

UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA

GRADUATE COLLEGE

THE CONCEPT OF CAPABILITY CONSCIOUSNESS:

LEARNING FROM HELEN KELLER

A DISSERTATION

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

By

MICHAEL JAY SURBAUGH

Norman, Oklahoma

2016

THE CONCEPT OF CAPABILITY CONSCIOUSNESS:
LEARNING FROM HELEN KELLER

A DISSERTATION APPROVED FOR THE
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND POLICIES STUDIES

BY

Dr. Susan Laird, Chair

Dr. William Gardner

Dr. John Covaleskie

Dr. Joyce Brandes

Dr. William Frick

© Copyright by MICHAEL JAY SURBAUGH 2016
All Rights Reserved.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my mother Sarah Esther Surbaugh 1934-2006, the poet of my heart.

Invisible Hope

*I sometimes wonder to myself,
How can these things be;
What is this utter longing
And restlessness in me?
I am like the tide that comes
and goes
Just longing to be free
Free but these thoughts
Keep coming back to me.
I look down at my children,
Tucked in their little beds
I see them in my future
My darling sleepy heads.*

-Mrs. John Surbaugh, circa 1963

My mother believed in education and fought hard despite all of the limitations life imposed to make certain I receive the best education I could. Not even periodic, devastating bouts with bipolar disorder could distort my mother's priorities, her devotion, or her loving gaze on everything I tried to do. She presumed my capabilities with the modal phrase "You can." My father inspired my deep desire "to know" and "understand" and "reflect" – as Keller put it about herself and the sense of personhood.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Ironically, I write these acknowledgements immediately after the death of Patty Duke Astin, whose illustrious career included both a stage and screen portrayal of Helen Keller in William Powell's, "The Miracle Worker" (Gibson 2008). Astin's death occurred the day after I defended this dissertation.* It was if another living link to Helen Keller has slipped into the night. I am thinking of photos of Astin and Keller together at Keller's home in 1962 where Keller, whom Astin described as "a jolly grandmother," led Astin about her garden to inspire a sensate tour of Keller's flowers. If I have learned anything about Helen Keller's life at all, I have learned that she lived in light not darkness. So it is fitting that her mother named her first child "Helen" which means, "light" or "bright shining sun."

This work would not have been possible without the assistance and encouragement of a number of different communities and individuals.

First and foremost, I would like to thank my Dissertation Committee: Susan Laird, Chair, for her encouragement to consider the classic educational text of Helen Keller and then for her high expectations in using my philosophical and practical skills to analyze and theorize from Helen Keller's works; John Covalleskie, for his suggestion of the possible usefulness of Dewey's conception of the reflex arc; Jim Gardner, for discussing my work and its implications for educational technology; William Frick for his inspiration to consider the educational systems perspective; and Joyce Brandes, for her insights regarding the implications of my research for special education.

Next I would like to express my gratitude to other academic groups: to the OU Writing Center, particularly for assistance from the director Michele Eodice; to the Philosophy of Education Society, particularly Jim Garrison and Suzanne Rice; to the Oklahoma Educational Studies Association, particularly Julie Davis; and to my peer support group, particularly Joe Meinhart, Steven Mackie, Kristen Holzer, and Sean Pendley.

There are so many colleagues at the Oklahoma Department of Human Services I wish to thank: Michaela Bishop, my supervisor, for allowing me to integrate my doctoral work into my professional service; JoAnne Goin, director of the Oklahoma Developmental Disabilities Services, for her unconditional and constant support; and my peers in this most important work, including Matt Aingell, Paula Baskin, Anna Adams, Bill Fields, Kim Powell, Bettina Larsen, Christie Hamm, Susan Russell, and Herbert Shalver.

My St. Jerome Parish church family has provided steadfast support of me and my work, particularly the church choir members, Bishop Rick Hollingsworth, Father DeWayne Messenger, Deacon Brother Ray Knapp, and Bishop Rafe Adams.

I am grateful to my two almost families. Martin, Maurine, and Kevin Lantz for their always welcome home for reading and writing; and Nance Cunningham, Howard Stein, and Zev Cunningham Stein for so many dinner and breakfast table discussions that asked good questions and clarified concepts.

Finally, most of all, I am grateful to my brother John Eric Surbaugh and his wife Nonette for their moral and financial support, and unlimited kindnesses.

