

**Ability qua Mobility:  
Disability as Identity and Hierarchy  
in *Brave New World* and *Flowers for Algernon***



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## Samandrag

Skildringa av funksjonshemjing i litteraturen er ein verdifull målestokk for dei samfunnsverdiane som eit samfunn forventar både av kropp og sinn. Science Fiction inviterer særskild ei lesing med fokus på funksjonshemjing sidan genren både skildrar forventningane frå den kulturelle samtida, og kva funksjonar ein kultur bør eller ikkje bør forvente frå innbyggjarane sine i framtida. Daniel Keyes sin roman *Flowers for Algernon* (1966) skildrar Charlie Gordon, som går frå kognitivt funksjonshemma til geni og tilbake. Det er ein Hugo-pris-vinnande klassikar som er «ein av dei vidast lesne som tek for seg dei mentalt funksjonshemma» og er hylla som ein humanistisk tekst.<sup>1</sup> Aldous Huxley sin banebrytande *Fagre Nye Verda* (*Brave New World*) (1932) skildrar ei dystopisk framtid med prøverøyrsfødsel og funksjon-segregering som er tilsynelatande mindre humanistisk. Den er ein vidt brukt allegori i bio-etiske diskursar, for eksempel med omsyn til testing av fostervatn.

Begge romanane brukar funksjonshemjing til å konstruera dei sosiale hierarkia sine og framkalle patos i forteljinga og karakterane. Desse hierarkia avslører ein evaluering av dei intellektuelt funksjonshemma, der dei har mindre nytteverdi enn dei som er fysisk funksjonshemma. Denne oppgåva nyttar den teoretiske korpusen kring funksjonshemjing i samanlikninga av desse to romanane og analyserer korleis tekstane konstruerer funksjonshemjing og fordeler nytteverdi til dei funksjonshemma karakterane. Der *Flowers for Algernon* presenterer teknologi som kur for funksjonshemjing, med konsekvens at ein identifiserer funksjonshemjing som verdiløyse, har *Fagre Nye Verda* fordelt nytteverdi til alle borgarar, uavhengig av nivået til evnene deira. Ved å setje romanane i dialog med kvarandre syner eg nødvendigheita i å skildre dei funksjonshemma som elementære medlemmar av framtidige samfunn for å fostre god diskurs.

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<sup>1</sup> Brent Walter Cline, “‘You’re Not the Same Kind of Human Being’: The Evolution of Pity to Horror in Daniel Keyes’s *Flowers for Algernon*,” *Disability Studies Quarterly* 20, no. 4 (2012): 1. (My translation.)

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## Introduction

Disability is a valuable part of human experience, yet it often impacts the individual's perception of their own identity. Everybody identifies as more than their disability, but society makes shortcuts by way of their definitions. In literature, identity and disability are constructs that require constant revision. Aldous Huxley and Daniel Keyes address contemporary societal and individual aspects of disability through science fiction, but their novels also provide a plan for how disability may be constructed in the future. *Brave New World*, published in 1932, is Aldous Huxley's seminal work. It depicts the World State, a futuristic society of disability castes where everybody is the result of careful ectogenesis and conditioning.<sup>2</sup> At first glance it would not compare well with Daniel Keyes's *Flowers for Algernon*, due to the latter's temporal setting around its 1966 publication. The protagonist of Keyes's novel is an intellectually disabled man who undergoes an experiment to augment his intelligence. While Keyes's novel immediately invites a disability reading due to its individualistic approach to disability, Huxley's disabled castes have not received much scholarly attention beyond comparisons to the working classes. However, both novels construct disability by drawing on Platonic imagery. This thesis examines the novels' constructions of disability in light of Plato's to revise established former readings. By comparing the two novels, I argue that disabled people are indispensable to Huxley's utilitarian world, while unexpectedly inconsequential in Keyes's humanist approach.

This thesis builds on Rosalyn Benjamin Darling's work in *Disability and Identity*, and thus uses the term *disability* as defined by the Americans with Disabilities Act: "a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more of the major life activities of such

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<sup>2</sup> Ectogenesis is gestation and birth in an artificial environment, outside the body.

individual; a record of such an impairment; *being regarded* as having such an impairment.”<sup>3</sup> Science fiction’s role in the construction of disability should not be underestimated.<sup>4</sup> In the abstract to their “Science Fiction and the medical humanities,” Gavin Miller and Anna McFarlane extol “Science Fiction’s critical relationship to the construction of ‘the future’ in the present.”<sup>5</sup> SF is “educational literature,” according to Darko Suvin’s famous definition of the genre, and therefore deserves particular attention in its representation of marginalised groups such as the disabled.<sup>6</sup> Through predictions unique to the SF genre, we pre-empt and prepare ourselves for possible changes in our societies. Kathryn Allan holds that no other literary genre than SF is equally suited to hyperbolize the issues surrounding disability. For example, by creating a caste of labourers disabled *by the state* in *Brave New World* or *curing* an intellectually impaired man to make him useful in *Flowers for Algernon*, the authors articulate what Allan terms “the anxieties and preoccupations of the present day” which help readers understand technological advances and their “impact on newly emerging embodiments and subjectivities.”<sup>7</sup> Academia occasionally spurns SF for being “speculative” fiction, but this thesis contends that it is this very speculation that makes SF uniquely suited as both a measuring rod and guiding post in disability representation. With basis in Darling’s, Allan’s, Miller’s and McFarlane’s landmark work, this thesis explores the “social reactions” to disability and its challenges as a social factor in the two SF novels.<sup>8</sup> I will strive to depict disability as a spectrum, although it is a concept often read in binary terms like abled and

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<sup>3</sup> Rosalyn Benjamin Darling, *Disability and Identity: Negotiating Self in a Changing Society*, ed. Ronald J. Berger, 1 ed., Disability in Society, (London: Lynne Rienner, 2013), 11-12 (Emphasis added).

<sup>4</sup> Science fiction henceforth abbreviated to “SF.”

<sup>5</sup> Gavin Miller and Anna McFarlane, “Science fiction and the medical humanities,” *Medical Humanities* 42, no. 4 (Dec 2016): 213, <https://doi.org/10.1136/medhum-2016-011144>, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/27885035>.

<sup>6</sup> Darko Suvin, “SF and the Genealogical Jungle,” in *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction: On the Poetics and History of a Literary Genre* (Massachusetts: Yale University Press, 1979), 36.

<sup>7</sup> Kathryn Allan, *Disability in Science Fiction: Representations of Technology As Cure* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 2. <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/bergen-ebooks/detail.action?docID=1431313>.

<sup>8</sup> Darling, *Disability and Identity*, 141.

disabled. To avoid these binaries, a brief introduction of concepts within disability scholarship is necessary before proceeding.

Tom Shakespeare defines *impairment* as “individual and private” and *disability* as “structural and public,” a distinction that underlines the social model of disability.<sup>9</sup> The social model rose to challenge the pervasive medical model, which casts disability as an individual flaw, moral wrong or “biological deficit.”<sup>10</sup> According to Darling’s timeline of disability activism, the social model problematizes the dominating mindset of the medical model and Shakespeare further suggests disability is superimposed onto disabled people’s impairment through their unnecessary isolation and exclusion from participating in society.<sup>11</sup> For example, Keyes’s narrator-protagonist Charlie Gordon has an intellectual impairment, but it is his society that disables him by failing to accommodate it. Likewise, *Brave New World*’s Bernard Marx has a physical impairment, his “stunted” physique, yet his peers disable and ostracize him even though he is functionally their equal.<sup>12</sup> These terms pose a considerable challenge for any scholar addressing people’s abilities, because “disability” and “impairment” may subsume a diverse and numerous group of people with little or nothing in common.

Two brief disclaimers are here in place. Scholars seem to employ “mental” and “intellectual” interchangeably as prefixes to disability. This is misleading because mental illnesses like bipolar disorder or schizophrenia have no correlation with cognitive learning disorders such as dyslexia. Therefore, I will strive to use “intellectual” where possible to avoid confusion. Furthermore, I refrain from identifying “the disabled” as a homogenous group. The label lumps people with different impairments under the same denominator, be they physically or intellectually challenged, or simply stigmatized because they are different.

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<sup>9</sup> Tom Shakespeare, “The Social Model of Disability,” in *The Disability Studies Reader*, ed. Lennard J. Davis (New York: Routledge, 2010), 268.

<sup>10</sup> Shakespeare, “Social Model,” 266.

<sup>11</sup> Shakespeare, “Social Model,” 267.

<sup>12</sup> Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World* (London: Vintage, 2007), 39.

Darling acknowledges the heterogeneous nature of the term “disabled” and argues that in spite of recent efforts to reconceptualise disability as a “normal form of human variation,” there is still much “conceptual variability” to the label.<sup>13</sup> However, for the sake of efficacy, this thesis will employ the terms “disabled people” and “the disabled” when addressing the impaired and socially marginalized in *Brave New World* and *Flowers for Algernon*.

David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder’s article “Narrative Prosthesis” claims that every culture contains an impaired or differently abled population that it usually views as a “problem in need of a solution.” However, the two scholars delineate how cultures also use disabled bodies as symbols to invoke pathos. Their approach resonates with the novels, as it highlights how literature uses disability as a “crutch” for symbolism and “disruptive” impact. The novels’ occasionally pitiful portrayal of disability risks essentialising disabled characters like Charlie and Bernard, and thus invites a reading using *narrative prosthesis* as method. Simply put, the concept means an author’s use of disability as a “narrative device” to connect emotionally with the reader, without any real exploration of the disability or the “prosthetic” disabled character. By analysing the novels’ characters as possible narrative devices, this thesis will exceed previously superficial disability readings.<sup>14</sup>

### **Established Former Readings**

At surface level, *Brave New World* and *Flowers for Algernon* seem to follow Darling’s timeline of disability representation; from stigmatization and oppression of Huxley’s characters to acceptance and positive “self-concepts” for Keyes’s Charlie.<sup>15</sup> The prevalent readings of both novels necessitate presentation before I introduce my own analysis.

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<sup>13</sup> Darling, *Disability and Identity*, 1.

<sup>14</sup> David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder, “Narrative Prosthesis,” in *The Disability Studies Reader*, ed. Lennard J. Davis (New York: Routledge, 2010), 276, 77.

<sup>15</sup> Darling, *Disability and Identity*, 6-19, 33.



Huxley's novel initially appears to use disability as a narrative device to display the inhumanity and stagnation of his utilitarian dystopia. The author feared the "progressive contamination of the genetic pool" and posited ectogenesis and conditioning as remedies.<sup>16</sup> In *Brave New World: Revisited*, the reevaluation published in 1958, Huxley explores how his predictions endured the test of time and maintains a derisive tone regarding his disabled characters. Words such as "sub-human," "biologically inferior" and "creatures" in addition to a direct reference to eugenics make a persuasive case for an unfavourable reading of disability in Huxley:

In the Brave New World of my phantasy, eugenics and dysgenics were practiced systematically. In one set of bottles biologically superior ova, fertilized by biologically superior sperm, were given the best possible pre-natal treatment and were finally decanted as Betas, Alphas and even Alpha Pluses. In another, much more numerous set of bottles, biologically inferior ova, fertilized by biologically inferior sperm, were subjected to the Bokanovsky Process (ninety-six identical twins out of a single egg) and treated pre-natally with alcohol and other protein poisons. The creatures finally decanted were almost sub-human; but they were capable of performing unskilled work and, when properly conditioned, detensioned by free and frequent access to the opposite sex, constantly distracted by gratuitous entertainment and reinforced in their good behaviour patterns by daily doses of *soma*, could be counted on to give no trouble to their superiors.<sup>17</sup>

"Dysgenics" refers to the planned pre-natal degradation of test tube babies that the World State predestines for "unskilled" work. In the author's own words *Brave New World* appears as an elitist blueprint for a future in which biologically "superior" humans govern the labouring lower castes disabled by the state. The castes do not intermingle, which makes the World State an ability-apartheid of sorts. Recent scholars such as David Bradshaw and Joanne Woiak have attributed the biological aspects of the novel to the young author's fascination with the then-burgeoning field of eugenics.

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<sup>16</sup> Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World Revisited* (London: Flamingo, 1994), Sequel, 29.

<sup>17</sup>Huxley, *BNW Revisited*, 19. (Emphasis in original.)

Bradshaw and Woiak reveal that Huxley supported eugenics at the time of writing his novel.<sup>18</sup> As late as 1958 he still talked about the problematic survival of the “unfortunate” and “congenitally insufficient organisms.”<sup>19</sup> The disabling of the citizens in *Brave New World* is thus a complicated theme, as the author’s attitude towards disabled people in his contemporary society might simultaneously have been sympathy and revulsion. However, despite Bradshaw and Woiak’s argument that the young Huxley initially designed *Brave New World* as more of an outline for a future society than a cautionary tale, the resulting novel unequivocally warns the reader against the state application of eugenics and dysgenics. General readings tend to misunderstand the novel’s efforts to maintain a society segregated by ability and Huxley’s problematization of the economical solutions that eugenics and cloning offer. Therefore, I need to disentangle my reading of *Brave New World* from Marxist approaches before I turn to Keyes’s novel.

Marxist critics have already drawn parallels between the enslavement of the Gamma, Delta and Epsilon castes, and the oppression of labourers in totalitarian or capitalist societies. Theodor Adorno has remarked upon the injustice of “a system of class relationships [...] made eternal and biological.”<sup>20</sup> The novel’s segregated ability-hierarchy of labouring Epsilons and governing Alphas lends itself easily to an exploration of classist issues. Consequently, most academic studies read the conflation of social class and disability as Huxley’s sympathies with the working classes. John Strachey, a British politician, exemplifies this constricted vision of the disabled castes when he claims what Huxley is “really thinking of is the mental and physical deformation of [...] manual workers which capitalism perpetrates here

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<sup>18</sup> David Bradshaw, “Huxley’s Slump: Planning, Eugenics and the ‘Ultimate Need’ of Stability,” in *The Art of Literary Biography*, ed. John Batchelor (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 160-64. ; J. Woiak, “Designing a Brave New World: Eugenics, Politics, and Fiction,” *The Public Historian* 29, no. 3 (Summer 2007): 109, <https://doi.org/10.1525/tph.2007.29.3.105>, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/18175454>. ; Ruth Hubbard, “Abortion and Disability: Who Should and Should Not Inhabit the World?,” in *The Disability Studies Reader*, ed. Lennard J. Davis (New York: Routledge, 2010), 108-09. Huxley’s brother Julian wrote several articles proposing the enactment of eugenic programs in the UK

<sup>19</sup> Huxley, *BNW Revisited*, 29.

<sup>20</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, “Aldous Huxley and Utopia,” in *Prisms* (Massachusetts MIT Press, 1983), 99.

and now.”<sup>21</sup> Bradshaw corroborates the young author’s fascination with the Soviet five-year-plan but adds that “the absorption of biological blueprints into broader plans for the rationalization of society was not uncommon in the 1930s.”<sup>22</sup> Huxley correspondingly does not treat social classes and eugenics as separate themes but conflates them through the use of SF technology. That said, I will utilise the Marxist term *use value* to describe a utilitarian evaluation of disabled people. Hence, while the Marxist readings of the class struggle in *Brave New World* are a useful departure point, this thesis focuses on analysing the castes as markers of disability identity, rather than allegories of social classes.

SF authors’ predictions are particularly exposed to ridicule because they foretell the future. Their errors increasingly glare as society catches up and surpasses their forecasts. Still, the predictions that endure – or even help shape the ongoing discourse – obtain near mythical status as prescience and often become shorthand for the themes predicted. *Brave New World* remains a layperson’s allegory in bioethical conversations because it preceded modern cloning efforts, prenatal diagnosis and therapy, and established the ethical framework for these discussions. Woiak claims that the title itself is now an “overused catch-phrase” that expresses societal “ambivalence” to “new genetics and its effect on human life.”<sup>23</sup> Proponents from both sides of biotechnology debates make “appeals” to Huxley’s novel, according to John Lynch, who points to scholarly references to the novel as late as “2017.”<sup>24</sup> The novel’s legacy thus invites a re-reading with the perspective brought by decades of disability activism. My decision to read it together with *Flowers for Algernon* springs from the newer novel’s offer of more favourable traditional readings, which have influenced disability discourse as well.

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<sup>21</sup> John Strachey, *The Coming Struggle for Power* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1982), Economic and social analysis, 214.

<sup>22</sup> Bradshaw, “Huxley’s Slump,” 163.

<sup>23</sup> Woiak, “Designing a Brave New World,” 107.

<sup>24</sup> John Lynch, “Bioethics and Brave New World: Science Fiction and Public Articulation of Bioethics,” *Rhetoric of Health & Medicine* 2, no. 1 (2019): 34, 55, <https://doi.org/10.5744/rhm.2019.1002>.

Keyes's narrative focuses on unsatisfactory and inhumane treatment of disabled people. The intellectually disabled in particular are the subjects of several emotive jeremiads, which focus on their intrinsic humanity and how society should protect them from ridicule and attack. Although it may be early to bring in novel for analysis, I do so to contrast Keyes's humanism with Huxley's utilitarianism. In his autobiography, *Algernon, Charlie and I*, Keyes claims that he bases Charlie's outlook on disability on his own: "How would I know his feelings? I would give him *my* feelings."<sup>25</sup> Charlie's iconoclastic accusation of the intelligence-enhancing experiment's initiator, Professor Nemur, is thus a good example of the novel's humanist tone. Nemur argues that he and the other scientists did everything they could for Charlie, to which he retorts,

"Everything but treat me as a human being. You've boasted time and again that I was nothing before the experiment, and I know why. Because if I was nothing, then you were responsible for creating me, and that makes you my lord and master. You resent the fact that I don't show my gratitude every hour of the day. Well, believe it or not, I am grateful. But what you did for me – wonderful as it is – doesn't give you the right to treat me like an experimental animal. I'm an individual now, and so was Charlie before he ever walked into that lab. You look shocked! Yes, suddenly we discover that *I was always a person* – even before – and that challenges your belief that someone with an I.Q. of less than 100 doesn't deserve consideration. Professor Nemur, I think when you look at me your conscience bothers you."<sup>26</sup>

Towards the end of the monologue, Charlie articulates one of the novel's core arguments, challenging the readers to review their disability bias. His discourse centres on his humanity both before and after his operation, that he is an individual and should be treated as such no matter his abilities or circumstances. Charlie also criticises Professor Nemur's hypocritical ableist anxiety; if Nemur disdains him as impaired, cures him, but then resents him whilst highly intelligent, he leaves Charlie no option for peerage as a human being.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Daniel Keyes, *Algernon, Charlie and I: A Writer's Journey*, First Harvest ed. (Orlando: Harcourt, Inc, 2004), 100. (Emphasis added.)

<sup>26</sup> Daniel Keyes, *Flowers for Algernon*, 4th ed., SF Masterworks, (London: Victor Gollancz, 2002), SF Novel, 172. (Emphasis added.)

<sup>27</sup> Ableist anxiety is the sudden awareness and fear that one may lose ability. It occurs when regarding an impairment or an ability that greatly exceeds one's own.

*Flowers for Algernon*'s humanist approach may explain why the novel has become a popular subject to teach in the classroom. For example, Brent Walter Cline lists enthusiastic reviews from contemporary critics and academic journals of pedagogy before he concludes that even in his present-day classes "the Hugo-winning science fiction novel was one of the most widely read that concerns the mentally disabled."<sup>28</sup> Keyes's novel certainly appears to assign more value to the life of a disabled person than Huxley's. Nonetheless, observant readers familiar with Plato may be surprised by *Flowers for Algernon*'s humanist reputation, since its use of Platonic imagery creates a dissonance with its disability theme.

The representation of disability and ability-hierarchies in the two SF novels are snapshots of prevalent views on disability. Interrogating the novels' politics of representation gives insight to how the novels resist or promulgate these views. To understand the novels' challenge to enduring disability constructions, it is necessary to understand disability's conceptual history. As a cornerstone in Western philosophy, Plato established views on the differently abled that serve as a background for the disability discourse and as a connection between the two novels.

### **Plato and the Disability Timeline**

Huxley's futuristic World State and Keyes's mid-twentieth-century US are both representative of Western societies, with their cultural roots in the Western canon. "[T]he prevailing view of disability in Western Society" was "stigma," according to Darling, until modern humanist conceptualizations such as the social model gained ground late in the twentieth century.<sup>29</sup> Plato did not invent stigma, but his philosophy separates people into subsets through a parable of metals and encourages their differential treatment.<sup>30</sup> Since Plato

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<sup>28</sup> Cline, "Pity to Horror in *Flowers for Algernon*," 1.

<sup>29</sup> Darling, *Disability and Identity*, 142.

<sup>30</sup> Plato, "The Republic," in *The Dialogues of Plato*, ed. and trans. B. Jowett (3, London: Oxford University Press, 1931), Stephanus 415.

is a founder of the Western canon, the Platonic imagery in the novels calls for analysis and comparison to older conceptualizations of disability. Therefore, by enlisting three disability scholars, I establish a rudimentary timeline of disability concepts that reaches back to Plato's time.

Plato's separation of people may call to mind the distinction of "abnormal" and "normal" people, but those are modern terms. Although disabled people and disabilities have existed throughout the entirety of human history, Lennard Davis argues "normalcy" as a concept is a product of nineteenth century statisticians' analysis, with ab-normalcy as a by-product.<sup>31</sup> That is not to say that disabled people were not visible or subjects of analysis before the nineteenth century. Instead, they suffered "historical, philosophical and conceptual neglect" due to economic and technological "limitations" that impeded disabled people's survival.<sup>32</sup> The normatively abled often regard disabled people as "abnormal," which presupposes a defect.

