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**Shelley L. Tremain (2017). *Foucault and Feminist Philosophy of Disability*. Ann Arbor:
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Shelley L. Tremain's *Foucault and Feminist Philosophy of Disability* (2017) builds on the author's over twenty years of professional labour and scholarly interventions within philosophy to provide a compelling and careful examination of a range of timely issues for researchers and students in disability studies. In the book, readers will find detailed engagements with the materiality of impairment, the marginalization and systemic exclusion of disabled philosophers within academia, as well as the implications of Michel Foucault's lectures at the Collège de France for the study of discourses of "abnormality," deviance, and disability critique. Although several years have now passed since the publication of *Foucault and Feminist Philosophy of Disability* (2017), Tremain's insights into the professional trajectories of philosophy and the field of biomedical ethics, as well as the theoretical depth and precision that comprise her Foucauldian approach to "the apparatus of disability" continue to warrant further engagement. Tremain's current readers can turn to her public philosophy projects such *BiopoliticalPhilosophy.com* and *Dialogues on Disability* to find the author's most recent insights on "The Biopolitics of COVID-19," the pandemic's impact on disabled students, as well as a host of other interviews and teaching resources developed by disabled philosophers and philosophers of disability. The issues and debates addressed in *Foucault and Feminist Philosophy of Disability* are likely to continue to inform and challenge researchers

and students working within and across various areas of disability studies, philosophy, and feminist theory in the present.¹

The book is organized around two interrelated “spheres of analysis,” each aiding in the development of, in Tremain’s words, “an analytically robust and empirically grounded feminist philosophy of disability” (p. 12). The first sphere of analysis - the reconstructive-conceptual sphere -, is the author’s articulation of an historicist and relativist approach to the problématique of disability. Drawing from archival materials and close readings of Foucault’s work, Tremain argues that the emergence of “problems” within philosophy, disability studies, feminist theory, and medical discourses regarding “practices, bodies, relations, and so on” related to disability and impairment, should be examined as the products of an historically and culturally specific “‘apparatus’ (*dispositif*) of relatively recent force relations” (p. 21). Positioning her work against rights-based and social models of disability, Tremain articulates a notion of disability as a “far-reaching and systemic matrix of power” (p. 22). Rather than relying on approaches that locate disability within individual bodies (as the medical model does) or within the disadvantages created through societal responses to forms of impairment (as some rights-based and social models do), Tremain’s account challenges the stability of impairment, in particular, and the concept’s use across differing accounts of disability. As an apparatus of force relations, Tremain shifts from an etiological account of disability that relies on a naturalized notion of impairment, which undergirds medical, rights-based, and social models of disability, on her reading. That is, she argues that medical models and variations of the social model of disability rely on a series of ontological commitments about the status of human morphology, bodily function, cognitive capacities, and so on, such that “impairment is a necessary condition for disability” (p. 92). From this perspective,

¹ See *BiopoliticalPhilosophy.com* <<https://biopoliticalphilosophy.com/>> and *Dialogues on Disability* <<https://biopoliticalphilosophy.com/dialogues-on-disability/>>.

Tremain locates her argument in relation to feminist debates in the Global North about the relationship between sex and gender. She notes that, just as feminist theory from the 1970s, emerging through accounts like that of Gayle Rubin (1975), rendered sex a “natural (i.e. prediscursive) property (attribute) of bodies and gender as its culturally specific configuration,” so too many models of disability have rendered impairment the natural, prediscursive structural facet of bodies that gives rise to societal conditions of disability (p. 111). This “binary thinking,” Tremain avers, functions alongside a host of other dichotomous pairings in Western intellectual thought such as “nature-culture; reason-emotion; mind-body; objectivity-subjectivity; form-content; public-private; male-female; masculine-feminine; subject-object; impartiality-partiality; and fact-value” (pp. 109-110).

Drawing from the work of theorists like Judith Butler and Foucault, Tremain seeks to denaturalize, and, in Foucauldian parlance, to “eventalize” the discourse of disability and the prediscursive account of impairment on which it relies. That is, she offers a genealogical analysis of the notion of impairment in an effort to wrest the concept from its proposed status as a materially-given and inevitable cause of disability in an effort to place its historical contingency and cultural specificity at the fore (p. 95). As such, Tremain delves into what she calls “the diagnostic style of reasoning” that has created a discursive relation to the apparent truth conditions of impairment and disability. She writes on the diagnostic style of reasoning, which she traces as emerging in the late 18th century:

A mechanism of biopower, the diagnostic style of reasoning introduced new modes of perceiving and understanding that have effectively brought the modern Western body and its materiality into being, that is, have brought the modern Western body into being as that type of thing. The clinical and administrative discourses that were introduced by the diagnostic style have

formulated, categorized, and delimited this body, in turn subjecting it to new laws, measurements, and causal relations that demarcated divisions between normal and abnormal, sick and healthy, sane and insane to ensure the stability of the body's state of health, promote its longevity, and improve its productive success. Hence the diagnostic style has created and caused to emerge new objects of knowledge and information with respect to this body--among which impairment, development, and materiality are only a few--as well as new sentences ("I have a disability") about the body's functions, its characteristics, forces, elements, and capacities, and new evidence such as "symptoms" with which to evaluate these candidates for truth and falsehood (p. 127).

