise achieve.

The lack of awareness of plastic straws as need-satisfiers stems from a lack of education surrounding the need-satisfiers of disabled people. While this can be corrected,

there is a tendency to frame the need-satisfiers of disabled people as 'special needs.' As I addressed in chapter 2, 'special needs' language makes it seem as if the needs of disabled people are separate from, or additional to, the needs of non-disabled people when in actuality the life-requirements of all human beings remains the same. What differs between non-disabled people and disabled people is that disabled people often have different or additional need-satisfiers. The tendency stems from the bad-difference view of disability that many non-disabled people hold. That is, since many people believe that to be disabled is to be inherently worse-off and that a disabled life is automatically a bad life, they conceive of additional need-satisfiers as altogether separate needs.

If we conceive of disabled people's need-satisfiers as 'special,' as removed from all other life-requirements and need-satisfiers, we risk concluding that we ought to spend limited resources on the need-satisfiers of the larger group, those who are non-disabled. However, I argue that accessibility devices allow for a higher degree of coherent inclusivity by not only acting as need-satisfiers for disabled people, but also as need-satisfiers for non-disabled people. Mike Oliver maintains that a great deal of social resources is funnelled into "individually based interventions with ever diminishing returns."[308] These individual interventions lead to a lack of resources being put toward environmental modifications "despite the greater potential benefits of such investments."[309] Oliver maintains that "providing a barrier free environment is likely to benefit not just those with mobility impairment but other groups as well (e.g. mothers with prams and pushchairs, porters with trolleys)."[310] Just as ramps and automatic doors

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[308] Oliver, 21.
[309] Ibid.
[310] Ibid.

can help a wide array of people, so too can plastic straws. Plastic straws are helpful for young children still learning how to use their basic motor skills. At the same time, as our population continues to age, there will be an increase in age-related disabilities as well as in the number of those who require plastic straws. Banning plastic straws, then, would be less coherently inclusive than regulating them even though they have a harmful impact on the environment.

When we address the struggles of disabled people, we are not addressing additional needs, but the needs of human beings who are, like all human beings, limited by their embodied materiality. Disability forces us to recognize the limitation of human beings. Through disability we see our vulnerability, our liability to injury and disease, as well as our susceptibility to extrinsic harms imposed on us by life-incoherent ruling systems. We can come to accept disability as part of human experience by accepting our own limitations as human beings. Through our acceptance of our intrinsic limitations, we can realize and begin to work against the extrinsic limitations imposed on us by the ruling value system.

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