Tim Stainton's and Thomas Joseph Kiefer's analyses of the Platonic construction of disability expand my own readings of the philosopher's text and allow us to map the ancestry of the idea that disabled people are "defective."<sup>33</sup> Kiefer claims that disability's "conceptual roots" trace back to "philosophical sources in antiquity and the functionality of reason applied to human embodiment," although he admits that disabled people in ancient Greece were not a "defined subcategory."<sup>34</sup> Due to contemporary hazards, physical or even intellectual impairments did not engender categorisation in ancient Greek culture. Instead, *reason* determines whether Plato categorises an individual as human. Stainton analyses how reason,

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<sup>31</sup> Lennard J. Davis, "Constructing Normalcy," in *The Disability Studies Reader*, ed. Lennard J. Davis (New York: Routledge, 2010), 3-4.

<sup>32</sup> Thomas Joseph Kiefer, "Reason and Normative Embodiment in Plato's *Republic*: On the Philosophical Creation of Disability," *Disability Studies Quarterly* 34, 1 (2014): 3, <https://dsq-sds.org/article/view/3319/3523>.

<sup>33</sup> Tim Stainton, "Reason and Value: The Thought of Plato and Aristotle and the Construction of Intellectual Disability," *Mental Retardation* 39, no. 6 (2001): 459, [https://doi.org/10.1352/0047-6765\(2001\)039<0452:Ravtto>2.0.Co;2](https://doi.org/10.1352/0047-6765(2001)039<0452:Ravtto>2.0.Co;2); Kiefer, "Philosophical Creation of Disability," 2.

<sup>34</sup> Kiefer, "Philosophical Creation of Disability," 3.

as per Platonic thought, helped shape the modern construction of intellectual disability. The scholar claims that the implication of a “hierarchy of beings,” with humans on top because of “their ability to reason,” is “firmly rooted” in Plato’s writings.<sup>35</sup>

Plato’s criterion of reason endures, despite modern efforts to reconceptualise disability. While it is conceivable that Plato, with the perspective of an ancient society, might argue to dispose of those born “deformed,”<sup>36</sup> Kiefer offers surprising insight to why the (dis)ability discourse remains ongoing:

Numerous contemporary philosophers still appeal to a normative conception of embodiment when considering whether or not a being is a "person" who ought to enjoy certain medical and ethical considerations owing to cognitive criteria or considerations of physical ability.<sup>37</sup>

To continue arguing that people’s normativity should determine if they deserve care is symptomatic of outdated disability rhetoric. Scholars have since noted that constructing disability “according to a criterion of normalcy” is tantamount to imposing a “compulsory able-bodiedness” that disparages those who do not meet the criteria.<sup>38</sup> By this logic, disabled people would not rank as human in Plato’s “hierarchy of beings,” nor, by extension, in Huxley’s novel.

The brave new World State imitates Plato’s ideal state. In *The Republic*, the philosopher delineates its hierarchy based on citizens’ abilities. Plato plots the creation of an everlasting republic governed by “guardians” considered “philosopher kings” that are selected from “the best” of the citizenry.<sup>39</sup> This hierarchy appears to have inspired Huxley.

Accordingly, *Brave New World*’s future society is also structured with intellectually superior Alphas at the top, and intellectually inferior Epsilons at the bottom. Merely suggesting that

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<sup>35</sup> Stainton, “Reason and Value: Plato's Construction of Intellectual Disability,” 453.

<sup>36</sup> Plato, “Republic,” Steph. 460.

<sup>37</sup> Kiefer, “Philosophical Creation of Disability,” 2.

<sup>38</sup> António Fernando Cascais, “The Metamorphic Body in Science Fiction: From Prosthetic Correction to Utopian Enhancement,” in *Disability in Science Fiction: Representations of Technology as Cure*, ed. Kathryn Allan (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 62.

<sup>39</sup> Plato, “Republic,” Steph. 473 , 456

the “best” should govern is not a disparagement of the disabled. However, Stainton claims that Plato was “not particularly sympathetic” to people with “lesser degrees of intelligence” and instead held that their position in society should be “subservient.”<sup>40</sup>

*Flowers for Algernon* addresses the expectation that disabled people ought to be subservient through Charlie’s peers’ expectations of subservience from him, but the novel also resonates with Plato’s more disparaging views. Considered “one of nature’s mistakes,” Charlie’s cure and sudden outperformance of his colleagues creates friction.<sup>41</sup> Kiefer argues that the reason for a friction like this can be found in Platonic constructions of disability:

Plato should be understood as one of the first philosophers to introduce a conception of normative human embodiment based on rationally-identifiable criteria in direct contradistinction to a *defective* form of embodiment. (Sources: Moravcsik, Galton, Carrick MacFarlane and Ronald) [...] Plato’s argumentation in effect creates a philosophical conception of disability as a type of *deficiency* when compared to that which is considered fully rational, healthy, or ideally human.<sup>42</sup>

Plato considers those that lack the ability to reason as defective aspects of a society. A defect requires a repair or a cure, which echoes the medical model of disability. It is thus possible to chart where the modern negative depictions of disability are rooted. Until recently, the media has tended to “promote” the medical model and portray people’s disability as an “individual problem” rather than the “social construction” line of thinking that is championed by adherents of the social model.<sup>43</sup>

Plato’s construction of disability functions as a conceptual basis that the SF authors deviate from. Stainton argues that it is specifically the Platonic “ideas” about how *human* or *valuable* a person is when he or she lacks “a certain type or degree of reason” that “underlie the current debates about prenatal testing, euthanasia, genetic modification, the right to treatment and rights to full and equal citizenship.”<sup>44</sup> The analytical chapters of this thesis

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<sup>40</sup> Stainton, “Reason and Value: Plato’s Construction of Intellectual Disability,” 455.

<sup>41</sup> Keyes, *Flowers*, 112.

<sup>42</sup> Kiefer, “Philosophical Creation of Disability,” 2. (Emphasis added.)

<sup>43</sup> Darling, *Disability and Identity*, 142.

<sup>44</sup> Stainton, “Reason and Value: Plato’s Construction of Intellectual Disability,” 459.



engage precisely the concepts of disability use value, humanity and ability hierarchies that the novels depict. I chart how *Brave New World* and *Flowers for Algernon* partake in a “fundamental reorientation of dominant Western knowledge constructs,” which Stainton suggests is the only way to resolve the disability debates in a way that recognises “the full equality and value of all humanity, including those with intellectual disability.”<sup>45</sup>

Between the three elements of the thesis – Huxley’s dystopic utilitarianism, Keyes’s humanist ability-transformation and Plato’s construction of disability – there is a tension which highlights disability-inclusive aspects of Huxley’s text and disability-derisive aspects of Keyes’s. The disability critic Antonio Fernando Cascais claims that the way SF treats “biological change” depicts a “line of development” moving from “individual cases to a view of a future in which the biological shaping of humans becomes normal and widespread.”<sup>46</sup> The former resonates with Charlie’s changeable ability and *Flowers for Algernon*’s focus on his experience.<sup>47</sup> Contrastingly, *Brave New World* disables every caste, whether Alpha or Epsilon, and therefore invites a comparison to Cascais’ latter description of widespread human biological shaping. This tension is the main reason why I chose to compare the disability construction in Huxley’s and Keyes’s novels.

I structure my thesis following Plato’s proposal that “we enquire into the nature of justice and injustice, first as they appear in the State, and secondly in the individual, proceeding from the greater to the lesser and comparing them.”<sup>48</sup> The first chapter of the thesis analyses the uses of disability as hierarchy and narrative device in both novels, and juxtaposes them with the utilitarian values of the ideal state that Plato outlines in *The Republic*. The second chapter analyses the experience of the novels’ disabled characters and

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<sup>45</sup> Stainton, “Reason and Value: Plato’s Construction of Intellectual Disability,” 459.

<sup>46</sup> Cascais, “Metamorphic Body in Science Fiction,” 72.

<sup>47</sup> To simplify the distinction between Charlie’s intellectual levels, I add disabled, postoperative and regressed as suffixes.

<sup>48</sup> Plato, “Republic,” Steph. 368-69.

collate these with the designations Plato bequeaths to people who are unable to analyse their own existence. Comparing the two novels' constructions of disability alongside Plato's shows that Huxley's utilitarianism is more egalitarian, but essentialises his characters to their disabilities. On the other hand, Keyes attempts a humanist portrayal, but missteps because his novel demonises Charlie's disability and renders the disabled as expendable. Read in conjunction, the novels tell us that disabled people are human beings beyond their use value, and that disability can be a source of knowledge.

Until we understand the conceptualisations that have helped shape the disability discourse, we cannot hope to fully utilise disability readings on SF literature. Only by knowing them can we plan to decommission the power structures of disability hierarchies.

## Chapter 1

### (Dis)ability as Hierarchy in *Brave New World* and *Flowers for Algernon*

This chapter analyses disability in Keyes and Huxley's novels, and charts how disability constructs social hierarchies through allusions to Plato. Whereas Huxley delineates his utilitarian society according to genetic predestination and use value, Keyes's hierarchy is more differentiated, albeit less demarcated. *Brave New World*, like Plato's *Republic*, predestines social position from birth while Keyes corrals his impaired characters in Warren, a mental institution. Huxley's World State heeds Plato's ideal society but differs on the topic of euthanasia and medical care. *Flowers for Algernon*'s mid-century US problematises Plato's eugenics-rationale yet portrays disability as an undesirable feature. Characters with changeable ability-levels affect and destabilise the novels' static hierarchies. Huxley's hierarchy crystallises when characters from different castes interact while Charlie's precipitous rise and fall in intelligence entails traversing the different ability-strata of his society. Like Plato, the authors use disability to assign societal status. *Brave New World* disables and assigns use value to all castes, which is more egalitarian and instructive to disabled people's societal inclusion than *Flowers for Algernon*'s Charlie, whose return to disability means uselessness. I argue that despite *Brave New World*'s institutionalised ableism – discrimination of an individual based on their level of ability – it presents more equality between people of different ableness than *Flowers for Algernon*'s more opaque ability hierarchy.

Both novels construct social hierarchies based on different levels of ability and suggest hegemony of one group over others. The genetically superior Alphas govern and assign roles for the mentally and physically “stunted”<sup>49</sup> lower castes. Professor Nemur and

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<sup>49</sup> Huxley, *Brave New World*, 127.

other scientists make decisions for the mentally disabled Charlie, effectively treating him as a “guinea pig.”<sup>50</sup> As often has been the case throughout human history, when one group is assigned or assumes leadership over another, an inequality between the two groups ensues. It is banally common that the hegemonic group receives, through discourse, propaganda or manipulation, a higher status and utility appraisal than those they govern. Such a stratification of value is increasingly problematic when the groups are separated and identified by their disability. There are two theoretical terms from disability studies that will aid me in interrogating the novels in the analysis that follows.

The two texts construct disability as more complex than a binary paradigm. To avoid the binary conceptualisation of disability and ability, this thesis adopts the term *(dis)ability* from Sami Schalk, which depicts ability as a spectrum. The scholar studies the intersectionality of race, disability and gender in black women’s speculative fiction and uses *(dis)ability* to “reference the overarching social system of bodily and mental norms that includes ability and disability.”<sup>51</sup> The parenthetical prefix highlights the mutual dependency of disability and ability, while disability un-parenthesised popularly signifies impairment only. The Alphas in *Brave New World*, for example, are identified by their ability rather than a disability, yet can only define themselves because they are distinct from the disabled Epsilon Semi-Morons. Furthermore, the *(dis)ability* term expands the dichotomy since it accommodates a third category: hyper-abilities such as Charlie’s genius-level intelligence. Schalk cedes that the line between *(dis)ability* and disability can be unclear, but for the purposes of mapping the *(dis)ability* hierarchies in *Brave New World* and *Flowers for Algernon*, this thesis employs her terminology to distinguish the two; moreover, it uses *disability*, *ability* and *hyper-ability* when discussing specific parts of the social systems.

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<sup>50</sup> Keyes, *Flowers*, 171.

<sup>51</sup> Sami Schalk, *Bodyminds Reimagined: (Dis)ability, Race, and Gender in Black Women's Speculative Fiction* (London: Duke University Press, 2018), 6.

The two texts' dependency on (dis)ability for world building and pathos is exploitative because it renders (dis)ability and disabled characters as mere narrative tools. If characters with an impairment are only present in a text to cause emotional affect in the reader, then they are robbed of agency; their identity is reduced to their disability, and their disability to a "problem." In his afterword to *Accessing the Future*, Derek Newman-Stille accuses SF of haphazardly projecting its fictions onto the disabled body, making it a "site where authors can explore so many of the themes that they enjoy: the quest for a solution, the plot of 'overcoming,' the character with a past that haunts them and is etched onto their body."<sup>52</sup> Newman-Stille inadvertently describes Keyes's Charlie, who "overcomes" his mental disability and Huxley's malformed Bernard Marx, who is "haunted" by the possibility that he had alcohol mixed in his embryonic fluid during his ectogenesis. The texts contain several other examples of (dis)ability used for narrative purposes; the brave new society of Huxley's imagination would not function without its labouring Epsilons. He envisions these disabled workers as the "foundation" that the rest of society rests on.<sup>53</sup> Bernard feels ostracized due to his physical impairment, which makes him unable to pass as an Alpha Plus. His (dis)ability motivates Bernard to travel with Lenina resulting in their contact with John the Savage, whose upbringing impairs his participation in the World State. The logic of *Brave New World's* plot thus relies on (dis)ability and Bernard's impairment. Meanwhile, *Flowers for Algernon's* plot depends on Charlie overcoming his impairment. If the theme of intellectual disability were absent from the novel, it would render Charlie's narrative nugatory as well. Both texts rely thus on the symbolic and emotional weight of (dis)ability.

Such a narrative reliance on disabled bodies invites a reading with Mitchell and Snyder's "Narrative Prosthesis." The examples above demonstrate a central tenet of the

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<sup>52</sup> Derek Newman-Stille, "Afterword," in *Accessing the Future*, ed. Kathryn Allan and Djibril Al-Ayad (2015), 225.

<sup>53</sup> Huxley, *Brave New World*, 195.

concept: “disability is foundational to both cultural definition and to the literary narratives that challenge normalizing prescriptive ideals.”<sup>54</sup> Simply put, the depiction of (dis)ability in culture, and specifically literature, is a valuable measuring rod of those norms and values that a given culture expects of a body and mind. Narrative prosthesis allows us to interrogate SF’s ability to hold up fictitious future societies for scrutiny and invites reflection on the genre’s use of disability as theme. I use narrative prosthesis to examine if the novels depict disabled people as integral to their societies. With this in mind, we return to my analysis of the two novels’ constructions of (dis)ability hierarchies.

### **(Dis)ability as Hierarchy – “All men are physio-chemically equal”**

Aldous Huxley’s choice to use (dis)ability as the main identifier for his novel’s castes could be interpreted as pejorative to the differently abled. However, I argue that engraining disabled people in the societal structure of his dystopia is instead a favourable treatment of the disabled that bears a resemblance to modern (dis)ability ideologies.

In a perverse reversal of the social model – which dictates that disability can be subverted if society accommodates a person’s impairments – the World State adjusts the ability levels of individuals according to what society needs. To borrow a phrase from Theodor Adorno, “the reproduction of stupidity, which previously took place unconsciously under the dictates of material necessity, must be taken in hand by triumphant mass civilization now that scarcity could be eliminated.”<sup>55</sup> The “reproduction of stupidity,” or what Huxley refers to as “dysgenics,” is done with full deliberation – as World Controller Mustapha Mond explains – to ensure “stability” in a society with minimal change and the near complete absence of fomentation.<sup>56</sup> The genetic make-up of the individuals deteriorates with the

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<sup>54</sup> Mitchell and Snyder, “Narrative Prosthesis,” 277.

<sup>55</sup> Adorno, “Aldous Huxley and Utopia,” 99.

<sup>56</sup> Huxley, *Brave New World*, 29-48.

descent of the castes. The author aligns his social classes according to the Greek alphabet, superior Alphas, Betas and then progressively more disabled Gammas, Deltas and Epsilon “semi-morons.”<sup>57</sup> The novel uses (dis)ability to demarcate society, but it is not a narrative prosthesis. Huxley’s utopia needs workers, and “the whole of a small factory [can be] staffed with the products of a single bokanovskified egg.”<sup>58</sup> “Bokanovskification” is a fictional scientific process, preceding real current cloning efforts, in which the budding egg-cells’ development is arrested through the use of chemicals, temperature and oxygen deprivation for the dual purposes of mentally and physically stunting the ensuing offspring. The cells are thus forced to divide exponentially into a maximum number of 96 identical twins. Huxley’s World State not only produces a caste system and labourers through ectogenesis, but simultaneously *disables* the members of the lower castes to facilitate societal control and stability.

Nevertheless, *Brave New World* depicts these lower castes as integral to its future society.

Huxley grants Mustapha Mond the most authority of all his characters, and his utilitarian arguments for a stable state carry great weight. Huxley never has Mond disparage the lower castes. Instead “they’re the foundation on which everything else is built.”<sup>59</sup> Hence, Huxley’s novel constructs (dis)ability as integral to the World State. Every citizen is a mere “cell in the societal body,” and individual lives do not have any intrinsic value. A dogmatic expression in the World State is that “the social body persists although the component cells may change.”<sup>60</sup> Both high-level and low-level citizens are expendable. It is therefore imperative that citizens do not depart from their predestined roles in society.

The stability of the World State necessitates consumers, labourers and vapid creatives that will not (and cannot) think independently. Thus, *Brave New World* posits the planned degeneration of *every* citizen as a means to this end. The Alphas may not have been prenatally

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<sup>57</sup> Huxley, *Brave New World*, 50.

<sup>58</sup> Huxley, *Brave New World*, 5.

<sup>59</sup> Huxley, *Brave New World*, 195.

<sup>60</sup> Huxley, *Brave New World*, 78, 84.

tempered with, but they have been equally “enslaved” by conditioning.<sup>61</sup> By constructing a caste system founded on eugenics and dysgenics, the novel construes (dis)ability as identity and identifier. The World State is dependent on disabilities and disabled people to anchor the Alphas’ social *sense* of superiority and to maintain stability.

There is a tension between *Brave New World’s* reliance on and devaluation of disabled people. The World State uses impairments to distinguish the castes and their roles, but their use *value* is the same. This is exemplified in some lines of dialogue between Lenina and Henry Foster,<sup>62</sup> the supervisor at the Hatchery – the state test tube baby facility. Lenina sees herself as superior to the disabled Epsilons, yet they perform “indispensable” services:

‘All men are physico-chemically equal,’ said Henry sententiously. ‘Besides, even Epsilons perform *indispensable* services.’  
[Lenina continues:] ‘I suppose Epsilons don’t really mind being Epsilons,’ she said aloud. ‘Of course they don’t. How can they? They don’t know what it’s like being anything else. We’d mind, of course, but then we’ve been differently conditioned. Besides, we start with a different heredity.’  
‘I’m glad I’m not an Epsilon,’ said Lenina, with conviction. ‘And if you were an Epsilon,’ said Henry, ‘your conditioning would have made you no less thankful that you weren’t a Beta or an Alpha.’<sup>63</sup>

The exclusion of heredity in “physico-chemically equal” juxtaposed with the following sentences’ focus on conditioning shows an inconsistency in the state’s (dis)ability doctrine. The characters’ self-assured regurgitation of dogma satirizes the absurdity of the World State’s (dis)ability indoctrination. Instead of a world purged of the disabled, Huxley offers a functioning, if ethically questionable, (dis)ability apartheid where every caste has a purpose. Although he also uses derogatory language such as “inferior” and “sub-human” to describe the lower castes, Huxley terms them “indispensable” and reveals an equality through interdependence between the castes.

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<sup>61</sup> Huxley, *Brave New World*, 78.

<sup>62</sup> Foster’s last name is an aptronym, considering it means “foetus” in Norwegian and “to bring up” in English.

<sup>63</sup> Huxley, *Brave New World*, 63-64. (Emphasis added.)



The tactic of keeping even high-level individuals ignorant of an alternative life situation is the state, as represented by the World Controllers, further disabling the citizenry. I support my argument with Adorno's reading of the Alphas "who credit themselves with being individuals [and whose minds] are caught up in standardization by virtue of their identification with the 'in-group.'"<sup>64</sup> By making (dis)ability the main identifier of the hierarchy, the novel collapses the hegemony of the Alphas and World Controllers as they also prove to be, if not impaired then certainly disabled. In *Brave New World*, (dis)ability is not constructed as a binary but instead invites the reader to consider a range of abilities. *Flowers for Algernon* is written on the premise that disability is something to be cured and conflates its disabled characters' use and social value in a usefulness/uselessness binary.

Daniel Keyes offers a society less demarcated than Huxley's, but hierarchical nonetheless. His protagonist Charlie Gordon –whose IQ measures 68 – undergoes an experiment that temporarily cures his disability and grants him hyper-ability in the form of increased intelligence. Charlie occupies a low social position at the onset of the novel, being disparaged and marginalized by those of normative ability. In the bakery where he works, the phrase "to pull a Charlie Gordon" is synonymous with failing at completing a task or misunderstanding a situation.<sup>65</sup> Even Gimpy, a co-worker with a "club foot," sees Charlie's disability as more extensive than his own, even worthy of pity. Gimpy has the insight to sympathise with Charlie, something that the other workers lack, but he does not empathise. He is impatient and even cruel to him, joining in with the "normally" abled bullies to secure his position in the hierarchy. When Gimpy and Frank, another co-worker, attempt to teach Charlie how to make rolls, he fails to perform within their time-limit and is deemed unfit for the task. Gimpy dismisses him with a comment: "Go on, you big baby [...] go sit down there

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<sup>64</sup> Adorno, "Aldous Huxley and Utopia," 100.