This, then, shapes Tremain's reconstructive-conceptual sphere, as a mode through which researchers and students can reconsider the conditions whereby disability and its presumed causal precursor, impairment, have emerged as a series of cultural and historical force relations.

This first sphere of analysis, then, supports the second sphere of analysis that Tremain develops throughout the book--the metaphilosophical sphere. This area of study addresses the systemic exclusion of disabled philosophers from the profession of academic philosophy and the force relations by which philosophy of disability is perpetually marginalized or relegated to the sub-field of biomedical ethics. This sphere of analysis will be of particular interest to the book's audience within academic philosophy, as the "institutional, organizational, and discursive" features of the discipline that Tremain highlights are tremendously important for the field's current practitioners. Namely, the approach to a feminist philosophy of disability that Tremain develops in the book constructs a series of claims regarding the professional habits and practices that comprise mainstream philosophical engagements with disability. Among these, the naturalization of impairment is a part. However, she also critiques a long-standing assumption within academic philosophy in which "any philosophical inquiry about disability is fundamentally biomedical in

nature” (p. viii). The set of professional practices that have relied on this assumption--including patterns of organization within research databases, conferences, publications, hiring practices, and so on--has perpetuated ableism within academic philosophy (pp. xi-xiii). Tremain writes that such an “ableist sequestration” (1) perpetuates the medicalization and depoliticization of disability within philosophy; (2) constrains how philosophers of disability can represent their research to prospective employers; (3) limits the extent to which hiring committees can recruit practitioners of philosophy of disability; (4) contributes to the diminution and marginalization of critical philosophical analyses of disability; and (5) contributes to the underrepresentation of disabled philosophers and other philosophers of disability in the profession (p. xi).

Accordingly, Tremain’s book is a poignant critique of these ableist patterns of harm within philosophy, including the demographics of the profession that suggest that disabled philosophers constitute less than 1% of faculty members employed in philosophy departments in Canada and roughly 2% of those employed as faculty members in U.S. philosophy departments (p. 29). Adding to these concerns, Tremain also refers to the apparatus of structural racism and sexism that continue to shape “the profession of philosophy [as] made up almost entirely of nondisabled white people” (Ibid.).

This metaphilosophical sphere of analysis thus invites Tremain’s readers to explore how feminist philosophy of disability can be practiced across a range of philosophical sub-fields beyond (and against) biomedical ethics, and thereby demonstrates the deep systemic underpinnings of the apparatus of disability and its functions across contemporary academic philosophy. In this manner, the book performatively enacts an extensive project aimed at revealing the ubiquity of disability across several common sub-fields in the discipline. For example, the book engages issues within epistemology, such as the ableist dimensions of contemporary framings of “epistemologies of

ignorance” (p. 41-44). Within political philosophy, her work exposes rationalist and cognitivist assumptions within the language of autonomy and the functions of such discourses within forms of neoliberal governmentality (p. 184-186). Tremain’s book also carefully explores questions of realism posed by critics of poststructuralism and develops a robust defense of relativism and historicism in response to critics within disability studies and feminist philosophy (Ch. 3). Regarding aesthetics, Tremain turns to questions within philosophy of art to defend a historicist and relativist framing of beauty that supports a multimodal account of perception (p. 116-117).

Her work also moves within feminist and disability theory to address questions regarding the materiality of the body, the violence of sexual assault, the neglect of disability within feminist critiques of Foucault, and the role of subjective experiences within activism and theory construction. Notably, some of the more detailed debates in the book address Foucault’s criticisms of the primacy and/or transcendental status given to subjectivity within phenomenology and psychoanalysis. Specifically, Tremain addresses a significant section of the book defending and refining Foucault’s claim that individual “subjectivities are the productions of force relations that can be analyzed,” and that “subjectivities--that is, specific types of identity and active and affective possibility--are, in other words, secondary phenomena whose historical emergence and descent genealogy is especially designed to trace” (p. 67). In these ways, *Foucault and Feminist Philosophy of Disability* is a remarkable demonstration--no doubt crafted through the author’s many years of professional activism and skilled research--of how the apparatus of disability organizes and shapes all domains of professional philosophy, including the framings of identity, experience, selfhood, and subjectivity that often underlie its theoretical positionings.