*Michael J. Surbaugh (b. 1959) died after suffering from cancer on April 19, 2016. He was unable to complete the final edits to his dissertation text. We did the best we could to reflect his voice and message.

His note below, following his March 28, 2016 dissertation defense:

Dear Susan and others involved in my doctoral defense, how can one express the profoundest gratitude due the kindness and consideration that I received at the conclusion of this doctoral journey.

I am honored by your presence, the varied scope of your research projects, and your collective wisdom. I pray for your peace and productivity for the future. If anything can tilt the balance to something more humane in the broadest sense, it is education.

Yours with affectionate respect,

Michael

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	iv
Table of Contents	vii
Abstract	ix
PART ONE	1
CHAPTER ONE	1
Introduction	1
Teacher and Student Meet	4
CHAPTER TWO	23
Sources	23
Peregrinations	27
CHAPTER THREE	34
Capability and Consciousness	34
~ Capability	34
~ Consciousness.....	36
~ “Capability + Consciousness”	41
PART TWO	46
CHAPTER FOUR	46
Theory of Capability Consciousness	46
~ Capability Disposition	58

~ Capability Defense	62
~ Capability Propensity	70
The Disabling (Contrary) Case.....	73
~ Disabling Disposition.....	78
~ Disabled Defense	85
~ Disabled Propensity	90
Capability Consciousness: Borderline Cases	95
~ Disconnected Capability	100
~ Cloaked Disability.....	101
~ Separating Capability	103
Constituting Capability Consciousness.....	109
~ Enabling Capability Consciousness	112
CHAPTER FIVE	127
Capability Consciousness and Difference	127
~ Conclusion: A Framework for Education	140
Works Cited	148

ABSTRACT

This dissertation is a philosophical analysis of the meaning of a concept I name “capability consciousness” and propose as useful for special education. Understanding this concept can help us answer an educationally and existentially significant question, “How can a person with a profound disability come to know herself capable?” Through a case study approach, I theorize the meaning, value, and significance of capability consciousness evident in autobiographical narratives by Helen Keller, primarily from *The Story of My Life* (Keller 2003) and *The World I Live In* (1914). My study of Keller’s texts draws a strong distinction between capability consciousness and “disabled consciousness,” and also explores a range of sub-concepts such as “capability disposition,” “capability defense,” “capability propensity,” “disabled disposition,” “disabled defense” and “disabled propensity.” My analysis builds critically on concepts such as “consciousness” (Arendt 1978, Rockwell 2005, Johnson 2007) “capability,” “habit,” (Dewey 2002, Kestenbaum 1977) and “capabilities approach” (Nussbaum 2011, Nussbaum 2007, Terzi 2008, 2005) using resources drawn from philosophy (Arendt 1978, Dewey 1984, 2002, 2005) and the empirical/cognitive sciences (Damasio 1999, Stern 2000, Stern 2002, Gibbs 2006, Siegel 2012).

My analysis, which is grounded in selections of Keller’s narratives, poses three questions: (1) how did Helen Keller come to know herself capable despite profound disability (2) how did Keller view education as supportive of her positive assessment of her capability; (3) what philosophical and empirical science scholarship exists to support Helen Keller’s disposition of capability consciousness (Siegel 2012, Stern 2000, Stern

2002, Vanlierde et al. 2003, Röder and Rösler 2004, Rödera and Wallace 2010, Merabet and Pascual-Leone 2010, Cattaneo et al. 2008, Cattaneo and Vecchi 2008, 2011). This inquiry suggests that capability consciousness involves engendering and encouraging an embodied experiential sense (Shusterman 1992; 2007) of capability through an environment favorable to the child's ways of learning (Dewey 1998, 2004). By focusing attention on the child's capabilities and ways of learning as the substrate for instruction, the teacher may encourage a student's sense of ontological parity (Buchler YEAR) about self towards others, despite differences that are labeled disabling (Surbaugh 2011, Wallace 1999, Buchler et al. 1990, Stiker 1999b).

The significance of this inquiry lies in proposing a foundation for meeting individualized educational needs in ways that challenge beliefs and attitudes that in fact are disabling to students with disability (Wendell 1996, Stiker 1999). In my conclusion, I propose the concept of capability consciousness as an educational aim that should accompany any curriculum implementation.