<sup>65</sup> Keyes, *Flowers*, 30.

until Mr. Donner wants you.”<sup>66</sup>. Because of his intellectual impairment, he fails as a baker and is exposed to ridicule and infantilization. Like other characters in the bakery, Gimpy might be on a lower rung of what might be regarded as “normal” in the (dis)ability hierarchy (below educated, physically healthy characters such as Alice Kinnian, Professor Nemur, the bakery boss Mr. Donner and Doctor Strauss), but his position is ensured by the disabled Charlie’s inferiority.

However, there are hierarchies even within disability. Charlie is not the “lowest” embodiment of (dis)ability in the novel. He is useful when given menial tasks such as sweeping the floors and provides the normatively abled co-workers with a feeling of social superiority. The Warren State Home and Training School represents *Flowers for Algernon*’s zero-point of (dis)ability. Although the inmates at Warren show varying levels of functionality – the matronly principal classifies them as “tidy” or “untidy,” meaning able or unable to perform basic routines of hygiene – they are all considered “beyond help.”<sup>67</sup> A point of pride for Charlie is his rudimentary ability to read and write, which is reminiscent of the state instructions deriding the Epsilons’ analphabetism in *Brave New World*.<sup>68</sup> He finds these two skills crucial to his own cognition because they distinguish him from those who cannot learn. Even if he is a slow learner, he has the capacity to learn. Thus, it is justifiable for his employer to keep employing him, which keeps Charlie out of Warren and within “normal” society. Nevertheless, it is important to note that the main reason his employer gives Charlie a job is out of an obligation to his uncle. Charlie’s position is therefore not secure, and a lot of the novel’s tension stems from his fear that he will lose what little respect he has gained. Respect is synonymous with ability in *Flowers for Algernon*.

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<sup>66</sup> Keyes, *Flowers*, 46.

<sup>67</sup> Keyes, *Flowers*, 159-60.

<sup>68</sup> Huxley, *Brave New World*, 22.

The novel presents a (dis)ability hierarchy in four categories: hyper-ability, as displayed by postoperative Charlie; “normal” ability, as displayed by Professor Nemur, Alice, Doctor Strauss; reduced ability as seen in the pre-operative Charlie, Gimp and Charlie’s senile mother Rose; and disability as embodied en masse by the inmates at Warren. The (dis)ability hierarchy is conflated with social status, just as in Huxley’s novel, but despite the four categories it is reduced to a binary separation of abled and disabled. Charlie’s hyper-ability highlights the dualism instead of exploding it. The novel thus equates abled and disabled with useful and useless. The two novels differ in how they portray disabled people as useful.

### **(Dis)ability Measures Use Value**

*Brave New World’s* castes present a spectrum of ability where citizens are expendable but “indispensable” because everyone has a job to do. Every cog of the machine is necessary but replaceable. Proof of the disabled castes’ use value abounds in the hypnopædic conditioning – truisms played on a loop while the subject sleeps – that pervades the narrative. The sleep teaching slogans are Huxley’s least subtle means of conveying his society’s ideology. Lenina quotes one of these “endless repetitions,” when she declares: “Everyone works for everyone else. We can’t do without any anyone. Even Epsilons are useful.”<sup>69</sup> The state provides all citizens with mandatory facilities such as housing, medical care, recreational drugs and food.<sup>70</sup> Equal welfare without freedom is still equality. Henry Foster discusses another of the egalitarian tenets of this society with Lenina over a crematorium’s phosphorous recovery factories. He celebrates the posthumous mineral extraction: “Fine to think we can go on being useful even after we’re dead. Making plants grow.” She agrees but adds that it is “queer” that

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<sup>69</sup> Huxley, *Brave New World*, 64.

<sup>70</sup> Huxley, *Brave New World*, 63.

the “nasty” Gammas, Deltas and Epsilons fertilize the same amount of plants.<sup>71</sup> Lenina’s social prejudice conflicts with the utilitarian logic and ethics which lie at the heart of *Brave New World’s* (dis)ability construction. Scott Peller’s Marxist reading of the novel corroborates this reading. The scholar claims Henry Foster’s comment regarding the upper cap of 96 twins in Bokanovsky groups – an excess of which creates eyeless monsters, who are “no use at all”<sup>72</sup> – cements ectogenesis’ objective as use value. Peller suspects that if the eyeless monsters had any “menial application,” they would also be decanted and predestined for society.<sup>73</sup> Since every member of society is mass produced for different purposes, all have use value and end their life producing similar amounts of phosphorus. *Brave New World’s* treatment of disability is nothing if not equitable.

*Flowers for Algernon’s* society equates disability with uselessness. Unlike Huxley, Keyes’s novel corrals the disabled in Warren, separating “the total population” into what Davis terms “standard and nonstandard subpopulations.”<sup>74</sup> Standard is abled and useful, nonstandard is disabled and therefore useless. Darling claims that every society recognises disabled people as “distinct from the general population,” but understands that the *value* associated with disability has varied “both geographically and historically.”<sup>75</sup> *Flowers for Algernon’s* contemporary setting allows Keyes to illuminate efforts to “deal with” disabled people at the time. However, despite the monologues where Charlie argues he “was always a person,” Keyes’s novel assigns value according to the “normal” and “abnormal” binary. When Charlie visits Warren once it is evident that his intelligence might begin to decrease, he is upset by the apathy, lethargy and worthlessness of its residents. He finds the people

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<sup>71</sup> Huxley, *Brave New World*, 63.

<sup>72</sup> Huxley, *Brave New World*, 11.

<sup>73</sup> Scott Peller, “Laboring for a Brave New World: Our Ford and the Epsilons,” in *Huxley’s Brave New World: Essays*, ed. David Garrett Izzo and Kim Kirkpatrick (North Carolina: McFarland & Company, 2008), 68.

<sup>74</sup> Davis, “Constructing Normalcy,” 7.

<sup>75</sup> Darling, *Disability and Identity*, 13.

working at Warren apathetic for not attempting to cure the residents, but his phrasing betrays his own prejudices towards the disabled:

There had been no talk of rehabilitation, of cure, of someday sending these people out into the world again. No one had spoken of hope. The feeling was of living death – or worse, of never having been fully alive and knowing. Souls withered from the beginning, and doomed to stare into the time and space of every day.<sup>76</sup>

This obloquy appears before postoperative Charlie scientifically proves that his cognition will revert to its previous point, or lower. The novel's theme of technology as cure for disability should denote hope, yet Charlie's despondence reveals the non-existent value placed on the impaired people in Warren. Exacerbating matters even more, the inmates at Warren are not all passive or "untidies"; some are shown to have the capacity to do menial tasks such as sand benches or make rudimentary products out of wood. An intellectually impaired boy proudly presents a lamp base he has made himself. Charlie uncompromisingly criticises the work, calling it an "unsteady" and "poor job," and although he feels socially obligated to praise the boy, he feels "hollow" for doing it.<sup>77</sup> Unlike Huxley's Epsilons, Keyes presents his intellectually disabled characters as deprived of any use value, and one might wonder if the useful Epsilons would be assigned to Warren as well.

*Flowers for Algernon* attempts to garner compassion for the disabled – the intellectually disabled in particular – but simultaneously establishes disability as a force of doom. Warren could certainly be read as a critique of the US's lacklustre efforts to provide humane care for its disabled citizens. Winslow, the head psychologist, states that the staff is under state obligation to make "all reasonable efforts" to keep their patients on the premises, but that they lack the manpower.<sup>78</sup> Furthermore, Winslow asserts that Warren has a waiting list of "fourteen hundred," meaning that several hundred disabled people in need of medical

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<sup>76</sup> Keyes, *Flowers*, 161.

<sup>77</sup> Keyes, *Flowers*, 159.

<sup>78</sup> Keyes, *Flowers*, 155.

care are left without aid due to patients staying for “the rest of their lives.”<sup>79</sup> These are truly horrendous conditions, but upon closer inspection the language used to describe the disabled residents and their caretakers creates a dissonance when considering the (dis)ability theme.

Given that the inmates at Warren have no use value, their descriptions are emblematic of the novel’s construction of disability. With regards to potentially escaping inmates, Winslow states that “the world doesn’t want them and they soon know it.”<sup>80</sup> Neither Charlie nor any other character disputes this. While worthy of critique, the atrocious accommodations do not present the real problem. They are merely the symptom of the existence of disabled people, which makes *disability* the problem. The care and affection that the staff does show to the inmates should in principle ameliorate and redeem Warren’s representation of disability. Indeed, Charlie, who the reader is supposed to sympathise with, admires the people who “dedicate themselves to these *silent minds*,” but his distaste for the worthlessness of the mentally disabled in Warren overrides any other sentiment.<sup>81</sup> Cline interprets Charlie’s descent and return to low intelligence as an “inevitable force” that paints disability as impending doom. Charlie thus overlooks the “benevolence” of the staff at Warren: “Clearly distraught at his deterioration, Charlie connects mental disability with *sub-human* souls and death.”<sup>82</sup> Thematically, *Flowers for Algernon* presents the curing of disabilities as the only feasible alternative to wasting away in an institution. Whereas *Brave New World* shows the “sub-human” mentally disabled Epsilons as socially segregated but active members of society, *Flowers for Algernon*’s “sub-humans” are marked by inactivity and used to foreshadow the tragic destination for Charlie’s character arc.

Scientific achievement is the antithesis of uselessness in Keyes’s novel. In the final progress report, Charlie has fully regressed to his initial level of cognition. He expresses a

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<sup>79</sup> Keyes, *Flowers*, 158.

<sup>80</sup> Keyes, *Flowers*, 156.

<sup>81</sup> Keyes, *Flowers*, 161. (Emphasis added.)

<sup>82</sup> Cline, “Pity to Horror in *Flowers for Algernon*,” 1, 10. (Emphasis added.)

desire to become smart again, solidifying the representation of his disability as stagnation. However, he does remember writing “The Algernon-Gordon Effect,” his treatise on the experiment performed on him. The regressed Charlie postulates: “I bet Im the first dumb persen in the world who found out some thing inportent for sience. I did something but I don’t remember what. So I gess its like I did it for all the dumb pepul like me in Warren and all over the world. [sic]”<sup>83</sup> Disability in *Flowers for Algernon* is a lack, and Charlie’s main achievement is to distinguish himself by making a scientific discovery, despite lacking intelligence. He fulfils his mother’s impetus to “be *somebody*” by being useful to society.<sup>84</sup> I do not claim that postoperative Charlie is perfect – he struggles with socialising and relationships – but scientific achievement gains him more respect than likeability did. The regressed Charlie is aware of his previous usefulness, which means that he not only considers himself as useless but perceives the inmates of Warren to be useless as well. The novel also assigns less use value to the intellectually disabled than the physically disabled. We must therefore analyse the differentiation between these two categories of disability, to get a broader understanding of how the (dis)ability hierarchies in both novels are constructed.

### **Physical versus Mental (Dis)ability Stigma**

The two texts portray physical and mental (dis)abilities as valued and measured differently. Huxley uses physical (dis)ability to visually distinguish the castes, but intellectual (dis)ability is what truly matters to the World State’s assignation of roles. Keyes also uses intellectual (dis)ability to distinguish the strata of his (dis)ability hierarchy, while physical (dis)ability entails mere assignation of epithets (Gimpy). Both constructions indicate a downward stratification and evaluation of ability in the hierarchies of each novel. Such a top-down structure is indicative of two societies based on *stigma*. As mentioned, in modern Western

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<sup>83</sup> Keyes, *Flowers*, 216.

<sup>84</sup> Keyes, *Flowers*, 50. (Emphasis in original.)

society stigma has been the mainline societal reaction to disability. Charting recent departures from stigma's normative influence, Darling defines stigmatization as "a form of societal reaction to those who are viewed as different because they do not conform to society's norms regarding appearance or behaviour."<sup>85</sup> To elaborate, individuals who interact with someone they regard as "abnormal" experience both aesthetic anxiety, as with the stigma associated with Bernard's "stunted" Gamma-physique and existential anxiety. The latter implies a sudden awareness that one's functionalities may cease due to an interaction with someone whose corporeal or mental autonomy is perceived as inferior to one's own. This thesis joins aesthetic and existential anxieties together under the umbrella term *ableist anxiety* which effects a classification of the disabled as "other."

Ableist anxiety is not supposed to occur in *Brave New World*'s static (dis)ability hierarchy, where everyone is predestined from birth. Nevertheless, physical impairments demarcate the castes and cause a social awareness of difference. The novel's (dis)ability caste system indeed correlates with, and seems to stem from, eugenicist stigmatizations as the Epsilons, Deltas and Gammas' physical, thus visible, deformity is interchangeable with the caste-system. Lenina is a Beta and, despite being "uncommonly pretty," has lupus and coral teeth.<sup>86</sup> The opening chapters infer that these ailments are easily avoidable and very rarely prominent in the Alpha caste. Despite her secure position in the hierarchy, Lenina experiences ableist anxiety and stigmatises the "nasty" Epsilons, because they are below her in social value.

On every level of *Brave New World*'s society, the (dis)ability hierarchy is underpinned by "Elementary Class Consciousness," which not only encourages the ability-apartheid of the World State but instils its notion in children through hypnopædia. The different castes are

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<sup>85</sup> Darling, *Disability and Identity*, 16.

<sup>86</sup> Huxley, *Brave New World*, 13.



colour-coded, but their distinction comes from being “stupid” or “clever.” In the opening chapters, a group of Alpha students overhear the following hypnopædic instructions:

Delta children wear khaki. Oh no, I don't want to play with Delta children. And Epsilons are still worse. They're *too stupid* to be able to read or write. Besides, they wear black, which is such a beastly colour. I'm so glad I'm a Beta. [...] Alpha Children wear grey. They work much harder than we do, because they're so frightfully *clever*.<sup>87</sup>

Through such repetitive and reinforcing statements, the citizens are taught to be proud of their caste, reverential of their superiors, derisive of their inferiors and that *intelligence* determines their caste. I stress that the citizens of the World State are taught to be proud of their (dis)ability level, but only the state-sanctioned disabilities such as the tapering heights of the castes. Any incongruity is discouraged, because the (dis)ability hierarchy rests on the pillars of institutionalised stigma. So, if everyone knows where they belong, what could create tension in the (dis)ability hierarchy?

Real-life disabled people control the information received by those who regard them as a technique to manage their identity. Darling defines *passing* as trying to prevent others from recognizing an undiscovered and possibly “stigmatizing attribute,” whereas *covering* is an attempt to hide, or minimise, a “visible attribute” that has already been stigmatised.<sup>88</sup> Deaf people may conceal their impairment out of fear of being disabled by society and thus pass as normal. Covering implies the person has already been disabled but the impairment may be made less obtrusive. *Brave New World's* treatment of old age and decrepitude is a case in point. When John visits the dying hospital, the “moribund sexagenarians had the appearance of childish girls.”<sup>89</sup> The rejuvenation efforts of the World State make every citizen pass as young, virile and “taut.” There ought not to be any stigmatized physical disabilities that need to be covered, because these are just visual indicators of the (dis)ability caste system. Alphas

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<sup>87</sup> Huxley, *Brave New World*, 22-23. (Emphasis added.)

<sup>88</sup> Darling, *Disability and Identity*, 17.

<sup>89</sup> Huxley, *Brave New World*, 177.

look like Alphas, Epsilons like Epsilons. The system of ectogenesis and dysgenics ensures that *passing* is not an issue. However, this is subverted by Bernard's role in the narrative. Even though he was decanted as an Alpha Plus, he has a Gamma-Esque physique. As a stigmatizing attribute for someone of his (dis)ability caste, this projects him downwards in the hierarchy, something that should be impossible in a society where government managers may "assign any given individual to his or her proper place in the social and economic hierarchy."<sup>90</sup> Bernard's physique is an already discredited attribute, and his inability to cover it up renders him unable to pass as a normative Alpha Plus. However, while he experiences some social prejudice, he retains all the privileges and duties that come with his caste and is described as "pretty good at his job."<sup>91</sup> I draw a line between institutional and social discrimination. Although one may argue that every interaction is institutionalised in the authoritarian World State, the hypnopaedia only encourages segregation, not devaluation or exclusion. Bernard is stigmatized due to his physical (dis)ability, but he is not institutionally discriminated against thanks to his intellectual ability.

While the World State segregates the castes through stigmatization of intellect, *Brave New World* does not disparage the use value of the lower castes. The stigma stemming from the conflation of intellect, physique and use value is portrayed as a purely social construct. Indeed, what truly sets the castes apart is their cognitive faculties, as all are groomed for specific tasks. Nevertheless, even Alphas and Betas have had their cognitive faculties *inhibited* and their curiosity and problem-solving skills conditioned away. Thus, *Brave New World* depicts disability as something universal and normalised both with regards to physical and mental (dis)ability. The difference is that physical (dis)ability *indicates* a person's station in life, while mental (dis)ability *determines* it. Huxley presents impairments as the standard in

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<sup>90</sup> Huxley, *Brave New World*, xlviiii-xlix.

<sup>91</sup> Huxley, *Brave New World*, 76.

society, which counters Davis's concept of separation into standard and nonstandard.

Huxley's novel rejects the idea of useless disability, whether physical or intellectual.

Physical (dis)ability is only briefly represented in Keyes's novel and while physical impairments are stigmatized, they are not discriminated against. For example, Gimpy's previously mentioned club foot has earned him a moniker based on his disability, but he is still able to pursue a career. He is well liked and with enough social currency to defend Charlie against other employees who abuse him. Additionally, he has gained a high level of trust from Mr Donner and is able to embezzle from the bakery. On the other hand, Charlie was ostracised by his family because of his mental impairment and inability to meet his mother's standards for normalcy. Like Huxley's novel, *Flowers for Algernon* portrays intellectual (dis)ability as more severe. Charlie's mother sees his intellectual (dis)ability as a family blemish. Her maternal feelings are eclipsed by the shame of having a disabled son; for her "making Charlie normal is more important than anything else."<sup>92</sup>

She internalises and extrapolates her own stigma of disabled people on her own son, and fiercely pursues any course of action which might lift the shame from their lives. "Fault" and "freak" are key words, emblematic of the discredit that she fears her child will incur. The following example reveals that Charlie's impetus to become smarter originates from the attitude that his mother had towards his (dis)ability:

It was something Rose Gordon lived with day and night. Her fear, her guilt, her shame that Charlie was a moron. Her dream that something could be done. The urgent question always: whose *fault* was it, hers or Matt's? Only after Norma proved to her that she was capable of having normal children, and that I was *a freak*, did she stop trying to make me over. But I guess I never stopped wanting to be the smart boy she wanted me to be, so that she would love me.<sup>93</sup>

His impairment is somebody's "fault," and she refuses to accept her son's abnormality. Her anxiety shows Keyes's engagement with ableism and an awareness of the stigma towards

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<sup>92</sup> Keyes, *Flowers*, 100.

<sup>93</sup> Keyes, *Flowers*, 100-01. (Emphasis added.)

people with intellectual impairments. This stigma is evidenced in other exchanges as well. Charlie calls his disabled self a “docile pup”<sup>94</sup> and he accuses Professor Nemur of believing that someone with a less-than normal IQ “doesn’t deserve consideration.”<sup>95</sup> Gimpy’s exasperation when Charlie failed to make bread rolls also highlights the novel’s implication: intellectual disability decreases a person’s use value more than a physical disability. Charlie verbalises this particular injustice later in the novel, when he witnesses a mentally disabled waiter get ridiculed for his clumsiness: “How strange it is that people of honest feelings and sensibility, who would not take advantage of a man born without arms or legs or eyes – how such people think nothing of abusing a man born with low intelligence.”<sup>96</sup> It is curious that this would seem strange to a character that quotes Plato offhand.

### **Platonic Hierarchies in *Brave New World* and *Flowers for Algernon***

The lack of intelligence, cognizance or rationality is conceptualised as a lack of humanity in Plato’s works, who saw reason as one of the defining features of humankind. So, where does that leave those whose ability to reason is impaired? Given that *Brave New World* and *Flowers for Algernon* are Platonic texts, in the sense that both engage with reason’s role in the construction of societies, it is necessary to compare the novels’ construction of (dis)ability hierarchies to a disability reading of *The Republic*. Plato shows the importance of use value for a citizen of the state when he outlines the responsibilities of a doctor. He separates “normal” lives from “good for nothing” lives – the ones who cannot produce for the state – and associates the latter with weakness and an inability to live “ordinarily”: the doctor ought not lengthen “good-for-nothing” lives or encourage “weak” fathers to beget “weak” sons.<sup>97</sup> Plato claims that if a man cannot live ordinarily, the doctor should not cure him because his

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<sup>94</sup> Keyes, *Flowers*, 85.

<sup>95</sup> Keyes, *Flowers*, 172.

<sup>96</sup> Keyes, *Flowers*, 138-39.

<sup>97</sup> Plato, “Republic,” Steph. 407.

recovery is useless to himself and the State. Such an anti-disability attitude is precisely what motivated Professor Nemur to cure Charlie. Nemur boasts that “in place of a feeble-minded shell, a burden on the society” they have created a man “ready to take his place as a contributing member of society.”<sup>98</sup> Stainton and Kiefer each argue that Plato is highly relevant for the philosophical creation of disability and help me examine the relationship between reason, value and “normality” in his texts.

Kiefer claims disabled people have been defined against “the traditional philosophical subject,” whose embodiment means that “certain rational or cognitive capacities [are] associated with what is normal, healthy or human.”<sup>99</sup> The ability to reason and think precludes rationality. Stainton maintains that “a core paradigm in the negative construction of intellectual disability in Western society is that human value is directly associated with human reason.”<sup>100</sup> As I have shown, this is certainly true for *Flowers for Algernon*, which shows a populace divided into standard and substandard, but less so in *Brave New World*, which uses intellectual disability as an indication of caste, but without the division into substandard.

