

# Anarchist Response to Disability

Fifth Estate History

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Foucault's happy pre-Enlightenment "ship of fools" was a fantasy: the reality of life with disability (particularly developmental disability and mental ill health) before charitable/government involvement ranged from outright murder, to banishment into charitable and religious institutions, to imposing the full duty of care on women within the confines of the family home. All of these practices continue alongside government and corporate services today.

To conceive of an anti-authoritarian approach to disability, it helps to start by rethinking the way we think of disability itself. The concept used by most disabled peoples' organizations is the social model of disability. This radical notion holds that disability is a social product. The human body and mind are infinitely diverse, and change throughout life as a result of experiences, accidents, aging and so on. The differences in ability that result are normal, not abnormalities to be excised. What turns differences into disabilities is the construction of physical and social barriers that prevent people with certain kinds of differences from functioning.

Each person has the right to define their own needs and have those needs met in non-condescending ways.

Providing the assistance required begins with accepting and valuing difference, proceeds through entering direct and equal relationships with disabled people, and will hopefully culminate in finding ways to provide the support, care and services needed outside of hierarchical, profit-driven systems.

We need to create an outline of the community practices which have been damaged by the introduction of mass media forms, from newspapers to radio to the Internet. Then a graduated plan to address and roll back the systematic alienations introduced by each of the media through history should be initiated.

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