PART ONE

CHAPTER ONE

*When I see
Only with eyes,
I tell myself
Many lies
When I wed
My Science
With my art,
I see more rightly
With my heart*

~“Seeing Rightly with the Heart”, Howard F. Stein¹

Introduction

How does one with a disability come to know oneself as capable? How does this “knowing” come about? To be sure, capability depends on context, conditions of support, and the powers one has, but how does one acquire a consciousness of capability? This question need not ignore disability as socially constructed, and in fact, requires it. Even the meaning of real impairment involves attitudes and beliefs that are themselves disabling. Knowledge and belief come from experience. One with a disability, however defined, must sort out the dissonance between capability and disability. One has to define capability against disability. To know oneself as capable or disabled can never be asserted in the abstract. One must have an experience of capability to know what capability is. On the other hand, one can be labeled disabled without an experience of disability. This is

¹ “Seeing Rightly with the Heart” © Used by permission of the author and Finishing Line Press.

clearly apparent as the child learns capability first as an individual, before any comparison with others becomes conscious. Later, capability and disability acquire a comparative dimension, and then become constitutive in a general sense for one's identity. While capability can be assessed with reference to specific task or activity, a sense that one is capable has a dispositional character just as the label disability has a dispositional character that one can acquire. The modal phrase "I can" implicates potential capability founded on an experience of capability.

The dissonance between disability and capability begins with semantics. In one broad stroke, disability cancels capability. Disability therefore is a general concept paradigmatic of limitation. Disability equals limitation. When one is disabled or considered disabled, the label of disability as limitation is applied categorically as something undesirably defective. This occurs before the disabled person takes stock of all that she can do. Disability defines identity in ways that cancel out the specific characteristics and abilities a person has. One is first seen as a person with a disability, before any other properties of individuality are revealed. Disability confers an identity that stands in stark contrast to a taken for granted identity of capability.

Capability connotes potential founded on experience. The modal phrase "I can" is an affirmation of capability that implicates claimed identity, despite many situations where one says, "I cannot." "Can" as a defining feature of identity does not ignore limiting conditions, instead it reflects knowledge based on experience that one is capable in a general sense. Saying "I am a capable person" is not the equivalent of making a list of everything one can do that then compares with a list of everything one cannot do. A

typically-abled person learns to take agency for granted in precisely the same way a person with disability learns that she cannot take agency for granted.

Identity formation is complex as one begins with attributes already defined. Within the experience of conferred identities, the self can acquiesce and claim a conferred identity, or the self can resist this identity, and even reshape its meaning for the self and for others. There may be a dissonance in one's experience with conferred identity. Persons with disability do resist conferred identities of invalidity and defectiveness. The tools for resisting a conferred identity require experience and education. These tools enable a dissonance in consciousness that redefine identity and self-perception. Simone de Beauvoir famously wrote of the female gender, "One is not born a woman, one becomes one" (de Beauvoir 1974, 283). This iconic statement applies to disability identity as well. In order to learn capability, a person with a disability must "unlearn" disability. One must learn one's conferred identity, and one must learn about the nature of "becoming" this identity. One no longer accepts the conferred identity as given. When this happens, and only then, is liberation from a conferred identity possible. One takes control over naming one's identity against the Naming power from dominant society.² To

² See also Sandra Bartky's argument in "Toward a phenomenology of feminist consciousness" where she argues that to be a feminist one must go through different stages of consciousness and conscious-raising (Bartky 1975). Bartky argues that becoming a feminist requires an "experience of a profound personal transformation" (425). There is a perception of social conflict at the personal level, which enables turning a "fact" into a "contradiction," which apprehends oppression and victimization as contingent and unnecessary (Bartky 1975, 429). Similarly, I believe that capability consciousness has roots in the perception of contradictions arising from attitudes and beliefs about disability that are potentially at odds with experience at the personal level. This raises consciousness about how social institutions perpetuate beliefs that are not built into the order of things, but cultural and contingent, questionable, and in need of change.

claim capability one must disclaim disability. I name a learned identity of capability, capability consciousness.³

This dissertation proceeds in two parts. Part one includes chapters one through three. Chapter two theorizes key concepts that form a theory of capability consciousness. Part two analyzes narratives, drawing out a theory of capability consciousness. Chapter four provides criteria for case types relevant to capability consciousness including a clear case, a contrary or disabling case, and a borderline case, with evidence drawn from texts, principally Helen Keller's writing. Chapter five discusses the significance of this inquiry and its relevance to disability and education. A word of clarification is needed: While the theory is drawn from an analysis of text, in the actual exposition of theory the criteria for each case type appears prior to the principle narrative excerpts. This is simply to guide the reader through the concepts that a theory of capability consciousness involves. Thus, subject headings that precede narratives are the concepts that the narrative demonstrates. While the risk is giving the impression that a theoretical structure is being imposed on a narrative, the criteria arose from a reading of text. I found it confusing for the reader to do exposition otherwise in following the structure of the argument.