Huxley’s dystopia is inspired by Plato’s ideal state, but their similarities have not been scrutinised from a (dis)ability perspective. The citizens of *The Republic*’s “are to be common,” meaning that “no parent is to know his own child, nor any child his parent.”<sup>101</sup> Mustapha Mond explains how the World State has done away with such concepts as “family, monogamy and romance,” through ectogenesis, and in its stead introduced the maxim “everyone belongs to everyone else.”<sup>102</sup> The objective for both is to ensure a stable populace with closer ties to the state than to other citizens. Huxley achieves this through hypnopædic conditioning. Although currently a SF trope, it mirrors Plato’s view that the subject needs

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<sup>98</sup> Keyes, *Flowers*, 113.

<sup>99</sup> Kiefer, “Philosophical Creation of Disability,” 1.

<sup>100</sup> Stainton, “Reason and Value: Plato’s Construction of Intellectual Disability,” 452.

<sup>101</sup> Plato, “Republic,” Steph. 457.

<sup>102</sup> Huxley, *Brave New World*, 34.

essential moral education while young, “for that is the time at which the character is being formed and the desired impression is more readily taken.”<sup>103</sup> Similarly to the World State’s maxim, Plato promotes the idea of an “audacious fiction,” which convinces the citizens that they are “formed and fed in the womb of the earth” because it would indebt them to their country as their mother and ensure their loyalty.<sup>104</sup>

Governance through deceit is prevalent in both *The Republic* and the World State. Mustapha Mond describes the citizens of *Brave New World* as “blissfully ignorant” and “so conditioned that they practically can’t help behaving as they ought to behave.”<sup>105</sup> The ignorance in question has been achieved by the World State disabling its citizens through prenatal tampering and Pavlovian conditioning. Such rule is in line with Platonic thinking. Kiefer interprets Plato’s argument “that rational principles of organization ought to dictate social policy, and reason can and should be used to manipulate the minds, souls and bodies of the citizenry” as root for harmony both in the individual and society.<sup>106</sup> Plato formulates this doctrine of deceit outright in *The Republic*: “If any one at all is to have the privilege of lying, the rulers of the State should be the persons; and they, in their dealings either with enemies or with their own citizens, may be allowed to lie for the public good.”<sup>107</sup> In *Brave New World*, the lower castes are ignorant of the managerial decisions of the Alphas and blindly accept whatever they say, due to their conditioning. The Alphas themselves are also just cogs in the machine, and even the World Controllers keep each other in check. Like Plato’s citizens, they are all conditioned to work for the benefit of the state. Furthermore, “history is bunk,” except that which specifically concerns Ford or propagates the ideology of the World State.<sup>108</sup> Plato likewise posits that censorship and the pruning of Homer’s tales to cultivate bravery would be

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<sup>103</sup> Plato, “Republic,” Steph. 377.

<sup>104</sup> Plato, “Republic,” Steph. 414.

<sup>105</sup> Huxley, *Brave New World*, 194.

<sup>106</sup> Kiefer, “Philosophical Creation of Disability,” 6.

<sup>107</sup> Plato, “Republic,” Steph. 389.

<sup>108</sup> Huxley, *Brave New World*, 29.

necessary to ensure a strong and stable state that would last. Compiled in this manner, the similarities between Plato's ideal state and the dystopic World State show that Huxley was familiar with Plato's thoughts on society and (dis)ability. The novel embodies the ideal state's social hierarchy.

Setting the "genetically superior" and highly educated yet indoctrinated Alphas to rule the World State is also in line with *The Republic*. Margaret Atwood, in her introduction to Huxley's novel, describes the Alphas as "direct descendants of Plato's guardians."<sup>109</sup> These guardians are selected from the best of the citizenry, bred from good parents and given the most thorough education. They are supposed to be wholly dedicated to the state, "making this their craft, and engaging in no work which does not bear on this end."<sup>110</sup> Only the "most alpha" of the Alphas, with an Alpha heritage, conditioning and education may become a World Controller. In *Brave New World* they are, in Plato's terminology, "the best of [their] citizens."<sup>111</sup> The other castes, in fact, the whole social hierarchy can be traced back to Plato's idea that "one man plays one role only."<sup>112</sup> In the parable of metals, Plato designates the rulers as made of gold, the auxiliaries of these rulers as silver and artisans, husbandmen and the rest as brass or iron. Every person's role is necessary and legitimises their position in the state, just like the World State's replaceable but indispensable citizens. The social ranking in society is similar, with clearly demarcated classes whose level of knowledge about how the state is run decreases along with the class rank. The (dis)ability hierarchy in the novel is based on Plato's castes, and I read Huxley's deviations as comments on (dis)ability's position in society.

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<sup>109</sup> Huxley, *Brave New World*, xiv.

<sup>110</sup> Plato, "Republic," Steph. 395.

<sup>111</sup> Plato, "Republic," Steph. 456.

<sup>112</sup> Plato, "Republic," Steph. 397.

## Plato, Huxley and Eugenics

Huxley's evident inspiration from Plato should suggest a likewise extreme attitude towards the disabled, yet *Brave New World* differs from its source material with regards to policies on euthanasia and medical care. In spite of a utilitarianism determined by biology, one of the issues on which Huxley did deviate, surprisingly, was eugenics. According to Stainton, Plato questioned whether one could place responsibility with an insane or demented person, noting that these ideas relate to "early 20<sup>th</sup> century eugenic arguments for the control of people with intellectual disabilities."<sup>113</sup> To directly link Plato to the eugenic movement is unreasonable, but Plato's allegory of the doctor does presage the idea of eugenics. Furthermore, he claimed that "the offspring of the inferior, or of the better when they chance to be deformed, will be put away in some mysterious, unknown place, as they should be," and "the breed of the guardians is to be kept pure."<sup>114</sup> In fact, we might start calling Plato the father of eugenicist thought as well:

The best of either sex should be united with the best as often, and the inferior with the inferior as seldom as possible, and that they should rear the offspring of the one sort of union, but not of the other, if the flock is to be maintained in first-rate condition. Now, these goings on must be a secret which the rulers only know, or there will be a further danger of our herd, as the guardians may be termed, breaking out into rebellion.<sup>115</sup>

Considering *Brave New World's* ectogenesis, prenatal manipulation, predestination, castes identified by their (dis)ability and "genetically superior" Alphas, it is easy to see traces of eugenicist thought in the novel. However, Huxley's World State also intentionally breeds disabled people. The Hatchery Director states that "an Epsilon embryo must have an Epsilon environment as well as an Epsilon heredity," which goes against Plato's eugenicist notion.<sup>116</sup> Moreover, the World State provides for all its castes. I find it necessary to make a slight detour, to better situate Huxley's relationship to eugenics.

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<sup>113</sup> Stainton, "Reason and Value: Plato's Construction of Intellectual Disability," 456, 59.

<sup>114</sup> Plato, "Republic," Steph. 460.

<sup>115</sup> Plato, "Republic," Steph. 459.

<sup>116</sup> Huxley, *Brave New World*, 11.



Woiak, who draws on Bradshaw's placement of Huxley in a eugenicist discourse, explains that in the late twenties and early thirties in the UK and US "eugenicists [...] assumed a strict division between the socio-economic classes in terms of mental and moral qualities."<sup>117</sup> This is evident in the (dis)ability caste system in *Brave New World*, where Epsilons only labour, and Alphas only govern the rest. Both Woiak and Bradshaw conclude that reading the novel's "rigid biological caste differentiation" as purely parodic is not satisfactory when compared to reading it as a societal blueprint. Woiak holds that "at that moment in history, a 'new caste system based on differences in natural ability' seemed relatively attractive."<sup>118</sup> It is misleading that she chooses to mention the "moment in history" when Huxley was writing the novel, as similar thoughts are present in Plato's antique writings.

This thesis challenges the two critics' views because the novel abjures the eugenic objective to trim the societal crop. Alphas are not desirable on their own. Mustapha Mond tells John the Savage that the World Controllers cleared the island of Cyprus and peopled it with a "specially prepared batch" of Alphas. Despite being given all the agricultural education and tools they required, the experiment ended in chaos and destruction as a civil war broke out and nineteen of the twenty-two thousand Alphas died. The reason was that "an Alpha-decanted, Alpha-conditioned man would go mad if he had to do Epsilon Semi-Moron work – go mad or start smashing things up."<sup>119</sup> Hence, none of the Cyprus Alphas wanted to labour or even briefly perform any low-grade work. The echoes of Plato's "one man one role" is at work here. Woiak interprets Mond as saying that the sole "workable alternative" is to make "inferior castes of menial workers and slavish consumers – the eight-ninths of the metaphorical iceberg that *happily* lives below the water line and keeps the world running

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<sup>117</sup> Woiak, "Designing a Brave New World," 109.

<sup>118</sup> Woiak, "Designing a Brave New World," 114, 24.

<sup>119</sup> Huxley, *Brave New World*, 196.

efficiently,” and perplexingly concludes that “to aim for total human perfectibility [a world without disabled people] would not produce “community, stability, identity.”<sup>120</sup> Woiak seemingly departs from her own reading of Huxley as a eugenicist model, since the eugenic objective is to “perfect” humans. My reading of Huxley’s novel focuses instead on its extrapolation of Plato’s parable of the metals, by way of his contemporary eugenicist discourse. The novel, like Plato, advocates a society consisting of people that have different kinds of ability, but contrives it through a spectrum of engineered (dis)ability.

*Brave New World* rejects eugenics by humanising the lower castes of the World State’s (dis)ability hierarchy and showing how conditioning may fail. Huxley forces the reader to consider the kind of degradation an otherwise healthy and well-functional human would have to be subjected to in order to accept such a life. The debate between Mustapha Mond and John the Savage is an oft-quoted section of the novel; it weights Mond’s utilitarian rationalizations of the comfortable organization of the brave new world against John’s idealistic arguments for the value of high art, higher meaning, and the necessity of suffering. In short, John challenges Mond on the position of the epitomal man by asking if the World Controllers abused mankind’s “pleasant vices” to degrade the citizenry. Mond retorts that he idealises a “happy, hard-working, goods-consuming citizen. Of course, if you choose some other standard than ours, then perhaps you might say he is degraded.”<sup>121</sup> Mond cedes the point, which marks one of the very few of John’s accusations and arguments that the World Controller does not debunk outright. In Johns eyes, the Epsilons are “human maggots” and society would be better off without them.<sup>122</sup> It is surprising that this argument comes from the libertarian John and not his autocratic counterpart. The Epsilons may well be degraded by our standards of society, but they have use value and are not denigrated by Mustapha Mond.

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<sup>120</sup> Woiak, “Designing a Brave New World,” 115. (Emphasis added.)

<sup>121</sup> Huxley, *Brave New World*, 208.

<sup>122</sup> Huxley, *Brave New World*, 195.

Although they have the means to perform euthanasia, in the World State they do not “allow people to go popping off into eternity if they’ve got any serious work to do.”<sup>123</sup> Huxley’s novel instead presents even severely disabled characters as productive members of society. Furthermore, when Mond punishes Bernard and other dissidents, it is with exile rather than capital punishment. Because Huxley presents such humane solutions, it is not educative to read the novel as a eugenicist text. Rather, *Brave New World* has humanist aspects of its utilitarianism. The World State encourages human variety by incorporating citizens from the whole spectrum of ability to cooperate. I agree with Woiak on one point, though; the caste system and society in the novel are static and they do not encourage social mobility.

### **Changeable Abilities Complicate (Dis)ability Hierarchies**

Charlie’s journey through the strata of *Flowers for Algernon*’s (dis)ability hierarchy is an inverse of Huxley’s rigid castes. His mobility challenges the essentialisation of disabled people. Like Keyes, Plato understood class mobility. Just as there may be children of rulers who are deemed unfit for the office, so may children of artisans and husbandmen be raised to become guardians. He specifies that “the eye of the ruler must not be pitiful towards the child because he has to descend in the scale,” so descending the hierarchy is not deemed a negative.<sup>124</sup> Such a mobile format opposes the biologically determined apartheid in *Brave New World*, but invites this thesis to examine Charlie according to Platonic thought. The characters who inhabit static hierarchies are not necessarily equally static.

In a narrative with a predetermined (dis)ability hierarchy, characters with unchanging (dis)abilities reinforce pre-existing power structures and the hegemony of those of normative ability. The characters may otherwise be dynamic and complex, but for the purpose of charting a (dis)ability hierarchy they function as touchstones. Lenina the Beta, for example,

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<sup>123</sup> Huxley, *Brave New World*, 134.

<sup>124</sup> Plato, “Republic,” Steph. 415.

begins and concludes the narrative as ablebodied and ableminded, except for her minor aesthetic imperfections. She retains her ability to participate in the activities that she desires or that are expected of her. According to the social model of disability she is not considered to be disabled and maintains her “normal” level of (dis)ability throughout the book. Lenina is thus a yardstick of normalcy with which Bernard measures his deviance. Although the Alphas and Betas are a minority, their high level of ability privileges them with the role of defining what constitutes as normal ability in the brave new society.

While characters with unchanging abilities align with eugenic ideology of nature over nurture and divide people into standard and substandard, Charlie’s changeable ability levels as concept rejects the idea of a “normal” level of ability. Davis holds that the “normal – is a configuration that arises in a particular historical moment;” it is symptomatic of industrialisation and Davis aligns it with other progressive ideas at the time when the bourgeoisie was unifying its ideology.<sup>125</sup> “Normal” is not just a median, an average or statistical midpoint; it is a tool for a society to contrive a set of characteristics that is shared by the majority, and therefore presupposes that it is shared by everyone. The introduction of the bell curve, or what eugenic propagator Sir Francis Galton redefined as the “normal distribution curve,” aided statisticians in charting attributes from norm to deviancy. The reason for the name change is that the bell curve provided eugenicists with a problem: human traits will emerge in both extremes of the curve, yet only one extreme will be what eugenicists considered positive. Take for example intelligence; the majority of a population will cluster around the top of the bell curve, whereas a minority would fall on the short ends of the curve and could therefore be considered deviants. However, eugenicists did not want to consider high intelligence as a deviant trait. Wanting to avoid the middling of desired attributes, the statistician Francis Galton preferred to map intelligence “in ranked order,” which became the

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<sup>125</sup> Davis, “Constructing Normalcy,” 17.

precursor for the familiar intelligence quotient or IQ.<sup>126</sup> Thus, industrial-era eugenicists were able to simultaneously engineer the norm as identity and present the higher ranks as desirable and more widespread than what was really the case. As Davis puts it, they were able to “norm the non-standard.”<sup>127</sup>

I coin the term *ability qua mobility* to emphasise the mobility inherent in the (dis)ability hierarchies in the novels. By putting the novels in dialogue, I show how *Brave New World* constructs a spectrum of (dis)ability and *Flowers for Algernon*'s protagonist moves across such a spectrum. Characters who gain or lose ability move through the strata of (dis)ability hierarchies. When they – intentionally or unintentionally – traverse such an ableist system they present (dis)ability as changeable and collapse the paradigm of normality. Ability qua mobility challenges a dichotomous and static understanding of abled contra disabled, by highlighting that ability is inherently alterable. The term entails the loss of abilities (like Charlie's loss of intelligence), the recovery of abilities (the original premise for Charlie's operation), and the acquisition of new abilities (like Charlie's hyper-ability). A character that presents ability qua mobility is *ability-mobile*.

The (dis)ability hierarchies in both novels are at their most identifiable when characters are shown to move along their axis. Both Keyes and Huxley use disability as narrative prosthesis by stratifying their societies based on levels of (dis)ability to create obstacles for their characters to overcome. Bernard's obstacle is *Brave New World*'s institutionalised ability apartheid which makes him feel “separate” and dejected, while Charlie's intellectual disability keeps him from gaining recognition and acceptance from his family.<sup>128</sup> In both cases the authors have chosen to write ability-mobile characters that traverse the strata of the (dis)ability hierarchies in their societies. For clarity, ability qua

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<sup>126</sup> Davis, “Constructing Normalcy,” 9.

<sup>127</sup> Davis, “Constructing Normalcy,” 7.

<sup>128</sup> Huxley, *Brave New World*, 58.

mobility means an “ascent” of the (dis)ability hierarchy, as is the case with Charlie’s meteoric increase of cognizance and reasoning ability; or a “descent,” like Charlie experiences after the experiment fails and his intelligence goes into remission. Bernard also “descends” the hierarchy, but his (dis)ability does not change. Instead, his social standing is affected because his physique is incongruous with his status as an Alpha. Therefore, ability-mobile characters are not only those whose levels of (dis)ability are biologically or medically changed, but also those who are *perceived* to change their level of (dis)ability or display the “inappropriate” level of ability.

### **Ageism Supersedes Ableism**

Arguably, every character is ability-mobile because ageing links to a decline in ability. Disability is to a certain extent a “universal experience” due to the general decline in abled-bodiedness and able-mindedness that tends to arrive with old age. The novels conflate ableism with ageism because the negative evaluations of (dis)ability correlate with symptoms of old age. In “‘No Country for Old Men’: Huxley’s *Brave New World* and the Value of Old Age,” Maren Linett opens a bioethical discussion of the novel and pontificates on the value of old age.<sup>129</sup> Is it better to die at seventy-five, before experiencing the decline of mental and physical faculties, or is there value in the stage of life where many of our productive abilities dwindle? Huxley’s novel answers the former question in the positive and the latter in the negative. Mustapha Mond celebrates the World State’s successful delay of geriatrics:

‘It only remained to conquer old age.’  
‘Gonadal hormones, transfusion of young blood, magnesium salts...’  
‘*All the physiological stigmata of old age have been abolished. And along with them of course...*’  
‘*Along with them all the old man’s mental peculiarities.* Characters remain constant throughout a whole lifetime.’

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<sup>129</sup> Maren Linett, “‘No Country for Old Men’: Huxley’s *Brave New World* and the Value of Old Age,” *Journal of Medical Humanities* 40, no. 3 (Sep 2017): 2, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10912-017-9469-x>, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/28819920>.

‘Work, play – at sixty our powers and tastes are what they were at seventeen.’<sup>130</sup>

The “mental peculiarities” in question are a propensity for introspection and reflection. The World State regards these traits as threats to stability. *Brave New World* is utilitarian and citizens who do not consume and produce have no use value. Mustapha Mond disparages the elderly: “Old men in the bad old days used to renounce, retire, take to religion, spend their time reading, thinking – *thinking!*”<sup>131</sup> The novel’s SF technology maintains a lithe and fresh-faced citizenry until the people swiftly deteriorate at sixty years, which aligns with what Linett calls *compulsory youthfulness*, an ideological mandate to present youth and able-bodiedness even in old age.<sup>132</sup> In *Brave New World*, age is more disabling than impairments.

Plato has similar views on old people’s use value. John’s mother Linda is an example of a clash between the World State’s compulsory youthfulness and euthanasia. In the Indian Reservation she was deprived of “rejuvenation” and aged. Upon her return she isolates herself and takes ever larger doses of *soma*. Eventually, a doctor concludes that her drug use will paralyze her respiratory system and she will die. The medical personnel cannot rejuvenate her but have no moral qualms with letting Linda die. They only keep people alive if they have “serious work to do. But as she hasn’t got any serious work” her doctor lets her perish.<sup>133</sup> Linda’s value equals her capacity as a producer and consumer and expires with her senility. From *Brave New World*’s passive euthanasia, I draw a parallel to Plato’s views on medicine. He derides a doctor that had a “mortal disease” who, “by the help of science [...], struggled on to old age.”<sup>134</sup> Kiefer claims that Plato argues that “incurably” injured or impaired individuals who are of no use to the state should die through “passive euthanasia or

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<sup>130</sup> Huxley, *Brave New World*, 46-47. (Emphasis added.)

<sup>131</sup> Huxley, *Brave New World*, 47. (Emphasis in original.)

<sup>132</sup> Compulsory Youthfulness “is the social mandate to maintain the ideals of youthfulness in regard to ability, memory, health, appearance, activity, energy, sexuality, and social roles throughout the life course, including later in life.” It was coined by Hailee M. Gibbons in “Compulsory Youthfulness: Intersections of Ableism and Ageism in ‘Successful Aging’ Discourses,” *Review of Disability Studies: An International Journal* 12, no. 2&3 (2016): 2.

<sup>133</sup> Huxley, *Brave New World*, 134.

<sup>134</sup> Plato, “Republic,” Steph 406.

exposure.” The World State similarly euthanises geriatric citizens at sixty, but rears disabled citizens by the millions. Like Henry’s useless “eyeless monsters,” old people have no use value in *Brave New World* and their existence is a taboo and suppressed from public knowledge through the state compulsory youthfulness. Huxley’s novel values the Epsilons more than the elderly because the latter have spent their use value.

*Brave New World* cherishes youthfulness, but distains childhood. Children are reared in facilities and conditioned for their caste and job in the World State, although scientists work to shorten this period. For Epsilons in particular, the period between their mental maturity at age ten and physical maturity required for their job at eighteen is described as “superfluous” and “wasted immaturity.”<sup>135</sup> Use value is in productivity, and children and geriatrics in the second childhood of dementia are not productive.

### **Infantilization**

*Flowers for Algernon*’s characters also disdain those *acting* younger than their age or those without the able-mindedness or able-bodiedness expected of their age. Contrasting *Brave New World*’s Death Hospital, where John observes “the blank incurious stares of second infancy,”<sup>136</sup> Keyes’s novel does not depict any geriatric characters. Instead, *Flowers for Algernon* infantilises the disabled. The director of Warren mental institution refers to the inmates as “retardates,” “boys,” or “children” and declares that “no matter what their ages are, they’re all children here.”<sup>137</sup> This is not limited to the “untidy” mentally disabled. The principal agglomerates patients with severe brain injuries alongside patients capable of working. Their products are inferior, worthless and they are not regarded as productive members of society. In Plato’s state, they would not have merited medical treatment. Like

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<sup>135</sup> Huxley, *Brave New World*, 11.

<sup>136</sup> Huxley, *Brave New World*, 175.

<sup>137</sup> Keyes, *Flowers*, 159.