Tremain’s book thus offers its readers a host of new directions for analysis and activism and opens pathways for further exploration and critique. For example, audiences interested in

ongoing movements framed through disability justice can locate within Tremain's relativist and historicist approach to disability an opening for further analysis into the functions of ableism operating through structural racism, settler colonialism, transphobia, and heteronormativity. In this, the historically and culturally specific character of the apparatus of disability that Tremain constructs serves as a methodological invitation for audiences working within disabled queer and trans of color spaces to further locate how the force relations of, for example, anti-Black racism, ongoing patterns of land displacement and genocide impacting Indigenous peoples, and the structural valences of anti-trans and anti-queer violence operate through various styles of diagnostic reasoning. Such networks of power, and, to use Tremain's phrase, "epistemologies of domination," that continue to attempt to pathologize, control, and/or normalize relations of desire, comportment, and mobilization among multiply oppressed communities, are thereby well situated to be analytically framed in relation to the *longue durée* of the apparatus of disability in its varied instantiations.

One brief illustration of such a possible extension and opportunity for analysis and organizing can be located within a series of intimate questions written by Aurora Levins Morales in a letter addressed to the then-deceased scholar, activist, and poet, Gloria E. Anzaldúa (1942-2004). In "Mountain Moving Day" (2013), Morales asks "why [Anzaldúa] refused to identify as a disabled woman," and inquires into "how people identify, which battles we take on and how and when and with whom, [such questions get] so loaded with judgment, with accusations of having let down the team, with diagnoses of self-betrayal by those who have made different choices" (Morales 2013, pp. 3-4). She writes that "So much depends on solidarity" (Ibid., p. 4). She notes that for Anzaldúa to have shouted to the world:

“Hey, not only am I a dark-skinned working class Tejana lesbian, but I’m disabled, too!” to draw attention to yet another way you were oppressed, and for this to do you good, you would have needed a strong, vocal, politically sophisticated, disability justice movement led by queer working class women and trans people of color who understood your life ... Who would have understood to the core your reasons for brewing all those herbal teas, knowing it’s dangerous to enter the doors of the medical-industrial complex, and that there are things we need there (Ibid., p. 4-5).

Morales’ epistolary *ofrenda*, dedicated to Anzaldúa, raises the possibility of movement-building and coalitional struggle, and the complicated negotiations of identification and de-identification with disability that exist among so many communities of color. While Tremain’s book does not offer direct insights into this particular set of questions, *Foucault and Feminist Philosophy of Disability* does ask its readers to focus less on the individualizing tendencies of neoliberalism and scholarly production and to turn to the “broad structural and institutional strategies and solutions” for addressing systemic obstacles to developing a shared project dedicated to eliminating ableism, the harms of the medical-industrial complex, and the dense networks of racism, sexism, and heteronormativity impacting disabled people (p. 207). In this, we find in Tremain’s invitation to explore the apparatus of disability further opportunities to link up and examine the dense histories of resistance to these orchestrating force relations. That is, as Tremain quotes from a Foucauldian lens, “Genealogy is an ‘attempt to desubjugate historical knowledges ... to enable them to oppose and struggle against the coercion of a unitary, formal, and scientific theoretical discourse’” (p. 67, quoting Foucault 2003, p. 9). In a related vein, Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha (2018) notes the following about historiographical work in a disability justice frame:

[Disability justice] becomes a space where we see that disability is all up in Black and brown/queer and trans communities--from Henrietta Lacks to Harriet Tubman, from the Black Panther Party's active support for disabled organizers' two-month occupation of the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation to force the passage of Section 504, the law mandating disabled access to public spaces and transportation to the chronic illness and disability stories of second-wave queer feminists of color like Sylvia Rivera, June Jordan, Gloria Anzaldúa, Audre Lorde, Marsha P. Johnson, and Barbara Cameron, whose lives are marked by bodily difference, trauma-surviving brilliance, and chronic illness but who mostly never used the term "disabled" to refer to themselves (Piepzna-Samarasinha 2018, p. 22).

These insights from Piepzna-Samarasinha are helpful for tracking further dimensions of resistance against the apparati of disability, racism, settler colonialism, sexism, and other structuring oppressions that manifest in historically and culturally-specific ways. While Tremain's book opens by addressing the emergence of discussions of disability within mainstream Anglophone discourses (pp. 1-2), her location of the diagnostic style of reasoning that facilitates the materialization, quantification, and stability of impairment creates a contextually-sensitive methodological framework that appears fluid enough to facilitate work across the historical nuances of multiply instantiating forms of violence and oppression in the Global North, and, importantly, the many centuries of mobilization against such structural harms. In these ways, Tremain's book reconfigures a series of possible avenues for philosophical critique within disability studies, including an invitation for new methods of collective resistance and attunement to the many obstacles that we may face amid those shared struggles.

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