Teacher and Student Meet

³ My working definition of consciousness is taken from Hannah Arendt in her posthumously published *The Life of the Mind, Volume One, Thinking*, which is principally concerned with the nature and role of thinking experience. Arendt simply writes, "Consciousness, that fact that I am *for myself*" provides a definition that condenses insights from phenomenology to describe a grasp of one's first-person perspective and claim to one's experience (Arendt 1978, 19).

“My beautiful Helen shall not be transformed into a prodigy if I can help it.”

~Anne Sullivan

“It is much better, I think, to assume that a child is doing his part, and that the seed you sown you will bear fruit in due time. It is only fair to the child, anyhow, and it saves you unnecessary trouble.”

~Anne Sullivan

The relationship of Helen Keller and Anne Sullivan began on March 3, 1887 on the front porch of the Keller homestead in Tuscumbia, Alabama. Keller was nearly seven years old. She had been deaf-blind since the age of nineteen months following a high fever. Sullivan was only fourteen years her senior and herself visually impaired since childhood because of an infection affecting her eyes (Nielsen 2009). Sullivan came to the Keller home in response to the family seeking a teacher for their child. A letter sent to the Perkins School for the Blind prompted the school director Michael Anagnos to select Sullivan as the best candidate for the job. Sullivan, a recent graduate of the Perkins School and the valedictorian of her class, had few job prospects. Ironically, Sullivan expressed little interest in being a teacher and had to be convinced to accept the job offer. Armed with only the briefest acquaintance with the teaching strategies of the day, Sullivan threw herself into her role as teacher; the result was the creation of a remarkable curriculum that met the needs of her student superbly.

The facts of Helen Keller’s early life are principally told in her classic autobiography *The Story of My Life* published in 1903 when Keller was an undergraduate student at Radcliffe College. From this book, numerous accounts of Keller’s life have

appeared in children's books, and on stage and screen. Despite being the subject of a plethora of tasteless jokes that play on her disability of deaf-blindness, Helen Keller remains an iconic figure in American history. Beneath the adoring hagiography and cruel jokes there is Helen Keller the flesh and blood person whose relevance to education stands the test of time both for what Keller said about her education and what she did with it. Reading what Keller said about herself makes clear that she did not allow disability to define her. This refusal cannot simply be swept aside as denial, or a failure to identify with others who also have disabilities. The limitations of Keller's political insight about the social construction and the hegemony of ableism do not cancel nor threaten Keller's significance for education today.

Who could have imagined that the child that greeted Anne Sullivan in March 1887 on a country porch in Tuscumbia Alabama would write twenty years later something like the preface to *The World I Live In*?

Every book is in a sense autobiographical. But while other self-recording creatures *are permitted* [italics added] at least to seem to change the subject, apparently nobody cares what I think of the tariff, the conservation of our natural resources, or conflicts which revolve around the name Dreyfus. If I offer to reform the educational system of the world, my editorial friends say, "That is interesting." But will you please tell us what idea you had of goodness and beauty when you were six years old?" First they ask me to tell the life of the child who is mother to the woman. Then they make me an anachronical grandmother... The editors are so kind they are no doubt right that nothing I have to say about the affairs of the universe is interesting. But until they give me opportunity to write about matters that are not-me *the world must go on uninstructed and unreformed* [italics added], and I can only do my best with the one small subject upon which I am allowed to discourse (Keller 1914, xi-xii).

The claims Keller makes at the age of twenty-eight are bold, but not delusional. She demonstrates an independence of mind that perceives a dissonance between how

others see her and how she sees herself. She chafes and resists, but her resistance is cogent, and compels others to think about her differently. She tells readers that she is asked to step outside of time, putting aside her education, to explain her thoughts about “goodness” as a six-year-old child. She informs readers boldly that she does have opinions about the conservation of natural resources, the tariff, and “events that surround the name of Dreyfus!”⁴ As an educated woman, Keller reads and is knowledgeable about national and international affairs. Keller makes a tantalizing claim she could reform the “educational system of the world,” if only she were asked to do so.