Huxley's "moribund sexagenarians," the Warren inmates' use value is zero. *Flowers for Algernon* equates disability, intellectual in particular, with childhood and a failure to be a productive member of society.

Like Warren's inmates, the disabled Charlie is referred to as a "kid," a "boy about women" and Alice is made to reassure him post-operation that she does not "think of [him] as a boy."<sup>138</sup> Charlie's rapid ability journey is analogous to an accelerated life narrative. He has a prolonged childhood due to his impairment and relies on charitable people such as Alice or his employer. Linett claims that "attitudes about states of less than optimal ability and productivity are tightly intertwined with attitudes about the worth of human beings who are physically disabled, who think more slowly than average, or who are not contributing relative or scientific works to society in the first place."<sup>139</sup> Her argument is apt for the ageist and utilitarian attitudes towards the "second infancy" that constitute the (dis)ability imagery in both novels.

Charlie's regression to disability is reminiscent of old age and dementia. Algernon, the titular mouse, undergoes the same experiment and foreshadows Charlie's journey. When Charlie is getting smarter, Algernon is his benchmark for the first plateau of intelligence he reaches. Keyes underlines the relationship between Charlie and Algernon when Charlie admonishes himself for "identifying with" the mouse, since he understands that he will regress mentally and suffer "progressive amnesia."<sup>140</sup> When Algernon dies, Charlie foresees his imminent intellectual decline and death. He fears "wasting [his life] as if [he] had never been" because of his regression.<sup>141</sup> Charlie's ability to leave a legacy determines his value and society's definition of legacy makes it impossible for him to leave one. Disability means worthlessness in *Flowers for Algernon*, because if Charlie dies without being *useful* to

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<sup>138</sup> Keyes, *Flowers*, 42, 34, 65.

<sup>139</sup> Linett, "No Country for Old Men - Huxley & Old Age," 4.

<sup>140</sup> Keyes, *Flowers*, 161, 77.

<sup>141</sup> Keyes, *Flowers*, 198.

society, he considers his life wasted. Despite the novel's tirades on the value of human life, it portrays (dis)ability as Plato construes it in *The Republic*. Charlie does not want to be one of the "silent minds" at Warren because he equates them with uselessness. Since he is "the first dumb person" who discovered something important for science, *his* life has not been a waste, but the novel still portrays his regression as tragic. Charlie exiles himself from normal society to go to Warren, the place that symbolises uselessness, and the final page reads like his last will and testament. He wishes everybody "goodby," and in a postscript implores somebody to leave "flowers on Algernon's grave."<sup>142</sup> Because Charlie's narrative arc is tied to Algernon's, the flowers are thus also for his own grave. I read Charlie's complete regression and institutionalisation as emblematic of his disability and death, which is the final nail in the coffin for *Flowers for Algernon's* construction of (dis)ability.

### **Chapter Conclusion**

This chapter has presented the thematic use of (dis)ability in *Brave New World* and *Flowers for Algernon*. (Dis)ability is identity in Huxley's novel. Impairments essentialise castes and the state disables its citizen "cells" to assure the survival of the "social body." Vice versa, (dis)ability equals uselessness, worthlessness and death in Keyes's novel. The texts reflect disability discourse throughout the twentieth century, despite their basis in Plato's views on disability. I argue that Huxley's text aligns closer with modern conceptualisations of (dis)ability as spectrum. The World State is brutally utilitarian: it prevents the birth of useless citizens with severe birth defects and enacts passive euthanasia for rapidly geriatric sexagenarians that have outlived their use. Nevertheless, Huxley's novel assigns use value to every member of society, from Alpha to Epsilon. Although rife with stigma and inter-caste prejudice, even higher-caste characters are taught that Epsilons serve an "indispensable"

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<sup>142</sup> Keyes, *Flowers*, 216.

function – which they do. Huxley may have set out to write the blueprint of a eugenicist society, but the novel invites a humanist reading instead. For although John the Savage designates the Epsilons as “human maggots,” they are inextricably human and, according to the World State, have value.

*Flowers for Algernon* equally surprisingly does not emerge unscathed. Keyes narratively demonizes Charlie’s (dis)ability and portrays the disabled inmates at Warren as useless. Thus, in spite of Charlie’s enthusiastic diatribes on the value of human life and an individual’s worth, the narrative circumvents these emotive points and portrays life with a mental disability as being, in Professor Nemur’s words, “a feeble-minded shell, a *burden on society* that must fear his irresponsible behaviour.”<sup>143</sup>

I have charted the construction of (dis)ability in *Brave New World* and *Flowers for Algernon* and observed that (dis)ability is not static. Bernard, Linda, and Charlie all perceive and exist within several strata of their (dis)ability hierarchies. The ratification of pre-existing power structures marks a preliminary step in challenging the status quo. A similar process transpired when disability activists attempted to wrest control of the movement’s narrative from followers of the medical model. Their reason for objection was the said model’s depiction of disabled people as a “biological deficit.”<sup>144</sup> Ability-mobile characters, such as Charlie and Linda, counter the medical model by rejecting the binary of able and unable. They rather present (dis)ability as a spectrum and a universal experience because ability levels are changeable. The novels’ construction of (dis)ability invites a consideration of ability qua mobility for our ontology of disability. I claim that Huxley’s novel is more instructive to the representation of disabled people because, unlike Keyes, his novel deviates from Plato and writes disabled people as integral to his enduring state.

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<sup>143</sup> Keyes, *Flowers*, 113. (Emphasis added.)

<sup>144</sup> Shakespeare, “Social Model,” 266.

Society needs continual reinforcement to improve living conditions and social inclusion of the disabled, and this is the real-world importance of SF's (dis)ability representation. As the public still discredits disability, Darling postulates that advances in prenatal diagnosis will result in a decrease in the birth of disabled infants, regardless of disability rights movements. These movements' challenge is to attempt a "re-framing of identity construction" among those with post-natal disabilities.<sup>145</sup> She observes a shift in (dis)ability identity towards increased diversity and appears optimistic because disabled people's self-perception has moved from stigma towards "more identity options."<sup>146</sup> Of the two novels, *Brave New World* is closer to her objective to reconceptualise disability "as a normal form of human variation."<sup>147</sup> Huxley and Keyes use (dis)ability thematically to challenge or reinforce normative human embodiment. In the following chapter, I will analyse how they construct their characters' experiences of disability.

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<sup>145</sup> Darling, *Disability and Identity*, 152.

<sup>146</sup> Darling, *Disability and Identity*, 155.

<sup>147</sup> Darling, *Disability and Identity*, 1.

## Chapter 2

### (Dis)ability Experienced in *Brave New World* and *Flowers for Algernon*

Keyes and Huxley's novels construct (dis)ability via the experience of impaired characters. Both adopt Platonic evaluations of disability, and thereby erroneously equate ignorance with intellectual impairment. Whereas the first chapter privileges an analysis of the latter novel because, like Plato, it uses disability to section society, Keyes's novel and its focus on disability experience will dominate this chapter. I argue that *Flowers for Algernon*'s attempt to instil sympathy for the disabled misfires because the novel exclusively presents disability as pitiful ignorance. For Charlie, only increased intellectual ability means increased knowledge. In contrast, *Brave New World* suggests disability can be a source of knowledge. The ability qua mobility of Huxley's characters grants them the wisdom to examine and critique their society.

Plato's pronouncement on "the unexamined life" as "not worth living," suggests that those who cannot reflect on their existence are unworthy of life.<sup>148</sup> He quotes Socrates whose lifelong pursuit was to question the world and search for truth. Socrates' objective was the definition and distinction of "true and false knowledge," which sets apart the real world and how we think it is.<sup>149</sup> Plato used the allegory of prisoners bound in a cave to outline the difference. The prisoners are sat watching shadows on a wall, and their wisdom is measured by reasoning about these shadows. They attain false knowledge and are ignorant since their conclusion is based on incomplete data.

A released prisoner, who sees the source of these shadows, will disbelieve his newfound wisdom before accepting it for truth. When he emerges from the cave, he doubts

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<sup>148</sup> Plato, "Apology," in *Dialogues of Plato*, ed. and trans. B. Jowett (3, London: Oxford University Press, 1931), Steph 38.

<sup>149</sup> "Apology," Steph. 41. I read Socrates as Plato's character of Socrates, not the thinker as such.

the veracity of what he sees because his eyes hurt from the light, but eventually understands and accepts the real world and the sun as reality. This is Plato's ideal of true knowledge.<sup>150</sup> When the escapee remembers his fellow prisoners and their so-called wisdom, vis-à-vis his own true Knowledge, Socrates postulates that "he would felicitate himself" and "pity" the others.<sup>151</sup> Upon his return to the cave, the escapee's newfound Knowledge does not help him read the shadows on the wall, and the other prisoners dismiss his explanations as nonsense. Socrates ridicules the prisoners who reject the escapee's Knowledge. Consequently, I infer that the bound prisoners embody the unexamined lives that Socrates considers not worth living, given that a prisoner needs to be capable of reason to escape Plato's cave. Stainton claims that Plato associates reason with human value, agency and "humanness itself" and that this thought has influenced the construction of intellectual disability.<sup>152</sup> While the cave indeed signifies ignorance and lack of reason, which connects to how the intellectually disabled are regarded, a return to the cave does not mean a loss of Knowledge nor the ability to reason.

The novels' use of Plato's cave allegory as a symbol of disability harmonises with Platonic concepts of Knowledge and ignorance, but with unfortunate ramifications for Keyes's novel. *Flowers for Algernon's* epigraph quotes a section from Plato's cave allegory which encourages pity for the ignorant and regards the knowledgeable as happy. Similarly, the novel portrays disability as a lack and its disabled protagonist as pitifully discontent. Through an experiment, Charlie becomes a genius and achieves Knowledge but returns benighted to the cave as the experiment malfunctions. His disability inferiority complex leads postoperative Charlie to disassociate from his previously disabled self, which he designates to the cave. Still, the novel insinuates that Charlie's increased cognition has cost him the ability

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<sup>150</sup> Plato's ideal of true knowledge henceforth referred to as "Knowledge" capitalized.

<sup>151</sup> Plato, "Republic," Steph. 516.

<sup>152</sup> Stainton, "Reason and Value: Plato's Construction of Intellectual Disability," 458. Stainton articulates and compiles the thoughts on intellectual disability from several of Plato's texts: *The Republic*, *Sophists* and *Laws*. He claims Plato's account "differs" in *The Republic* and *Laws*, but that a "mental capacity determination" permeates his writing.

to sympathise with and understand other people. This discrepancy complicates the tragic stylings of his return to disability. While the experiment allows the disabled Charlie to seek Knowledge, *Brave New World* disables all citizens to prevent them from seeking Knowledge. If an unexamined life is worthless, then the only lives of value in the World State are Bernard's and Helmholtz's. They experience disability and hyper-ability as an alienation that makes them question society. Their (dis)abilities are therefore a source of knowledge that instigates their venture out of Plato's cave. Nevertheless, Huxley humanises an Epsilon liftman – an ignorant and disabled individual, conditioned to remain in the cave – in disagreement with Plato's paradigm of *reason* and value. A society that views the reasonless as worthless engenders people who self-identify accordingly, who may devalue or even stigmatise themselves regardless of their assigned use value.

The awareness of bias influences individual experiences of disability. A disabled individual who experiences a society which equates disability and worthlessness is affected whether cognizant of this prejudice or not. Darling challenges *labelling theory* – which puts forth the idea that disabled people “internalize the negative views of others and incorporate them into their self-concepts” – since disabled people's identities are too varied to be superimposed externally.<sup>153</sup> However, she cedes that stigma affects the identification process. Disability, therefore, not only influences how others evaluate an individual, but self-evaluation and self-identification as well. Having established Plato's cave allegory and outlined how its privileging of reason relates to intellectual (dis)ability and identity, I adopt it to an analysis of how the novels portray their characters' experiences of disability.

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<sup>153</sup> Darling, *Disability and Identity*, 143.

## **Experience of Disability – “I am I, and I wish I wasn’t”**

The novels depict characters experiencing varying degrees of (dis)abilities, often with negative connotations. *Brave New World's* Bernard, though highly intelligent, has been hampered by conditioning and a restricted education. However, an analysis of Bernard shows that (dis)ability creates an outsider status, which can be a source of knowledge. His most prominent impairment is his “ugly,” “small” and “stunted” physique, which is “horribly and typically low-caste” and thus disables him more than his intellectual restrictions.<sup>154</sup> His shame is exacerbated by the rumour that claims his height stems from accidental alcohol poisoning at the embryo-stage. In a society that disables all castes, an unconventional impairment presupposes a mistake. Other citizens stigmatise Bernard, but he secludes himself. The reason for his reclusiveness is that contact with lower caste individuals reminds him “painfully” of his “physical inadequacy.”<sup>155</sup> The description of Bernard’s poor self-esteem evokes what Darling calls *symbolic interaction perspective*, a form of labelling theory, which makes individuals perceive themselves by way of internalisation of the observers’ views and stigma. The scholar explains how this disability self-image theory posits that “stigmatized individuals would see themselves as others saw them” and therefore have a “deviant identity.”<sup>156</sup> Bernard regards himself as deviant and experiences ableist anxiety when he interacts with lower castes. In an exchange with Delta-Minus attendants, he commands in the “sharp, rather arrogant” tone of someone who is insecure “in his superiority.”<sup>157</sup> His interactions are ridiculous and highlight the social awkwardness that separates him from society. Bernard’s negative (dis)ability experience alienates him, which drives him to question and criticise his social system. The World State discourages intermingling of the castes and provides

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<sup>154</sup> Huxley, *Brave New World*, 39.

<sup>155</sup> Huxley, *Brave New World*, 55.

<sup>156</sup> Darling, *Disability and Identity*, 33.

<sup>157</sup> Huxley, *Brave New World*, 55.



continuous distraction from any serious thoughts, so that disparate communities are not supposed to happen. Bernard's alienation impedes its presentation as a stable society.

The novel stages an interesting interplay in the identification dynamic between the World State collective and the individual Bernard Marx: neither the one nor the other is completely to blame for Bernard's isolation. While the initial mistake that led to Bernard's impairment is the World State's fault – “for accidents will happen” – his ensuing anxiety and isolation are his own doing.<sup>158</sup> *Brave New World* creates a paradox by establishing a universal “faint hypnopædic prejudice in favour of size,” which entices Bernard's peers to mock him, yet blames his isolation on himself. For example, after a mandatory orgy to promote solidarity, Bernard emerges in a state of self-consciousness from a “crimson twilight” and feels “utterly miserable,” yet the others' rapture makes him conclude that “perhaps it was his own fault.”<sup>159</sup> The novel echoes Darling's symbolic interaction perspective when it describes Bernard's process of self-ostracising:

The mockery made him feel an outsider; and feeling an outsider he behaved like one, which increased the prejudice against him and intensified the contempt and hostility aroused by his physical defects. Which in turn increased his sense of being alien and alone.<sup>160</sup>

The character's ability qua mobility spirals him down in the social hierarchy, which the novel ascribes to Bernard's own fault since he considers his own a lack of effort or conformity as reason for his misery. The novel's castes reflect a (dis)ability hierarchy according to assigned use value, but superimposes a social hierarchy based on an individual's ability to pass as their predestined level of (dis)ability. The tension between these two hierarchies keeps Bernard's status in flux and motivates his social isolation.

Nevertheless, when Bernard brings back John from the reservation and becomes a celebrity, he reconciles with society and forgets about his deviancy, notwithstanding a

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<sup>158</sup> Huxley, *Brave New World*, 55.

<sup>159</sup> Huxley, *Brave New World*, 74.

<sup>160</sup> Huxley, *Brave New World*, 55-56.

tendency for showboating an unorthodoxy privileged him by his celebrity status. When John refuses to be put on show, Bernard loses his status and his nonconformity compounds the indignation of those who already dislike paying heed to “a creature with a Gamma-Minus physique.”<sup>161</sup> The stigma for his impairment returns immediately and unequivocally due to Bernard’s classification as deviant. His peers react with rage because they feel he has overstepped his position and “the higher their position in the hierarchy, the deeper their resentment.”<sup>162</sup> Bernard’s association with John let him briefly perform as a normative Alpha, but once this status is revoked his act becomes a violation. Bernard can perform his functions in society if he presents humility, but when he makes pretensions to a higher societal position, his already uncertain situation in the (dis)ability hierarchy aggravates his overstep. The brave new world discourages ability qua mobility because it causes ableist anxiety and destabilizes society. Bernard’s conceit highlights the social construct of the castes. Those with higher positions must denigrate him to remain superior.

Bernard experiences disability as exclusion and ensuing deviancy. The novel presents him as a subversive figure akin to Plato’s Socrates, who examined “pretenders” to knowledge; in lieu of actual charges those with higher positions rely on “ready-made charges” such as the disability-stigma used to reject Bernard.<sup>163</sup> In both cases unorthodox opinions exacerbate the populace’s conditioned prejudice. In the end, it is Bernard’s heretical opinions which exile him, not his impairment. His experience indicates that behaviour outside the normalized (dis)ability spectrum of *Brave New World’s* caste system is met with social sanctions. The escapee in Plato’s allegory, upon gaining Knowledge and understanding that the world works differently from what the people in the cave believe, would “endure anything, rather than think as they do and live after their manner.”<sup>164</sup> Similarly, Bernard “got too self-consciously

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<sup>161</sup> Huxley, *Brave New World*, 151.

<sup>162</sup> Huxley, *Brave New World*, 151.

<sup>163</sup> Plato, “Apology,” Steph. 23.

<sup>164</sup> Plato, “Republic,” Steph. 516.

individual to fit into community life,” which means that he understood his world to an excess that prevents him from conforming in the World State.<sup>165</sup> Bernard’s disability experience places him outside society just like Plato’s prisoner finds himself excluded by the inhabitants of the cave.

The novel’s presentation of Bernard’s experience undermines a consideration of his (dis)ability as a narrative prosthesis. Stories that rely on the “potency of disability as a symbolic figure” will seldomly address (dis)ability as an “experience of social or political dimensions, according to Mitchell and Snyder.<sup>166</sup> By this definition, disability in *Brave New World* is not a narrative prosthesis because it presents different abilities as having both social and political contexts. Bernard is always aware of his position in the World State’s (dis)ability hierarchy. His deviancy prevents him from self-fulfilment and purpose according to what society expects of him; he thus *functions* at a normative level but cannot *pass* as such. The discrepancy between his inability to cover his impairment and his awareness of his position as “other” causes him grief and depression: “I am I, and I wish I wasn’t.”<sup>167</sup> Bernard identifies with his impairment and the social and political ramifications it entails, such as ableist anxiety, stigma, and the injustice of a tiered caste system. The ramifications cast him as an agitator, such as Plato’s Socrates; unlike the philosopher, however, he is driven by an unsympathetic egotism. His selfishness distinguishes him from Helmholtz Watson, who is a more sympathetic ability-mobile renegade.

Bernard is the antithesis of Helmholtz, who is a deviant because of his hyper-ability. His superiors consider him “a little *too* able,” which is detrimental to Helmholtz’s success in and experience of the World State.<sup>168</sup> Although physically “every centimetre an Alpha,” he

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<sup>165</sup> Huxley, *Brave New World*, 200.

<sup>166</sup> Mitchell and Snyder, “Narrative Prosthesis,” 274.

<sup>167</sup> Huxley, *Brave New World*, 55.

<sup>168</sup> Huxley, *Brave New World*, 57.

feels the same apartness from society as Bernard does. The novel juxtaposes their relationship to society with their relationship to their abilities:

That which had made Helmholtz so uncomfortably aware of being himself and all alone was too much ability. What the two men shared was the knowledge that they were individuals. But whereas the physically defective Bernard had suffered all his life from the consciousness of being separate, it was only quite recently that, grown aware of his mental excess, Helmholtz Watson had also become aware of his difference from the people who surrounded him.<sup>169</sup>

Helmholtz is stigmatised because of his hyper-ability. His “mental excess” is easier to hide than Bernard’s physical defect, and Helmholtz can therefore pass as a normative Alpha, which ameliorates his experience of the World State. Although favourable, Helmholtz’s displacement on the (dis)ability spectrum makes him self-identify as a deviant. Unlike Bernard, Helmholtz has a choice. He *passes* as a normative Alpha but *functions* on a higher level. Due to their apartness from society, Bernard and Helmholtz perceive the World State as an authoritarian system of government which deprives its citizens of the ability to criticise. Both characters come into conflict with the authorities for expressing their undogmatic views. Bernard includes subversive opinions in a letter to World Controller Mond and Helmholtz writes inflammatory poetry. They take pride in these seditious actions because instigation allows them to identify outside the framework of (dis)abilities and predestined jobs. As instigators, they have importance beyond their station.

Neither Bernard nor Helmholtz is content with (dis)ability as the differentiating factor in their lives. Darling explains that the disabled have self-concepts which are not limited to (dis)ability identity but include several identities. Often, these other identities have increased salience than the one associated with disability. She claims that the “salience” of (dis)ability identity increases when “*society* calls it to someone’s attention through stigma or discrimination.”<sup>170</sup> *Brave New World’s* tension between utilitarian disability politics and

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<sup>169</sup> Huxley, *Brave New World*, 58.

<sup>170</sup> Darling, *Disability and Identity*, 144. (Emphasis in original.)

hierarchical society stems from just this interplay between the characters' different identities. Bernard and Helmholtz have distinct approaches to their self-identification due to the difference in their (dis)abilities but seek to identify and understand themselves apart from their (dis)ability just the same.

Platonic imagery unites the two characters and bridges the gap between the two novels. The two Alphas dissociate themselves from society, aware of the empty happiness and systematic suppression of free expression in the World State. World Controller Mond exiles them for being recalcitrant and therefore a danger to the state's stability. Plato describes wayward philosophy students as similarly dangerous to a state because their sceptical natures transform them from "keeper[s] of the law" to renegades.<sup>171</sup> He pronounces that his guardians must ascend from ignorance in the allegorical cave to arrive at "the good" of Knowledge, subsequently the guardians must share this knowledge and therefore "descend again among the prisoners in the den" to fulfil their maxim of happiness in the whole state.<sup>172</sup> World Controller Mustapha Mond "descends" to lecture his subjects on the wisdom of Ford, but *Brave New World's* dilemma is that its "guardians" – the world controllers – are controlled and kept from Knowledge by each other and the system. Plato's escaped prisoner sees the truth of the world of light but gains no traction with the people who still reside in the cave. To illustrate the unsusceptible attitude of the ignorant, Plato says that the other "men would say of him that up he went and down he came without his eyes," which highlights how difficult it is for a person to share his or her Knowledge.<sup>173</sup> Keyes quotes Plato's line after Charlie's hallucinatory last therapy session with his psychiatrist. At the point where his abilities peak, Charlie claims that Plato's words "mock" him from the "shadows" of the cave.<sup>174</sup> *Flowers for Algernon* adopts this quote to signal Charlie's return to the cave and simultaneously defines

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<sup>171</sup> Plato, "Republic," Steph. 539.

<sup>172</sup> Plato, "Republic," Steph. 519.

<sup>173</sup> Plato, "Republic," Steph. 517.

<sup>174</sup> Keyes, *Flowers*, 199.

his regression as a *descent* to ignorance, which imbues the narrative with pathos and disparages his disability. While *Brave New World* portrays (dis)ability as a source of knowledge, it is only pitiful ignorance in Keyes's novel.

### **Experience of Disability – “Exceptional refers to both ends of the spectrum”**

The surface reading of *Flowers for Algernon* suggests a humanist representation of (dis)abilities, but thematic tensions in the narrative clash with that reading. Keyes urges his readers to regard an individual separately from his impairments. In his autobiography, Keyes claims that Charlie's “basic personality” remains despite changes in intelligence.<sup>175</sup> The character's dissatisfaction is caused by his mother's unreasonable expectations to cure his intellectual impairment and have a normal child. The author thus invites the reader to empathise with Charlie and not devalue him. However, as indicated in the previous chapter, the tension between uselessness and disability impedes empathy for Charlie. Often disability becomes a narrative prosthesis that exploits disabled characters for attention or pathos. Mitchell and Snyder highlight how we as readers fall prey to “literary narratives [that] support our appetites for the exotic by posing disability as an ‘alien’ terrain that promises the revelation of a previously uncomprehended experience.”<sup>176</sup> By promising to include us in the inner workings of an ability-mobile disabled man, Keyes's novel offers a spectacle and an emotional journey with a satisfyingly tragic ending. Even before his operation, Charlie is dissatisfied with (dis)ability and aware that people regard him as different. The reader is primed to view his lacking abilities as unsatisfying and pitiful. I therefore analyse Charlie's experience of (dis)ability in this section and its link to pity in the next.

Charlie's transmogrification, from intellectually disabled via brief hyper-ability to his return to disability, shows how intrinsic his (dis)ability is to his identity. While he is

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<sup>175</sup> Keyes, *Algernon, Charlie and I*, 155.

<sup>176</sup> Mitchell and Snyder, “Narrative Prosthesis,” 280.

disabled, he is discontent because he is aware of his intellectual limitations. When he is hyperable, his dissatisfaction is due to his social limitations. Charlie suffers from “phenylketonuria” and has lived his life as an intellectually disabled, but functional, man with an IQ of 68.<sup>177</sup> He undergoes an operation to become smarter which catapults him to genius-levels of cognition. The novel thus posits technology as a cure for disability and as Charlie’s journey out of Plato’s cave.

Initially, the novel presents Charlie as a congenial, cheerful and socially well-adjusted person despite his intellectual impairment. He is not content with his level of ability and admires his friends’ and co-workers’ discussions about things that he considers above his capacity. He respects intelligence and has a strong drive to become smart like “other peopul.”<sup>178</sup> Though later bullied and belittled by those he considers his friends, at the onset his experience of (dis)ability appears to be harmonious. However, discrepancies in what Charlie understands as reality and what the reader extrapolates from his statements reveal a negative experience of (dis)ability. For example, when his co-workers make jokes at his expense, he fails to understand that he has been slighted. Instead, he maintains, “their my frends and they really like me.”<sup>179</sup> As Charlie’s cognition increases to the point where he understands that he has been mistreated, he feels ashamed of his former ignorance. According to the allegory of the cave, he thus moves from false knowledge under pitiful circumstances to approach Knowledge, but all he learns “outside the cave” is that he is an outcast. A brief detour is necessary to demonstrate how the two novels use the cave allegory.

*Flowers for Algernon* adopts the cave allegory to portray intellectual disability and ignorance to a greater extent than *Brave New World*. Whereas Bernard escapes the cave due to his “sense of apartness,” a mental superfluosness in the World State, Helmholtz and

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<sup>177</sup> Phenylketonuria is a real disease discovered by Ivar Asbjørn Følling in 1934. While it may lead to intellectual disability, the prognosis is normal health if the patient is on a strict diet low in foods containing phenylalanine.

<sup>178</sup> Keyes, *Flowers*, 11.

<sup>179</sup> Keyes, *Flowers*, 16.

Charlie escape it because of an excess of ability.<sup>180</sup> A departure from the cave connects with an ability to perceive and critique one's own society, but I argue that the difference between the three characters is in the levels of ability they inhabit. Although both are Alphas, Bernard experiences disability and normal ability, while Helmholtz experiences normal ability and hyper-ability. They regard the other citizens of the World State as ignorant as Plato's cave-bound prisoners, but are not yet out of the cave or able to claim Knowledge before Mustapha Mond explains their society to them. After which they are too knowledgeable and must be exiled before they can spread their wisdom. *Brave New World's* World State discourages Knowledge and even the World Controllers, comparable to Plato's guardians, are fettered. Contrariwise, Charlie experiences the whole (dis)ability spectrum. He moves from disability to ability to hyper-ability and back because of the external influence of the experiment. After becoming a genius, Charlie also critiques his society and the men responsible for his intelligence. He says that while they "pretended to be geniuses" they were just ordinary men attempting to "bring light into the darkness."<sup>181</sup> Not only does postoperative Charlie use the cave allegory as imagery for his disability, but he considers himself to have more Knowledge in comparison to his previous superiors. Both novels use ability qua mobility – changeable ability-levels – alongside Platonic imagery to show the characters' journey towards Knowledge. However, the closer to Knowledge Charlie gets, the more he resists identifying with his (dis)ability.

Keyes's novel simulates the thought processes of an individual who has experienced the whole range of the (dis)ability spectrum, yet the progress report format ties Charlie's identity to his disability. The conflation of his identity and ableness is not just restricted to descriptions, dialogue or a background theme, but permeates every aspect of the novel. In addition to describing Charlie's transformation, *Flowers for Algernon* uses spelling, syntax

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<sup>180</sup> Huxley, *Brave New World*, 58.

<sup>181</sup> Keyes, *Flowers*, 105.



and the narrative format – progress reports from Charlie’s point of view – to illustrate the protagonist’s different levels of intelligence and proficiency. For example, the first title “progris riport 1 martch 3” shows a lower orthographical skill-level than “PROGRESS REPORT 7 MARCH 11.”<sup>182</sup> The process is reversed in the second half of the novel, culminating in a journal entry that is written with faulty grammar and facile language, similar to the first entry. The reader’s first and final emotional involvement with Charlie ties his identity to his disability via his poor writing skills and low intelligence, but that character is completely unlike the intelligent Charlie seen midway through the narrative. Despite depicting Charlie in a disabled state, an intelligent postoperative state and a re-disabled regressed state, the novel splits the character in two identities; the disabled Charlie and postoperative Charlie, his intelligent foil.

Charlie only sees himself as exceptional when he is intelligent and ridicules the idea that he could be exceptional as disabled. As the plot progresses, the text depicts an increasingly self-aware and reflecting individual as his style of writing changes and pontification grows. Charlie considers his journals a “contribution to mankind” and attaches significance to the uniqueness of his experience and ability journey.<sup>183</sup> Moreover, he identifies himself as apart from the people who surround him both before and after his change in abilities. When describing his ability qua mobility he shows a profound insight: “*Exceptional* refers to both ends of the spectrum, so all my life I’ve been exceptional.”<sup>184</sup> Charlie expresses a need to experience validation and recognition for his actions, but simultaneously ties his achievements and exceptionality to his hyper-ability. The novel indicates that Charlie is aware of a spectrum of abilities and that he is exceptional for having moved through its stratum, but does not enjoy being or identifying as disabled.

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<sup>182</sup> Keyes, *Flowers*, 1, 10.

<sup>183</sup> Keyes, *Flowers*, 194, 78.

<sup>184</sup> Keyes, *Flowers*, 106. (Emphasis in original.)

The journals chart the full spectrum of Charlie's experience as an ability-mobile character. He uses Alice, his teacher and romantic interest, as a measuring rod for his intellectual development, thereby making her analogous to what he considers normal ability. Although he considers himself equally distanced from Alice when he has "an I.Q. of 185" as he was when he was intellectually disabled, with a high intelligence he understands *why* there is an obstacle to their relationship.<sup>185</sup> This ability to rationalise his relationship echoes how Plato privileges reason and Knowledge, although his relational circumstances have not changed. Like Bernard and Helmholtz, his deviant ability levels isolate him and prevent him from identifying with those who would be his peers. While Charlie's intelligence rises, his social skills deteriorate. Fay, his one relationship during the genius period, is merely "handy" as company.<sup>186</sup> Professor Nemur describes him as developing from a "likeable, retarded young man into an arrogant, self-centred, antisocial bastard."<sup>187</sup> The novel portrays hyper-able Charlie as having emerged from the cave, yet introduces his inability to communicate and sympathise with those he now considers beneath him. Up until the middle of the narrative, *Flowers for Algernon* is analogous with Plato's cave allegory. Through the experiment and his subsequent studies, Charlie has left the cave and surpassed those he thought were his superiors. He loses respect for academia and experts because unlike them, his hyper-ability allows him to excel at many subjects at once. In a journal entry, halfway through his ability journey, he comprehends that his abilities have climaxed: "It's as if all the knowledge I've soaked in during the past months has coalesced and lifted me to a peak of light and understanding."<sup>188</sup> Again, Platonic imagery in the quote indicates that Charlie has gained Knowledge of the world. However, when the protagonist begins regressing back into disability, the imagery of the cave allegory and the friction between his two identities unravel

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<sup>185</sup> Keyes, *Flowers*, 88.

<sup>186</sup> Keyes, *Flowers*, 164.

<sup>187</sup> Keyes, *Flowers*, 172.

<sup>188</sup> Keyes, *Flowers*, 167.

the humanist message that Keyes might have had in mind, and the novel instead presents Charlie's (dis)ability as pitiful.

### **“Its good to have frends” in Plato’s cave – Pity and Ignorance**

Charlie's metamorphosis invites a discussion about his voicing. Howard Sklar challenges Keyes's decision and capacity to give an intellectually disabled character a voice. The critic terms it an “ethical intrusion” on the basis that Charlie is an attempt to ventriloquize an impaired person.<sup>189</sup> Sklar points to the infantile language and naïve perspective in the sections preceding Charlie's operation to accuse Keyes of using facile techniques to illicit feelings of sympathy and pity for his character. The critic connects these techniques with a “stereotypical representation” of intellectually disabled people and claims it undermines the “individuality” of Charlie's voice, making him a prosthetic character.<sup>190</sup> Charlie takes no umbrage when a supposed friend laughs at him for making mistakes, but rather says: “We have some good times but I cant wait to be smart like my best frends. [sic]”<sup>191</sup> The dissonance between what Charlie perceives as good-natured banter, and what the reader rightly understands as derision evokes pity for the character and his disability. Not only does the novel encourage the reader to pity the disabled Charlie, but it demonstrates how he also pities himself.

Postoperative Charlie thinks Warren's disabled inmates are pitiful, and fears regressing to disability himself. When he visits Warren he is upset at seeing a man with an “empty” smile, because he reminds postoperative Charlie of his disabled self.<sup>192</sup> The evocative language serves to reinforce “the dominance of those of normalized ability.”<sup>193</sup>

Even while intelligent, Charlie expresses a need to conform. This hegemony exists in *Brave*

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<sup>189</sup> Howard Sklar, “The Many Voices of Charlie Gordon: On the Representation of Intellectual Disability in Daniel Keyes's *Flowers for Algernon*,” in *Disability in Science Fiction: Representations of Technology as Cure*, ed. Kathryn Allan (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013; reprint, Softcover), 50.

<sup>190</sup> Sklar, “Many Voices of Charlie,” 57. Sklar cites Mitchell and Snyder's definition of “narrative prosthesis.”

<sup>191</sup> Keyes, *Flowers*, 22.

<sup>192</sup> Keyes, *Flowers*, 155.

<sup>193</sup> Sklar, “Many Voices of Charlie,” 56-7.

*New World* as well, where the Alphas, Epsilons and the rest who conform to and propagate the system dominate even the World Controllers. However, Charlie specifically supersedes “those of normalized ability,” and remains a pitiful character because he struggles to socialise. Charlie rejects being essentialised, but simultaneously rejects (dis)ability. There is a tension between what the novel *says* is the value of intelligence and what it *presents* as valuable to Charlie.

*Flowers for Algernon* demonstrates the hegemony of “normal” ability through Charlie’s parents and his negligible ability to pass as normatively abled. Like Bernard, he experiences pressure to conform, both when exhibiting disability and hyper-ability. In a flashback of a passionate exchange with Matt, Charlie’s father, Rose, his mother, expresses her desire for her disabled son to pass as a person of normative ability:

“He’s just slow, that’s all. But he can learn like everyone else.”

“You’re fooling yourself, Rose. It’s not fair to us or to him. Pretending he’s normal. Driving him as if he were an animal that could learn to do tricks. Why don’t you leave him alone?”

“Because I want him to be like everyone else.”<sup>194</sup>

The novel shows how (dis)ability stigma impacts characters connected to the disabled protagonist. *Flowers for Algernon* pits two pervasive attitudes towards disabled people against each other. Matt embodies what Sklar defines as an “attitude of pity” towards the disabled, reminiscent of Plato’s encouragement to pity the ignorant.<sup>195</sup> Matt accepts his son’s disability, but simultaneously discredits and infantilizes him in a defeatist manner. He attests that a child such as Charlie is “a cross, and you bear it, and love it.” Meanwhile, Rose’s thinking is eclipsed by the shame of having a disabled son, to her “making Charlie normal is more important than anything else.”<sup>196</sup> Charlie’s experience is of lesser concern than the general fact that he is disabled. His personal tragedy is his awareness, “even in [his] dullness,”

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<sup>194</sup> Keyes, *Flowers*, 52.

<sup>195</sup> Sklar, “Many Voices of Charlie,” 56.

<sup>196</sup> Keyes, *Flowers*, 100.

that he is unable to pass as a person of regular intelligence and normal ability.<sup>197</sup> The stigma against (dis)ability could be rooted in Keyes's own.

Keyes attributes his own thoughts to his characters without any consideration of how Charlie's different life and upbringing might make his perspective different. In his memoir *Algernon, Charlie and I*, Keyes explains how he felt the need to visit a state facility for "what is now referred to as the *developmentally challenged*" as he had never visited one.<sup>198</sup> The author makes an effort to be inclusive of disabled people, because he addresses them in the correct vernacular of the time. Nevertheless, this is undercut when he declares that Charlie's tour of Warren "is a record of my own emotions during that visit. The people Charlie meets, the sights Charlie sees, are what I discovered that day. [...] I gave him my emotional responses."<sup>199</sup> Keyes associates cognitive impairment with fear in his biography because he is reminded of Charlie's line: "I remember I did something but I don't remember what," whenever he has a "momentary but frightening" lapse in memory.<sup>200</sup> Once again, Keyes employs the image of disability as uselessness, but it cannot be translated directly to *Flowers for Algernon*.

Keyes's novel struggles to clarify how it appraises intelligence. As mentioned in the previous chapter, it essentialises Charlie's use value to his intellect and ability to contribute to science. Likewise, his exceptional (dis)ability and journals give him fulfilment and should ease his experience of returning to Plato's cave. Charlie can apparently come to terms with his return to disability as long as he knows that his life was not "unexamined." During his psychedelic therapy session, at the cusp of his intellectual growth, he perceives that he is approaching a point of Knowledge. However, instead of reaching the apex of his abilities, he feels that a part of him is holding him back. Charlie hallucinates and prophesies that he will

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<sup>197</sup> Keyes, *Flowers*, 139.

<sup>198</sup> Keyes, *Algernon, Charlie and I*, 121. (Emphasis in original.)

<sup>199</sup> Keyes, *Algernon, Charlie and I*, 121.

<sup>200</sup> Keyes, *Algernon, Charlie and I*, 1.

arrive in “the darkest of caves” and while there is some light that promises “the answer,” he fears the darkness that symbolises a lack of intelligence. He is afraid “not of life, or death, or nothingness, but of wasting [his life] as if I had never been.”<sup>201</sup> The darkness of the cave therefore symbolises ignorance and an inability of self-examination. The novel’s imagery invites a parallel to Plato’s cave allegory and its equation of reason and value by directly referencing the philosopher.<sup>202</sup> The use of Platonic imagery to describe Charlie’s (dis)ability exposes a negative conceptualization of disability. Charlie sees himself as having value while hyper-abled and worthless while disabled.

There are further instances of dissonance in the intelligence evaluation throughout Keyes’s novel. Postoperative Charlie holds that he “was a person before the operation” too and stands up for an intellectually disabled dishwasher by chiding the rest of the restaurant: “He can’t help what he is ... but for God’s sake, have some respect. *He’s a human being.*”<sup>203</sup> The novel appeals to human life’s inherent value, whether one is disabled or not, which does not coincide with Platonic thought. Nevertheless, the novel’s cave imagery discredits attributes in a process similar to stigmatization. Again, Kiefer claims that Plato conceptualises disability as “deficiency” compared to the “fully rational, healthy or ideally human.”<sup>204</sup> *Flowers for Algernon* challenges this concept by pointing to deficiencies in Charlie’s life beyond his (dis)ability. Once he plateaus on a level of ability close to Alice’s, Charlie deviates from his previous single-minded ambition to increase his intelligence. He suddenly feels an urge to know if he can be “like other men” and have a “woman to share a life with,” because “intelligence and knowledge” are not sufficient.<sup>205</sup> Charlie’s inability to understand or sympathise with those of normal ability makes him isolated and lonely. His hyper-ability is

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<sup>201</sup> Keyes, *Flowers*, 198.

<sup>202</sup> Plato “Republic” Steph. 517 “... the men of the cave would say of him that up he went and down he came without his eyes...” quoted in Keyes, *Flowers*, 199.

<sup>203</sup> Keyes, *Flowers*, 138.

<sup>204</sup> Kiefer, “Philosophical Creation of Disability,” 2.

<sup>205</sup> Keyes, *Flowers*, 90.

neither idyllic nor flawless. Although he dislikes how his workmates mistreated him, he misses them. It is a cruel irony that his motivation to become smart was to have more friends and respect, yet he finds the obverse to be true: “when I was retarded I had lots of friends, now I have no one.”<sup>206</sup> The friction between his happiness as disabled and his loneliness as a genius approaching Knowledge exacerbates the dichotomy of his disabled persona and his postoperative self. In the process of becoming a genius, Charlie left an important part of himself in the cave.

The novel demonizes Charlie’s disability by turning it into a discrete character that aims to consume the intelligent foil. Keyes maintains that his protagonist has a continuous personality despite his ability qua mobility, even though postoperative Charlie disassociates from his previous self. I vehemently disagree with Keyes’s claim – that Charlies’ “basic personality doesn’t change with a change of intelligence” – because other characters observe not only that he has changed, but that he dissociates from his old self.<sup>207</sup> Professor Nemur accuses Charlie of transitioning from “likeable” to “arrogant,” and Strauss, his therapist, perceives a “peculiar dissociation” where Charlie sees his disabled self as “a separate and distinct individual still functioning in his consciousness.”<sup>208</sup> The dissociation occurs frequently throughout the narrative, which substantiates his therapist’s observation. After the operation, when memories from his disabled life are triggered, Charlie experiences the first instance of his dissociation. “It’s me, yet it’s like someone else lying there – another Charlie.”<sup>209</sup> He remembers the disabled Charlie as the victim of bullying and comments on an externalised self instead of himself. When he gets fired because his ability qua mobility causes ableist anxiety in his co-workers, he visualises the episode as “both of [him], the old

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<sup>206</sup> Keyes, *Flowers*, 174.

<sup>207</sup> Keyes, *Algernon, Charlie and I*, 155.

<sup>208</sup> Keyes, *Flowers*, 172-73.

<sup>209</sup> Keyes, *Flowers*, 42.

Charlie and the new,” waiting for his boss’s final decree.<sup>210</sup> He experiences the disassociated character of his disabled self as running parallel to his current self, yet it is a distinctly separate entity. When Charlie attempts to reconcile with his estranged father, he hesitates and says, “I wasn’t his son. That was *another* Charlie. Intelligence and knowledge had *changed* me, and he would resent me – as the others from the bakery resented me – because my growth diminished him.”<sup>211</sup> The confusion between the two personalities is also evident in a difficulty to distinguish personal pronouns. When Alice attempts to calm an agitated Charlie after his encounter with his father, he introduces the episode with the following words: “I went to see his – my – father.”<sup>212</sup> Postoperative Charlie struggles with the fact that he was previously disabled and ultimately rejects the “flawed” version of himself. Despite Keyes’s claim that Charlie “is still Charlie,” the intelligent character confronts his disabled self in a mirror and addresses *his mirror image* as “Charlie.”<sup>213</sup> The following discussion shows how the novel fuses this split personality with Platonic imagery to personify disability and turn it into the novel’s antagonist.