In a letter to Robert LaFollette, the progressive Republican Party candidate for president in 1924, Helen Keller bitterly criticized her status as the “archpriestess of the sightless,” chaffing against this status’ foreclosure of her political voice.

So long as I confine my activities to social service of the blind, they [the newspapers] compliment me extravagantly, calling me the ‘archpriestess’ of the sightless,’ ‘wonder woman’ and a ‘modern miracle.’ But when it comes to poverty, and I maintain that it is the result of wrong economics—that it is the industrial system under which we live that is the root of much physical deafness and blindness in the world—that is a different matter. It is laudable to give aid to the handicapped. Superficial charities make smooth the way of the prosperous; but to advocate that all human beings should have leisure, comfort, the decencies and refinements of life, is a Utopian dream, and one who seriously contemplates it, must indeed be deaf, dumb and blind (Keller 1967, 14).

Without education, Keller could not have made the claims she did about what she could do. Her teacher Anne Sullivan evolved into an extraordinary educational innovator. Sullivan was an early constructivist by method, even if she had not the concept of

⁴ Alfred Dreyfus, a Jewish French soldier unjustly accused and imprisoned as a spy for the German Government in 1894.

constructivist theory from theorists and practitioners like John Dewey or Maria Montessori.⁵ The analogical “as” and “like” structure of Keller’s epistemological self-defense can be traced, I believe, to the analogical “as” and “like” structure of Sullivan’s early teaching. Sullivan began teaching with a talent for close observation and this guided her as she constructed curriculum. In her first letter sent to her friend Sophia Hopkins dated March 6, 1887 she wrote:

[Helen] is quick-tempered and willful, and nobody except her brother James, has tried to control her. The greatest problem I shall have to solve is how to discipline and control her *without breaking her spirit* [italics added]. I shall go rather slowly at first and try to win her love. I shall not attempt to conquer her by force alone; but I shall insist on *reasonable* [italics added] obedience from the start. One thing impresses everybody is Helen’s tireless activity. She is never still a moment. She is here, there, and everywhere. Her hands are in everything but nothing holds her attention for long...She helped me unpack my trunk.... she found the little doll [sent from the Perkins School from other children]...I thought it a good opportunity to teach her first word. I spelled “d-o-l-l” slowing into her hand...Whenever anybody gives [Helen] anything she points to it, then to herself, and she nods her head. She looked puzzled and felt my hand, and I repeated the letters and she imitated them very well and pointed to the doll (Keller 2003, 139).

After her arrival, Sullivan was appalled by the Keller’s indulgence of their daughter. Sullivan was impressed the child’s “spirit” as something to preserve. Sullivan regarded establishing dependence and discipline as a first task, but it was only because of a larger objective to establish a connection. The play and screen adaptations of Keller’s early life dramatize a highly physical scene where Sullivan combatively tries to force a wild-child Helen to use her napkin (Gibson 2008). This brief interaction, however,

⁵ Anne Sullivan and Helen Keller met the famous educator, Maria Montessori in 1915, and Montessori paid tribute Sullivan by commenting that she was an educational pioneer.” She said, I have been called a pioneer, but she pointed at Sullivan and said, “there is your pioneer” (Delano 2008, 49).

misrepresents the nature of the relationship building that Sullivan patiently engaged. Keller's early education was an intense bodily interaction with her teacher, almost replicating, and recapitulating behavior patterns between an infant and a primary caregiver. These patterns of interaction involve the sustenance of physical needs, and, importantly, include the emotional regulation that later becomes part of the child's own resources used to cope with the world around.

From the start, Sullivan leveraged every observation she had in order to understand how typically abled children learn and posed questions to herself.