The novel foreshadows its protagonist’s return to Plato’s cave through episodes where postoperative Charlie is intoxicated and loses control to the intellectually impaired foil. Cline claims that there is “no integration” between Charlie’s two personalities, and that the disabled personality “haunts” the genius as an “inescapable destiny.”<sup>214</sup> Postoperative Charlie ruminates on his other self: “The operation had covered him over with a veneer of education and culture, but emotionally he was there – watching and waiting. [...] In spite of the operation, Charlie was still with me.”<sup>215</sup> Incidentally, such an externalisation of disability has been observed in disability studies as well. Darling claims that disability is viewed as a

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<sup>210</sup> Keyes, *Flowers*, 72.

<sup>211</sup> Keyes, *Flowers*, 131. (Emphasis added.)

<sup>212</sup> Keyes, *Flowers*, 140.

<sup>213</sup> Keyes, *Algernon, Charlie and I*, 155. ; Keyes, *Flowers*, 175.

<sup>214</sup> Cline, “Pity to Horror in Flowers for Algernon,” 7.

<sup>215</sup> Keyes, *Flowers*, 136-37.



foreign element in the body, although Charlie's situation is reversed since he has gained and not lost ability.

Lindgren (2004, 155) suggests that biomedical and popular images view illness or disability as alien to the body, making it likely that "we will imagine [it] as an other within the self." As a result, she argues, a disability acquired in adulthood can threaten "an established sense of self." She uses autobiographical accounts to show how a newly acquired disability "estranges the person with disabilities from his social world."<sup>216</sup>

In comparison, Charlie externalises his disabled self and anthropomorphises his disability as an "other" which threatens his new self. However, he is estranged by his hyper-ability, *not* his disability. Despite his lacking social skill, postoperative Charlie describes himself as a man "born blind" who can finally "see the light"; he thus envisions the technology of his experiment both as a cure for his intellectual disability and his way out of Plato's cave.<sup>217</sup> Keyes draws a parallel between *Flowers for Algernon* evocation of pity through Charlie's (dis)ability and the escaped prisoner's pity for those that remain in the cave, but in the following analysis I argue that this is not possible.

Keyes's use of Platonic imagery creates a dissonance with its representation of Charlie's (dis)ability and sets up a conflict between his two identities. The cave allegory depicts the difficulty of gaining Knowledge and the further difficulty of imparting it to those who still reside in the cave. A return to Plato's cave does not mean – as suggested by Keyes's novel – a loss of Knowledge or a return to ignorance, nor does it mean a recovery of lost social skills. Towards the end of the novel, after Charlie has regressed to his initial level of intellectual ability and his job at the bakery, he regains his old friends. Thus re-disabled, Charlie can again declare that "its good to have frens," after Gimpy takes his side against a bully.<sup>218</sup> Nevertheless, given the reader's knowledge of how his friends treated him previously, it is a hollow statement which strengthens the pitiful depiction of Charlie's

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<sup>216</sup> Darling, *Disability and Identity*, 130.

<sup>217</sup> Keyes, *Flowers*, 75.

<sup>218</sup> Keyes, *Flowers*, 215.

disability experience. The disabled Charlie's single advantage was in his social skills and ability to adjust to his surroundings. However, since the reader knows those skills are based on "humility and self-effacement," his supplantation of the intelligent foil casts a pall over the character's return to disability, making it a tragedy.<sup>219</sup> The regressed Charlie has nothing. Postoperative Charlie describes his disabled self as a looming presence of ignorance: "the other Charlie who walked in the darkness is still here with us. Inside me."<sup>220</sup> He fears the old disabled Charlie, who waits for him in the darkness of Plato's cave, and refuses to acquiesce. His use of Platonic imagery suggests the horrible eventuality that the disabled Charlie will consume the intelligent foil.

Although he has achieved high intelligence, contributed to mankind through science and established himself as exceptional, postoperative Charlie guards his existence jealously. His antagonistic relationship with his previous self comes to a head in a confrontation through a bathroom mirror. The novel pits the two personalities against each other and while the intelligent foil provides the dialogue, the disabled Charlie expresses himself through poignant looks or body language. Keyes thereby privileges the more intelligent self with linguistic proficiency, alienating the disabled version of his protagonist that speaks with his body. Postoperative Charlie monologues at his reflection and ponders the value of the disabled Charlie's unexamined life experience:

You want me out of here so you can come back and take over where you left off. I don't blame you. It's your body and your brain – and your life, *even though you weren't able to make much use of it*. I don't have the right to take it away from you. Nobody does. Who's to say that *my light* is better than *your darkness*? Who's to say death is better than your darkness? Who am I to say? . . .  
But I'll tell you something else, Charlie. [...] I'm not your friend. I'm your enemy. I'm not going to give up my intelligence without a struggle. *I can't go back down into that cave.*<sup>221</sup>

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<sup>219</sup> Keyes, *Flowers*, 173.

<sup>220</sup> Keyes, *Flowers*, 173.

<sup>221</sup> Keyes, *Flowers*, 175. (Emphasis added.)

He maintains that his previous persona had no use value and sees his Knowledge as a “light,” compared to disabled Charlie’s “dark” ignorance, meanwhile declaring animosity to the anthropomorphic avatar of his disability. The final statement does not only mean a refusal to return to his previous level of intelligence because he sees it as less valuable, the genius Charlie is not *able* to return to the cave. According to Cline, Charlie’s return to disability symbolises the death of his genius personality since, claims the critic, disability “causes the book’s clear protagonist, the intelligent Charlie, to no longer exist.”<sup>222</sup> Cline bases this interpretation on the gradual erasure of characteristics that the reader associates exclusively with postoperative Charlie and how this iteration of the character associates “mental disability with sub-human souls and death.”<sup>223</sup> The hyperintelligent version realises that Charlie is destined for Warren, which he has already connected with pitiful uselessness, Plato’s dark cave, and death. At the end of the confrontation between the two personalities, postoperative Charlie seems to plead with his disabled self. He implores: “There’s no place for *me* to go now, Charlie.”<sup>224</sup> If a high intellect is what gave Charlie purpose, his statement that “intelligence alone doesn’t mean a damned thing” is pointless, since the narrative suggests the opposite.<sup>225</sup>

Intelligence is crucial to how *Flowers for Algernon* and *Brave New World* depict the clash between Platonic ideals of Knowledge and false knowledge and that is why their use of Platonic imagery is problematic. The disabled Charlie and the citizens of the World State share a false happiness because their contentment is based on ignorance. They lack the virtue of Knowledge regarding their situation and instead accept the shadows in Plato’s cave as truth. According to Stainton, Plato postulated two kinds of ignorance; the “*pure and simple*” that Stainton connects with that of “the deformed soul,” which is less “venal” than the

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<sup>222</sup> Cline, “Pity to Horror in *Flowers for Algernon*,” 4.

<sup>223</sup> Cline, “Pity to Horror in *Flowers for Algernon*,” 10.

<sup>224</sup> Keyes, *Flowers*, 175. (Emphasis in original.)

<sup>225</sup> Keyes, *Flowers*, 173.

ignorance associated with the “*conceit of [one’s] own wisdom.*”<sup>226</sup> In both cases, he equates ignorance with a false knowledge, not a lack of intelligence. I compare the former type of ignorance to the disabled Charlie and Huxley’s Epsilons, whilst Bernard, Helmholtz and Charlie-the-genius invite a comparison to the conceited ignorance. This conceit is comparable to Plato’s prisoner who has seen the things that cast shadows on the wall but has yet to connect the vision to the sun. An argument exists in favour of designating Bernard and Helmholtz as disabled or deformed souls, due to the World State’s ectogenesis and conditioning, but since Huxley’s novel specifies that they have been minimally tampered with as embryos, I overlook that eventuality. The two Alphas question their worldview and challenge the accepted norms of their society, but they have not yet realised that even the authority of the World Controllers is eclipsed by the power of the system they work for. They are intelligent but remain ignorant because they have yet to realise the limited scope of their knowledge.

Comparably, postoperative Charlie is ignorant and conceited because of his intellectual arrogance. His knowledge is limited to the natural sciences, mathematics and languages, but when he approaches the Platonic concept of Knowledge, Keyes’s novel specifies that he does not entirely reach it. In his hallucinatory therapy session, postoperative Charlie nears the light of a new plateau of intelligence and understanding, but the old disabled Charlie prevents him from piercing “the upper curtain of the mind.”<sup>227</sup> Even after he has been “cured” of his disability, he blames the disabled Charlie for his shortcomings. Besides, unlike Plato’s guardian who ascends from the cave only to later descend and spread his newfound Knowledge, Charlie is not interested in sharing his knowledge. To be sure, he expresses a desire to use his knowledge to increase “human intelligence” and help others like himself, but

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<sup>226</sup> Stainton, “Reason and Value: Plato’s Construction of Intellectual Disability,” 455. These concepts were primarily outlined in Plato’s *Laws*, but are also present in *Republic*. (Emphasis in original.)

<sup>227</sup> Keyes, *Flowers*, 197.

he obsesses over increasing ability, not distributing the knowledge he has gained.<sup>228</sup> Instead, Charlie has a need to be perceived as smart, and uses the knowledge he possesses to discredit Professor Nemur's research.<sup>229</sup> He does see his previous disability as a unique vantage point, but does not attribute any knowledge or insight to the disabled version of himself. Intelligence equates knowledge and enlightenment in *Flowers for Algernon* and Charlie's disability is a lack of both. Disability is thus experienced as a lack in Keyes's novel. In contrast, *Brave New World* does not conflate intellect or intellectual ability with the virtue of true Knowledge.

Granted, the World State citizens with low intelligence are shown to also be ignorant, but they are not vilified for it. Stainton posits a "citizen's ignorance" in Plato's works, which suggests virtue can be developed by means of habituation, "regardless of cognitive ability."<sup>230</sup> Simply put, even those who lack intellectual faculties may become good citizens to the state, as exemplified by Huxley's novel. No citizen of the World State is a good citizen due to any effort on their own part; they are rather the result of government-sanctioned conditioning. Ignorance and intellect do not therefore correspond in *Brave New World*, since everyone is ignorant. Even intelligent characters such as Bernard and Helmholtz are conceited of the knowledge and individuality they have gained, despite their unawareness of the system that governs their world. However, the burgeoning desire to unravel the hidden truths of their society indicates that they are in the process of gaining Knowledge. Stainton complicates the concept of citizen's ignorance because "habit virtues are an inferior type of virtue, appropriate to the citizen subjects of the *Republic*, but they are not equivalent to complete virtue, which requires wisdom or knowledge."<sup>231</sup> Bernard and Helmholtz disbelieve the conditioned virtues of the World State and crave Knowledge because they have been isolated by their deviant abilities. Since they cannot submit to the hegemony of normalized ability, they initialize a

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<sup>228</sup> Keyes, *Flowers*, 139, 67.

<sup>229</sup> Keyes, *Flowers*, 148, 78.

<sup>230</sup> Stainton, "Reason and Value: Plato's Construction of Intellectual Disability," 455. (Emphasis in original.)

<sup>231</sup> Stainton, "Reason and Value: Plato's Construction of Intellectual Disability," 455.

process of Knowledge acquisition, like Plato's prisoner who leaves the cave. They do not obtain Knowledge, but in its pursuit they gain knowledge. It is not their high intelligence, but their maladjustment to society, their disability, which is the source of their newfound knowledge. In Huxley's novel, disability is a source of knowledge, although intelligence is its antecedent.

Although decidedly not content in his ignorance, John the Savage is equally disabled in the World State. He is intelligent, but his lack of conditioning and refusal of the state's false knowledge make him unsuited to life in the World State. Unlike Bernard's and Helmholtz's, his disability is his social insufficiency. Pain is seen as a "delusion" in *Brave New World* and John's fetishization of it makes him unable to accept the comfortable false happiness the state provides.<sup>232</sup> Discomfort is "cured" by drugs, and his refusal to get drugged is considered a disability by the people of the World State. Explicitly, the banal status quo of normality in that society is unendurable while sober, even for the severely disabled lower castes, therefore reason and sobriety are disabling attributes. John professes high culture, Shakespeare, the "sublime" and reason as defining factor of humanness, but this has no value in the novel's "civilized countries."<sup>233</sup> He was an outcast in the luddite Indian reservation and is an outcast in civilization because of his knowledge of Shakespeare. His Knowledge is incompatible with the world he lives in, which again mirrors Plato's prisoner, though in John's case the entire World State is Plato's cave. His reason disables him. Huxley's novel refuses to outright agree or disagree with Plato's views. Rather, it presents two doctrines as equal and omits a moral judgement of the Platonic construction of intellectual (dis)ability. In doing so, *Brave New World* rejects a portrayal of enlightenment or a character with Knowledge to leave the answer up to the reader's divination.

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<sup>232</sup> Huxley, *Brave New World*, 221.

<sup>233</sup> Huxley, *Brave New World*, 179, 210.

Intelligent characters in the novels are predisposed to gain knowledge from disability, which raises the question of how disability is experienced by those too intellectually impaired to gain knowledge. How do the novels represent Plato's ignorant citizens? The disabled Charlie's happiness is seen as false by his hyperintelligent self, but the latter version is not happy either. Moreover, postoperative Charlie fears Warren, which symbolises intellectual death and therefore a cessation of his existence. The director at Warren describes the disabled inmates as "shut out from every human experience," which is a horrible prospect for anyone, but especially for the ambitious Charlie.<sup>234</sup> John the Savage considers the vacuous contentment of the Epsilons and Deltas to be the same, but how do the "human maggots" of Huxley's fable experience their disability?<sup>235</sup> *Flowers for Algernon* privileges Charlie as narrator while *Brave New World* grants dialogue primarily to the higher castes. Having already addressed Sklar's critique of Keyes for ventriloquizing the disabled Charlie and capitalising on his pitiful experience of disability, I analyse a section where Huxley gives voice to an Epsilon worker for comparison.

### **Lower Caste Dialogue**

The representation of disabled characters can be gauged based on their rendition in the narrative. In "Discourse in the Novel," Mikhail Bakhtin claims that "the prose writer makes use of words that are already populated with the social intentions of others and compels them to serve his own new intentions, to serve a second master."<sup>236</sup> Simply put, Bakhtin says that writers employ distinct language in an attempt to provoke a certain response in their readers. Disabled characters are thus not only evaluated by how much they are permitted to speak, but

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<sup>234</sup> Keyes, *Flowers*, 160.

<sup>235</sup> Huxley, *Brave New World*, 195.

<sup>236</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel," in *Literary Theory: An Anthology*, ed. Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan (West Sussex, UK: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd., 2017), 209.

also how their dialogue is phrased and in what language the author frames their dialogue. The dialogue and surrounding description are essential to a reading of characters with intellectual disabilities, as in most cases the author borrows the voice of someone who is physically incapable of expressing their own experience. For example, Charlie's orthography is faulty in his early and latter progress reports, thus inspiring pity in the reader. If Huxley's construction of (dis)ability is merely a narrative device to distinguish the upper and lower castes, then it should stand to reason that the Gammas, Deltas and Epsilons are completely voiceless. Yet it is not so.

The plot of Huxley's novel mainly follows a selection of Alphas; notably Bernard Marx, Mustapha Mond, and Helmholtz Watson. These characters carry most of the dialogues in the novel, which is the obverse of Mustapha Mond's assertion that the utopian society consists of one-ninth of supervisors and Alphas, and eight-ninths of labourers. The Gammas, Deltas and Epsilons are not meant to be heard, but only to exist as materialist devices and foundations of the World State. This narrative deployment of the lower castes is what gives them use value as per the first chapter of the thesis. As a narrative device, they would be prosthetic "crutch" characters according to Mitchell and Snyder's definition of the term, with no character agency as their disability essentialises them.<sup>237</sup> This is not the case in *Brave New World*. As Bernard Marx emerges onto a rooftop, Huxley privileges an Epsilon with dialogue and a description of an inner world:

'Roof!' called a creaking voice.

*The liftman* was a small simian creature, dressed in the black tunic of an Epsilon-Minus Semi-Moron.

'Roof!'

He flung open the gates. The warm glory of afternoon sunlight made him start and blink his eyes. 'Oh roof!' he repeated in a voice of rapture. He was as though suddenly and joyfully awakened from a dark annihilating stupor. 'Roof!' He smiled up with a kind of doggily expectant adoration into the faces of his passengers. Talking and laughing together, they stepped out into the light. *The liftman* looked after them.

'Roof?' he said once more, questioningly.

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<sup>237</sup> Mitchell and Snyder, "Narrative Prosthesis," 276.



Then a bell rang, and from the ceiling of the lift a loud-speaker began, very softly and yet very imperiously, to issue its commands.  
'Go down,' it said, 'go down. Floor Eighteen. Go down, go down. Floor Eighteen. Go down, go...'  
*The liftman* slammed the gates, touched a button and instantly dropped back into the droning twilight of the well, the twilight of his own habitual stupor.<sup>238</sup>

Huxley employs imagery from Plato's cave to illustrate the Epsilon's experience of his workday. What is immediately noticeable in this section, is that in spite of having characterised the Epsilon character as "small," "simian," and a "semi-moron," Huxley consistently refers to him by his occupation. While one might conclude that this merely constricts the Epsilon to the role of a "cog in the machine," it also validates the character in general, especially in a strictly utilitarian society such as the World State. If we consider the social model of disability, it could appear that Huxley has envisioned a society in which jobs such as these have been accommodated to fit the limited abilities of an Epsilon. Since the character is technologically redundant, and Mustapha Mond asserts that many labour-saving devices have been invented that would take the Liftman's job, one might wonder what Huxley wants to achieve by privileging this Epsilon with dialogue

The Epsilon's inner world is briefly illuminated and enroots the character as a human being. Instead of the barren wasteland of a "stunted" mind, the reader is informed that the Liftman is capable of "rapture," "expectant adoration" and being "joyfully awakened." Yet after seeing the sun, he returns to the "twilight of this habitual stupor." Despite labelling Epsilons (almost) "sub-human" and placing them on the bottom rung of the societal ladder, Huxley grants his character human sensations. The juxtaposition of the infantile dialogue and these voluble descriptors complicates the novel's representation of disability. Huxley's dystopia is based on use-value, which would justify the exploitation of the Gammas, Deltas and Epsilons, but their experience of disability is more favourably rendered than the

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<sup>238</sup> Huxley, *Brave New World*, 50-51. (Emphasis added.)

experience of the disabled in *Flowers for Algernon's* Warren State School. In Huxley's novel, the experience of low-functioning intellectual disability has the potential for happiness. Huxley differs from Plato and Keyes by depicting unexamined lives as also worth living.

Plato's *Republic* praises reason and use value as measurements of great people, but by that logic there must also exist less significant people. Kiefer claims that Plato's "argumentation in favour of euthanasia in the ideal city is predicated upon the idea that some types of human life are not worth living."<sup>239</sup> *Brave New World* presents a society where every life was commissioned by the government and manufactured to a predestined position in the system. When they expend their use value they are also genetically predisposed to rapidly age, which can be termed a passive euthanasia, but nobody is worthless. Every individual is important, except for embryos that are too damaged by Bokanovsky's process – the forced division and degradation of embryonic cells – to serve a function in society, they are not allowed to gestate. While morally questionable, there is a difference between euthanasia and the prevention of life that separates Huxley's novel from Plato's views. No matter if imperfect like Bernard, every life that is allowed to gestate has worth and is provided with the means to a comfortable existence by the state. Even though the Epsilon Liftman was adapted to his job and not the other way around, a reversal of the social model of disability, the novel suggests that he has a purpose and a capacity for happiness. The Liftman's experience of disability is not pitiful, because his intellectual and physical impairments do not disable him from fulfilling his role in society.

Charlie pities his disabled personality and his genius isolation alike, but values his existence as hyperintelligent because his intelligence enables him to examine his life and make his mark on the world. He entangles his identity by essentialising his disability and inferiority complex. There is no level of (dis)ability where he feels at home; while ability qua

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<sup>239</sup> Kiefer, "Philosophical Creation of Disability," 7.

mobility is a source of knowledge for Bernard and Helmholtz, it only causes Charlie misery. He is unable to coalesce his disability and hyper-ability. After he becomes a genius, he asks “Who and what Am I now? Am I the sum of my life or only of the past months?”<sup>240</sup> Keyes attempts to encourage the reader to consider Charlie the sum of his life, but since *Flowers for Algernon*, unlike *Brave New World* conceptualises disability as a lack and not a source of knowledge, then Charlie can hardly consider his thirty years “in the dark” as anything but a waste of time.<sup>241</sup>

### **Chapter Conclusion**

It is important to highlight the discrepancies in the (dis)ability experiences depicted in the two novels because they have been widely discussed in (dis)ability studies. Cascais claims that “An alternative approach to disability must deconstruct the very notion of an essential disability by exposing its construction through the incorporation of biomedical knowledge into the individual's identity.”<sup>242</sup> Charlie does the exact opposite and essentialises his disability despite his wealth of biomedical knowledge. Unfortunately, his urge to “cure” his intellectual impairment and others with similar intellectual impediments aligns with the medical model of disability. Cascais observes that the model “supposes that the relation between biomedical technology and disability is essentially one of prosthetic correction of an intrinsic deficit or personal flaw.”<sup>243</sup> I hold that Charlie is a prosthetic character due the way he denigrates his disabled self. Meanwhile, Huxley’s novel predates the social model of disability by fifty years, yet his representation of both high- and low-functioning people with intellectual (dis)abilities bears a striking resemblance.

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<sup>240</sup> Keyes, *Flowers*, 107.

<sup>241</sup> Keyes, *Flowers*, 120.

<sup>242</sup> Cascais, “Metamorphic Body in Science Fiction,” 62.

<sup>243</sup> Cascais, “Metamorphic Body in Science Fiction,” 62.

The analysis of Platonic imagery and (dis)ability experiences in Keyes and Huxley's novels reveals a dissonance in the way the two authors have adopted the philosopher's views on (dis)ability and human value. Keyes relies on the cave allegory to illustrate Charlie's ability qua mobility; the allegory makes sense while the character's intelligence increases and he approaches enlightenment, but Charlie's "tragic fall" does not agree with the imagery of the cave.<sup>244</sup> Plato saw the journey out of the cave as an "ascent of the soul into the intellectual world," but when his guardians return under the proverbial ground they must "get the habit of seeing in the dark" because then they would see clearer.<sup>245</sup> It is harmful disability representation to connect the darkness of Plato's cave and a disability such as Charlie's. *Flowers for Algernon* has the hyperintelligent Charlie fear his character-death at the hands of his disability's avatar in the darkness of Plato's cave, which is doubly ironic because the cave signifies ignorance, not unintelligence.

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<sup>244</sup> Keyes, *Algernon, Charlie and I*, 156.

<sup>245</sup> Plato, "Republic," Steph. 517, 20.

## Conclusion

### Science Fiction and (Dis)ability Construction

It stands to reason that fiction, in intricate ways, engages in exploring the world as it is, while SF charts its future. When literature brings (dis)ability into its fold, what matters is less its theme than its politics of representation. While contemporary (dis)ability representation is far from the definite answer, the more obvious representational flaws in older SF provide valuable insight to the (dis)ability discourse. My analysis of *Brave New World* and *Flowers for Algernon* has revealed that callous utilitarianism can mean equal treatment of the differently abled, whilst humanist intentions are insufficient if the narrative categorically dismisses disability.

I have examined the construction of (dis)ability in the two novels to illuminate three key elements in their contribution to (dis)ability discourse – the contemporary attitudes of the authors, their interpretation of Platonic disability constructions, and their efforts to shepherd audiences towards a future more in line with their ideologies. Or, as is the case with Huxley, guide readers away from a dystopic future. I have chosen two older novels in the SF genre because they established the parameters for modern SF. Revisiting them with an updated (dis)ability perspective yields profound insight into how disability has been and may be constructed.

*Brave New World* stands the test of time, not because it accurately predicts the course of real-life events, but because it offers a morally relativistic depiction of disabled people and the society that engineers them. By criticising eugenics and dysgenics, conformism and individualism, stigma and disability-pride alike, Huxley's novel invites the continuous references to itself as the perennial "what if." Despite Woiak's eugenicist interpretation of the novel, the critic cedes that Huxley perhaps intended to create a "middle ground: a community

of contented imbeciles” hegemonized by “a relatively benign aristocracy of intellect.”<sup>246</sup> *Brave New World* maintains a position of relevance because it allows for comparisons both to a universally designed society, where its segregated citizens all have a role to play, and a dystopic world that prohibits the birth of “worthless” individuals. To this day, it is used in debates on the ethics of cloning or prenatal testing.<sup>247</sup> To assume that Huxley foresaw the development of the social model of disability is not constructive. Therefore, I have compared it with a newer novel that professes a more humanistic approach to disability than the utilitarian stylings of the World State.

While Keyes’s engagement with disability themes shows a sympathy for disabled people and a wish to humanise them, my analysis has revealed that his novel narratively discredits disability. Unlike Huxley, he makes his protagonist run the gamut from disabled to hyper-abled and back, which invites the reader to consider Charlie’s humanity regardless of his ability. However, in reading the two novels, I have argued that *Flowers for Algernon*’s construction of disability teeters towards the Platonic useful/useless binary; the representation of the inmates at Warren is paternalistic and makes them emblematic of the pejorative view of disabled people.

My analysis has revealed how the novel makes Warren’s inmates static and assigns them to the lowest rung in its (dis)ability hierarchy. Their existence is worthless and meaningless, only serving to exacerbate Charlie’s fear of further disability. Keyes’s motivation appears noble; he wants to oppose Aristotle’s dictum that “tragedy can happen only to the highborn, because there can be a tragic fall only from a great height” by taking “the lowest of the low, a mentally handicapped young man” to the “heights of genius” and then making him lose “it all.”<sup>248</sup> Keyes misfires because the “fall” is postoperative Charlie’s

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<sup>246</sup> Woiak, “Designing a Brave New World,” 119.

<sup>247</sup> Hubbard, “Abortion and Disability.”

<sup>248</sup> Keyes, *Algernon, Charlie and I*, 92.

return to his initial state, which characterises the disabled Charlie as his antagonist. Cline pioneers this reading of the novel by associating the “tragic fall” with “cognitive regression” and terming Charlie’s (dis)ability the “novel’s primary villain,” but I have built on his analysis and argued against his designation of Warren as a “welcoming place.”<sup>249</sup> While Cline focuses mainly on Charlie’s disability as horror and death, I have situated Charlie’s disability according to the imagery of Plato’s cave and on the spectrum of the novel’s (dis)ability hierarchy. As a result, I hope to have performed a more exhaustive analysis of (dis)ability in Keyes’s novel.

Scholars such as Cline and Sklar question the advantageousness of *Flowers for Algernon*’s (dis)ability construction. Like them, this thesis opposes the predominant reading of the novel as supportive of people with disabilities, but I have also shown that its rhetoric can be directly harmful to the disabled. The novel attempts to de-essentialise Charlie but fails because its use of Platonic imagery renders the return to disability as a loss of humanity. Keyes’s construction of (dis)ability and Charlie’s journey through its strata indicate a negative conceptualization of disability that capitalizes on the reader’s pity.

Of the two novels, neither truly voices the experiences of an intellectually disabled person, which is what modern disability-positive SF attempts to do. “Nothing about us without us,” is JoSelle Vanderhooft’s accessibility-motto in her preface to *Accessing the Future*, a challenge to able-bodied authors who deploy disabled characters as narrative prosthetics. The scholar berates the “ableism in SF,” due to the “overwhelming” number of disabled scientists and “pioneering SF authors and creators” with disabilities.<sup>250</sup> Her motto raises an interesting question, as Keyes and Huxley suffered from vision impairments and might today have identified as disabled. While Keyes was “very nearsighted” in his youth and

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<sup>249</sup> Cline, “Pity to Horror in *Flowers for Algernon*,” 2, 10.

<sup>250</sup> JoSelle Vanderhooft, “Preface,” in *Accessing the Future*, ed. Kathryn Allan and Djibril Al-Ayad (Futurefire.net Publishing, 2015), viii, vi.

Huxley had an eye-infection that left him sightless for several months and impaired for the rest of his life, neither likely considered himself as disabled, since spectacles were a commonplace accessibility aid.<sup>251</sup> Incidentally, my analysis has shown that the authors are keener to explore intellectual than physical impairments as identity in their novels.

The authors' focus on intellectual impairment may explain why disability-as-identity appears as theme in both novels. According to my reading, *Brave New World* is more egalitarian on this topic as well, because it creates a society where everyone identifies according to their (dis)ability. Meanwhile, *Flowers for Algernon* only identifies the "exceptional" on either side of the characters' (dis)ability divide. "Disability is located," claims Allan, "not at the site of the individual, but at the site of culture and society." The critic encourages authors to imagine "accessible" futures and warns against suggesting "any one disabled be changed to fit (or, even worse, be eliminated from) that future," but rather that "society adapt to that person and all people."<sup>252</sup> According to this stipulation, neither novel successfully imagines an accessible future, but of the two, Huxley's novel is closer.

This thesis has also shown how the two authors use the unrealistic freedoms of the SF genre to explore (dis)ability as trope and identity. Keyes has Charlie undergo an experiment to make him smarter, thereby postulating a world where the cure or elimination of the intellectually impaired is a viable solution to the "problem" of disability. Huxley's novel upends this paradigm by making everybody disabled; the World State functions as the "site" where disability is located. Furthermore, the dystopic image of "all people" adjusted to society as opposed to Allan's decree of an adaptive society provides, as Frank Dietz puts it, a "defamiliarizing perspective" that invites readers to "see their social reality as diseased or

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<sup>251</sup> Keyes, *Algernon, Charlie and I*, 3.

<sup>252</sup> Kathryn Allan and Djibril al-Ayad, "Introduction," in *Accessing the Future*, ed. Kathryn Allan and Djibril al-Ayad (Futurefire.net, 2015), 1.



pathological.”<sup>253</sup> Instead of an accessible utopia where society is adjusted to the needs of every citizen, Huxley creates a totalitarian and stagnant dystopia that disables its subjects, inviting the reader to consider potential similarities with their daily lives.

Although the World State as an embodiment of the social model of disability is an elucidative image, Huxley often essentialises his disabled characters. I have offered criticism of the authors’ excessive and exploitative use of disabled characters, or their conversion into narrative prostheses, to contrast the narratives’ strengths. By invoking (dis)ability as theme for their novels, the authors partake in the development of disability discourse. While disabled readers feel irked when they are excluded – or, what is worse, erased – by the author’s visions of the future, the inclusion of (dis)ability in a SF novel allows for a myriad of complicating (dis)ability representations. Before concluding my analysis, it is necessary to highlight its contributions to the (dis)ability conversation.

### **The (Dis)ability Conversation**

The discourse that surrounds (dis)ability and identity has changed since Huxley’s publication of his dystopic ability-apartheid. My thesis has joined an ongoing conversation with roots in Platonic constructions of (dis)ability and evaluations of human life. Contemporary disability scholars continue to contend with engrained stigma and outdated designations of human embodiments. Similarly, disabled people fight their societal designation as a minority, defined against normative ideals of bodies and minds.

This thesis has challenged the notion of “abled” and “disabled” as binary and exclusive categories by coining the terms “ability qua mobility” and “ability-mobile.” While Schalk’s parenthetical “(dis)ability” is useful for depicting a spectrum of ability and the

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<sup>253</sup> Frank Dietz, “The Image of Medicine in Utopian and Dystopian Fiction,” in *The Body and the Text: Comparative Essays in Literature and Medicine*, ed. Bruce Clarke and Wendell Aycock (Texas: Texas Tech University Press, 1990), 119.

“shifting, contentious and contextual boundaries” that separate ability from disability,<sup>254</sup> my term indicates a comprehensive crossing of these boundaries which combats essentialisation. I have indicated how the spectrum of (dis)ability may be *traversed* by showing how ability-mobile characters negotiate their identity according to the level of ability that they have or are perceived to have. The term prevents truisms, or lines of thinking that promulgate the Platonic useful/useless binary, and allows for the conceptualisation of (dis)ability as something that affects everyone.

If we refrain from restricting disability as a minority issue and accept that it affects everyone, even those who do not identify as disabled in any form or function, we allow for Tom Shakespeare’s insight that disability is a “universal experience of humanity.”<sup>255</sup> Indeed, to *feel* disabled is a universal experience, since people accumulate injuries and impairments with age. My analysis has shown that Keyes and Huxley both depict the feeling that society can be inaccessible for normatively abled people in their novels. The average Alpha and Beta feels inferior to the ten World Controllers, who control the system that engineers the citizens’ abilities to a point where they cannot access Knowledge about their society. Charlie feels inferior while disabled, but his hyper-ability – and particularly the contrast between the two disparate levels of ability he exemplifies – angers the normatively abled because they do not like “feeling inferior to the moron.”<sup>256</sup> Keyes touches on this notion of normative inferiority in his autobiography as well, where a doctor tells him that someone with “an I.Q of 120 might feel he’s disabled when compared to someone with [an] I.Q. of 160 to 170.”<sup>257</sup> The author uses Charlie’s experiment as premise to examine his “normal” characters’ feelings of disability. In fact, both authors employ technological tropes in their SF narratives to destabilize the concept of an essential (dis)ability. Their normative characters’ feeling of

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<sup>254</sup> Schalk, *Bodyminds*, 6.

<sup>255</sup> Shakespeare, “Social Model,” 273.

<sup>256</sup> Keyes, *Flowers*, 74.

<sup>257</sup> Keyes, *Algernon, Charlie and I*, 177.

disability resonates with the efforts of modern disability scholars to remove the burden of examination from the disabled.

*Brave New World* and *Flowers for Algernon* push back against the methodology in disability scholarship because of their genre. The analytical chapters of the thesis have shown that Huxley's "bottle-grown" characters resist Mitchell and Snyder's "Narrative Prosthesis" concept. While Huxley's novel invites comparison to Plato's *Republic* or eugenicist thought, Keyes's novel is under critique for ventriloquizing intellectual disability. No single theoretic framework encapsulates the novels' (dis)ability constructions. However, Huxley's brave new world has much in common with the social model of disability, which aligns with Cascais's explanation of SF's role in the ongoing disability conversation:

SF narratives on disability anticipate the social constructionist model of disability that denaturalizes and de-essentialises disability. They reveal that the impairments alleged to underlie disability are actually construed as essential and universal attributes of subjects.<sup>258</sup>

Although I have critiqued *Flowers for Algernon* for demonising Charlie's disability and implying that it ought to be *cured*, my analysis has also suggested that the novel portrays disability as not essential to a person's identity. Charlie Gordon and his ability qua mobility are useful devices for visualising the spectrum of disability, even if the novel suggests that the inmates at Warren are useless and worthless. Contrastingly, my thesis has shown how *Brave New World's* hierarchical society, which ensures that the state takes care of all its members, mirrors the modern welfare state. Huxley's novel suggests that everyone, regardless of their level of ability can contribute with something and is therefore valuable and important. It insists that "unexamined" lives *are* important. I agree with Peller's view that "the future world is founded" on the disability of the lower castes, which allow the Alphas to "enjoy and/or question their existence."<sup>259</sup> Going one step further, my thesis has also taken the liberty of

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<sup>258</sup> Cascais, "Metamorphic Body in Science Fiction," 72.

<sup>259</sup> Peller, "Laboring for Brave New World," 62.

“questioning the existence” of the lower castes. Instead of mindless hordes, I have argued that the Epsilons are humans trapped in the same system as the Alphas. They are disabled, but so is everyone, and Huxley’s novel depicts Epsilons, not Alphas, as indispensable.

### **Brave New Questions, Further Research and Thesis Conclusion**

With a starting point in Darling’s research on the relationship between identity and (dis)ability, this thesis has revised traditional readings of the two novels from a (dis)ability perspective. Whereas the castes in *Brave New World* have often been read as symbolic of the Marxist class struggle,<sup>260</sup> my revision has juxtaposed them to the social model of disability, which in turn uncovered an egalitarian, if dystopic, hierarchy based on (dis)ability. *Flowers for Algernon*’s protagonist resists the essentialisation of (dis)ability as he traverses its spectrum, but my analysis shows how the novel makes Charlie’s return to intellectual impairment a tragedy and thus turns him into a prosthetic character. This thesis has positioned the two novels in conjunction with Plato’s *The Republic* because the tension between its construction of (dis)ability and the novels’ revealed hitherto unexamined evaluative challenges in the narratives. The SF genre allows Huxley and Keyes creative freedom to explore potential views on (dis)ability’s place in our future, whether they propose to cure undesirable traits or incorporate it into the structure of an enduring World State. Regardless of the novels’ focus on society or the individual, (dis)ability is an integral part of their future worlds and demands our critical attention.

Although not yet recognised as participants in the (dis)ability discourse, the novels provide insight on the social constructions that engender (dis)ability. Presumably, (dis)ability in *Brave New World* has received so little academical attention because its aspects have so far been overshadowed by other social movements like Marxism or feminism. However, the

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<sup>260</sup> Adorno, “Aldous Huxley and Utopia.” ; Strachey, *Coming Struggle*. ; Bradshaw, “Huxley’s Slump.”

thesis stress on human value and worth has revealed proof that both novels should be equally considered (dis)ability literature. It is precisely the fact that (dis)ability is downplayed in Huxley's novel that makes it respond to Keyes's so uniquely. *Flowers for Algernon* foregrounds the disability of its characters, much like the modern disability-positive SF tends to do, but it misfires due to the unfortunate connotations of its main character's tragic arc. Contrarily, Huxley's novel incorporates (dis)ability into the core of its society and nominally achieves disability-positive SF's ideological mandate. This thesis has read the two novels in conjunction because Huxley's utilitarianism and Keyes's humanism each represents positive aspects of (dis)ability that the other lacks.

To expect modern standards of (dis)ability representation in the two novels might be asking too much since Huxley's was written nearly a century ago. After all, (dis)ability awareness has only gained ground in the recent decades. Darling reminds us that the social model and disability pride are even more recent and understands those who struggle with adopting them. "Stigma and the medical model" remain "normative" perceptions of disability, especially among "older individuals" who were socialised in adherence to them.<sup>261</sup> I stress that the beneficial (dis)ability representations in both novels are laudable. However, it is just as important to be aware of the metaphorical "road map" that brought (dis)ability awareness to today's level as it is to outline the path forwards.

My choice of *Accessing the Future* as a reference for modern (dis)ability representation has steered my reading of the two SF classics. For better or worse, Huxley and Keyes adopted (dis)ability for their SF. Therefore, the modern writers found in Allan and Al-Ayad's collection continue Huxley's and Keyes's work.<sup>262</sup> Since different periods have different conceptualisations of (dis)ability, a comparison of other SF classics with modern (dis)ability-positive SF might provide an interesting topic for future research. Such readings

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<sup>261</sup> Darling, *Disability and Identity*, 136.

<sup>262</sup> Allan and al-Ayad, "Accessing Future."

might show a development from the essentialising and surreptitious denigration of disabled people that this comparison has revealed.

My methodology has not accounted for intersectionality between (dis)ability and, for example, gender. My analysis may be deemed faulty for overlooking or simplifying the female characters' experiences of the novels' (dis)ability hierarchies, whether disabled or not. The first chapter has addressed female characters such as Linda and Alice, yet mostly stressed how their narrative functions affect the construction of (dis)ability hierarchies. This lack of consideration is unfortunate as, Darling claims, disabled women – like Huxley's Linda – experience unachievable cultural expectations to be physically attractive, sexual or perfect caregivers. Darling's research suggest that "disabled women tend to experience more discrimination and to have lower self-esteem than disabled men," which Linda's portrayal aligns with.<sup>263</sup> Since female (dis)ability is relatively marginal in the narratives, I have excluded the female characters' analysis from my discussion. With more time at my disposal, gender-specific stigmatization of Linda's visible signs of ageing, thus ageism, could have been interesting to explore. Hopefully, as the field of (dis)ability research in SF expands, gender-considerate analysis of the disabled women in both texts will proliferate.

Since the disability scholarship that this thesis relies on is diverse, my contribution could be critiqued for relying too heavily on Darling's work with disability and identity in the reading of different characters. Nonetheless, her research has helped outline many aspects that come into play in the analysis of the multifaceted experience of (dis)ability, including the conceptualisation of disability as diversity of body and mind. I have shown how the texts reverberate with Darling's refusal to see (dis)ability as limiting, and instead together form an image of expansive (dis)ability. Like Bernard and Helmholtz, we can see different levels of ability less as inhibiting factors and more as sources of knowledge.

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<sup>263</sup> Darling, *Disability and Identity*, 144.

The analysis of (dis)ability constructions in the two novels' societal structures and the carefully wrought experiences of their characters, leads me to conclude that *Brave New World* offers a relatively favourable presentation of (dis)ability. Despite its publication on the cusp of WW2, embroiled in eugenic discourse, the novel's construction of (dis)ability as a source of knowledge is more inclusive of disabled people than *Flowers for Algernon's* inadvertent deference to Platonic (dis)ability vilification. This is not to say that Huxley's brave new world is a bulwark of (dis)ability justice, but even the "brainless, emotionless state of *negative well-being*" which permeates the World State is more desirable than Warren's "living death."<sup>264</sup> However, merely holding one novel above the other is not sufficient to reach the final conclusion.

I have chosen a comparative approach because the distinct perspectives of the novels reveal themselves in dialogue with each other. Instead of only searching for the strongest (dis)ability depiction, my comparative reading pits utilitarianism against humanism and has thereby shown the following strengths and weaknesses of the narratives. The World State's cold analytical logic uncovers errors in Keyes's humanistic ethics because his novel evaluates people according to their ability while claiming that they have equal value to normatively abled people. There is no "problem" in removing the disabled in *Flowers for Algernon* because they are inconsequential to the narrative. Its society, like Plato's ideal state, has no need for disabled people and sees nothing positive in them. Yet, in Huxley's novel, the (dis)ability hierarchy is not only desirable, but indispensable to the creation of a stable state. Conversely, Charlie's ability qua mobility shows that *Brave New World's* stagnant society essentialises people's (dis)abilities and rejects any mobility in its (dis)ability hierarchy. The conversation between the two novels reveals a disability-positive element to utilitarianism and a flaw in humanistic rhetoric; it is not sufficient to argue for the humanity of disabled people

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<sup>264</sup> George Woodcock, "Utopias in Negative," *The Sewanee Review* 64, no. 1 (1956): 95, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27538509>.(Emphasis added. ; Keyes, *Flowers*, 161.

if society considers them expendable. They require instead our acceptance of difference and that we embrace them as useful and integral members to a future state. This thesis is therefore also a call for more SF works by disabled people, whose unique perspective is truly indispensable.

Whether authors imagine fantastical new technologies that imbue their characters with supernatural abilities or imagine remedies for societal and individual ills, they tend to write with the implicit notion that the all-encompassing “tomorrow” will provide solutions. Modern (dis)ability activism strives to conceptualise a future that makes room for different abilities and therefore discredits Plato, whose ideal city and euthanasia are “predicated upon the idea that some types of human life are not worth living.”<sup>265</sup> As technology continues to make the (dis)ability discourse accessible for people with both intellectual and physical impairments, we are sure to hear more from people previously thought voiceless, which will surely cement the fact that their lives also matter.

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<sup>265</sup> Kiefer, “Philosophical Creation of Disability,” 7.



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