I asked myself, "*How does the normal child learn language*"? [italics original] The answer was simple, "by imitation." *The child comes into the world with an ability to learn* [italics added], and then he learns by himself, provided he is supplied with sufficient outward stimulus. He sees people do things, and he tries to do them. He hears other people speak, and tries to speak. But long before he utters his first word, he understands what is said to him. I have been observing Helen's little cousin lately. She is about fifteen months old, and already understands a great deal. In response to questions she points out prettily her nose, mouth, eye, chin, cheek, ear. If I say, "Where is baby's other ear"? she points it out correctly... she obeys many commands like these: "Come," "Kiss," "Go to papa," "Shut the door," "Give me the biscuit." But I have not heard her try to say any of these words.... But it is perfectly evident she understands them... These observations have given me a clue to the method to be followed in teaching Helen language. *I shall talk to her as we talk into a baby's ears* [italics original] I shall assume that she has the normal child's capacity of assimilation and imitation. I shall use complete sentences in talking to her, and fill out the meaning with gestures and her descriptive signs when necessity requires it; but shall not try to keep her mind fixed on any one thing. I shall do all I can to interest her and stimulate, and wait for results (Keller 2003, 151).

Perhaps the most important assertion in this extended passage begins with *the child comes into the world ready to learn*. In a subsequent letter fourteen days later, Sullivan concluded "*The new scheme works splendidly*," and indeed it did as Keller progressed rapidly in her grasp of new words (Keller 2003, 152). Sullivan recognized her

young student's readiness to learn language from their first meeting. Helen Keller could see and hear until nineteen months of age. This is a developmentally important fact.⁶ By nineteen months, the foundation skills for learning language are present in the typical child.⁷ For Helen, the fruitful sensorimotor and cognitive growth occurred without incident until her illness. Helen Keller was a loved and attached child, with a mother who refused to give her up when other family members thought it best. Such favorable circumstances make clear that Helen Keller already had many crucial capabilities for further learning. At nearly seven years of age, young Keller's mind was well prepared to learn language.⁸ Only deaf-blindness made others believe that Keller could not learn.

⁶ Anne Sullivan recognized this writing in a letter September 18, 1887, "It seems as if a child who could see until her nineteenth month must retain some of her first impressions no matter how faintly. Helen talks a great deal about things she cannot know through the sense of touch. She asks many questions about the sky, day and night, the ocean and mountains. She likes to have me tell her what I see in pictures" (Keller 2003, 169).

⁷ For purposes of this inquiry drawing a variety of sources, I will claim the following as prerequisite developmental skills as foundation skills Keller clearly had even as a prelingual child. Such skills are essentially developmental tasks that an infant/child must achieve to develop receptive and expressive language skills. She describes in *The Story of My Life* how she understood the intentions of her mother and understood and could complete simple tasks. Following instructions and understanding intentions are very complex skills that signal the functions of language.

⁸ See Michael Tomasello, *Constructing a language: a usage-based theory of language acquisition* (Tomasello 2003). Tomasello argues at around 9-12 months, infants acquire a "joint attentional frame," where the infant participates with the adult in attending to an object, and, secondly, the infant begins to "understand communicative intentions," and finally, "cultural learning in the form of role reversal." Such acquired skills are necessary for understanding and following the intentions of others, with the corresponding belief that others can understand one's intentions as well. Following instructions is an exercise in reading intention. Something Keller claimed she could do as a prelingual child.

Despite a propensity for learning, Keller's innate gifts did not guarantee that she would find the circumstances that would help her learn.

Helen Keller's experience with her teacher involved continuous touch. The distinctly embodied nature of instruction was necessary. Teaching a deaf-blind child could not be otherwise. Text was inscribed into hands. Consequently, text and hand were kinesthetically entwined in a very intimate way, to enable a "grasp" of the world and her internal feeling states. Teaching a deaf-blind child required a "graphic" embodiment that used touch and hand to inscribe descriptions. In Keller's case, and by her own testimony, the warmth of a particular living hand became a familiar presence. The learning of language occurred through a hand that never stayed still, but literally impressed language into the child's hand using a manual alphabet. Yet Sullivan's method of immersion was roughly equivalent to how all children learn language.⁹ Sullivan began with single words reiterating them repeatedly in connection with the appropriate condition or context, but she intentionally moved into a conversational mode and increased the speed of communication with her young student. The sheer force of repetition reinforced vocabulary for making analogies. Simultaneously a sense of another "self" reinforced the intentionality of communication and its function for identity formation. Text throbbed with life and the associations of this lively means of conversing transferred to the embodied reading of braille text, itself, inherently tactile. The palpable nature of text made text alive. Any observer of a person fluent in fingerspelling with another person is

⁹ See Michael Tomasello, *Constructing a Language: a usage-based theory of language acquisition* for an account of language construction through use.

quickly amazed at the pace of movements that occur as fast as verbal speaking. Sullivan's method of immersion was roughly equivalent to how all children learn language.¹⁰ Understanding that others have intention is central to having one's intentions understood. Sullivan intuitively recognized such skills, and immediately began to bridge the gap in development by immersing Keller in words that rapidly advanced to whole sentences without hesitating to explain each word.

For Keller individual words melted into complete sentences as meaning arrived to her mind in chunks without hesitant consideration of every word. What began as a game of imitation in March 1887, quickly took on meaning with letters signifying words, and words signifying objects and actions. Gradually, whole sentences became commonplace and sentence forms were seamlessly formed into questions. The mutual pattern of words and sentences flowing, back and forth, included questions and information about context, expressions of perplexity, wonder, and every sort of emotional emphasis due the situation. The special bond of constant hand contact testifies to the role of embodiment in teaching to the needs of this child. Sullivan's instruction was always

¹⁰ Tomasello writes that language acquisition depends on foundation skills of "intention-reading" and "pattern finding" (Tomasello 2003). Under typical circumstances, intention-reading skills, according to Tomasello, develop at around 9-12 months of age, well before Keller's age of approximately nineteen months when illness completely impaired vision and hearing. "At around 9-12 months of age human infants begin to engage in a host of new behaviors that would seem to indicate that something of a revolution in the way they understand their social worlds... it is at this age infants begin to flexibly and reliably look where adults are looking (gaze following), to use adults as social reference points (social referencing), and to act on objects in a way adults are acting on them (imitative learning). These behaviors are not dyadic... they are triadic in the sense that infants involve coordinating their interactions with both objects and people, and the object or event to which the share attention... These behaviors would seem to indicate an emerging understanding of the other persons as intentional agents like the self..."(Tomasello 2003, 21).

kinetically performative, and subject to changes of circumstance or context. No detached instruction would do. The typical dance of eye glance between teacher and student was transformed into moving fingers that injected and impressed, enabling and accentuating the very movement of thoughts. Even naming objects required manual inspection to connect use with tactile impressions. The teacher had to think of what a seeing child gains from seeing and find ways to translate the seen into the tactile in order to create a kind of tangible sight for recognition.

Sullivan felt the weight of her teaching responsibilities and realized that she was on her own; she would have to open up the world in ways the child could understand the world she could not see or hear. Aside from a few psychology textbooks Sullivan requested be sent to her from the Perkins School, she was without any professional pedagogue to intervene or lend her aid. Prior to coming to the Keller home Sullivan had spent only a short time with Helen Keller's famous deaf-blind predecessor, Laura Bridgman from whom Sullivan learned to fingerspell.

There isn't a living soul in this part of the world to whom I can go for advice in this, or indeed, in any other educational difficulty. The only thing for me to do in a perplexity is to go ahead, and learn by making mistakes (Keller 2003, 166).

Finally concluding that all children display similar patterns of learning, Sullivan scornfully rejected the idea that knowledge could be imposed on a child, as she believed traditional teaching methods assumed. In a letter dated May 8, 1887 wrote,

I am beginning to suspect all elaborate forms of education and special systems of education. They seem to me to be built on the supposition that every child is a kind of idiot (sic) who must be taught to think. Whereas if a child is left to himself, he will think more and better, if less showily. Let him come and go freely and let him touch real things and combine his impressions for himself.... (Keller 2003, 153).

Sullivan lavished her student with maternal affection, something poignantly missing from her own childhood,¹¹ patiently correcting or supplying missing information when she fingerspelled into her student's hand. In only six months, the necessity of a highly embodied pedagogical approach with a deaf-blind child paid huge dividends not only for factual knowledge but for the perceptive and emotional intelligence this approach encouraged. From a report to the Perkins School on October 1, 1888, Sullivan wrote,

...[Helen's] sense of touch has considerably increased during the whole year, and has gained in acuteness and delicacy. Indeed, her whole body is so finely organized that she seems to use it as a medium for bringing herself into closer relations with her fellow creatures. She is not only about to distinguish with great accuracy the different undulations of air and vibrations of the floor, made by various sounds and motions, and to recognize her friends and acquaintances the instant she touches their hands and clothing, but she also perceives the state of mind of those around her. It is with for anyone Helen is conversing to be particularly happy or sad, and withhold the knowledge of this fact from her.

She observes the slightest emphasis placed upon a word in conversation, and she discovers meaning in every change of position, and in the varied play of the muscles of the hand. She responds very quickly to gentle pressure of affection, the pat of approval, the jerk of impatience, the firm motion of command, and to many variations of the almost infinite language of feelings; and she has become expert at interpreting this unconscious language of the emotions that she is often able to divine our very thoughts.

...Last year, I mentioned several instances where [Helen] seemed to have called into use an inexplicable mental power, but it now seems to me, after considering the matter, that this power maybe explained by the muscular variations of those with whom she has contact, caused by emotions (Keller 2003, 187-188).

Moral disapproval could not be seen on the face, but demonstrated by taking the child's hand and placing it on the teacher's face. Gradually, a desire to please that comes

¹¹ Sullivan's mother died when she was child and her father was alcoholic and unable to care for his children. Sullivan and a younger brother lived at the Tewksbury Alms house in a Massachusetts town of the same name. Sullivan's brother died at Tewksbury under circumstances of medical neglect.

from the child's need for recognition and nurturance inspired moral behavior. Knowing leapt from an experience of doing and feeling. Sullivan could not have known the precise neurological underpinnings of emotion, nor could have known the physiology of sensory compensation or the cross-modal work of the various senses,¹² but her careful observation and intuition served her purpose well. In my reading of cognitive research for this inquiry, I wonder if Sullivan's repetitions of taking Helen's hand and placing it on her face shaped the child's neural pathways similarly to vision and the so-called "mirror neurons" that are believed to elicit comparable neurological activity between actors and observers.¹³

Constructing curriculum as she went along, Sullivan maintained an intense focus on the child. Educational intent dictated everything Sullivan did, as Sullivan weighed her observations of what the child could do against what she knew the child needed to know. Sullivan focused on such things as manners, the idioms of speech, and polite

¹² See "Do We Really Need Vision? How Blind People "See" the Actions of Others."

¹³ Neurophysiologists conducting brain research with macaque monkeys identified "mirror neurons" (Rizzolatti, Fogassi, and Gallese 2009). Scientists recognized similar neurological firing by specific parts of the brain that were activated when one monkey observed the actions of another. Scientists found that the observer and the doer had the same neurological firing pattern "mirroring" one another, hence, the reference to "mirror neurons." Since this discovery, cognitive scientists have found evidence that humans have the same neurological mechanisms that might help explain reciprocal behavior between mothers and infants. There is also speculation that mirror neurons play a role in intersubjectivity and the workings of empathy. Vittorio Gallese, a principle researcher on the role of mirror neurons in embodied processes: "The relevance of mirror mechanisms stems from the fact that for the first time it has been found a neural mechanism allowing direct matching between observed and potential executable motor actions, thus providing a parsimonious and effective solution to translating the sensory information of others' bodily movements into something that observer is immediately able to recognize" (Gallese and Sinigaglia 2010, 752).

conversation, and attended to a scrupulously polished appearance as a social necessity.¹⁴ This too, Sullivan carefully considered in her teaching, since so much of interaction with others involves visual cues. Sullivan had to begin with the very fundamentals of language something most children mastered much earlier in life. Sullivan wrote in a letter to Sophia Hopkins May 16, 1887,

The desire to repeat what has been told her shows a marked advance in the development of her intellect, and is an invaluable stimulus to the acquisition of language. I ask her friends to encourage her to tell them of her doings, and to manifest as much curiosity and pleasure in her little adventures as they possibly can [italics original]. This gratifies the child's love of approbation and keeps up her interests in things. This is the basis of real intercourse. She makes many mistakes, of course, twists words and phrases, puts the cart before the horse, and gets herself in hopeless tangles of nouns and verbs, *but so does the hearing child* [italics added]. I am sure these difficulties will take care of themselves. *The impulse to tell is the important thing* [italics added]. I supply a word here and there, sometimes a sentence, suggesting something she has omitted or forgotten. Thus her vocabulary grows apace, and new words germinate and bring forth new ideas and they are the stuff out of which heaven and earth are made (Keller 2003, 155-156).

The world was placed into Helen's hands. What could be touched was touched, and what could be smelled, smelled, and what could be tasted, tasted. The combination of all of these sense experiences encouraged associations that lent verbal descriptions of things a realness and coherence. The world was vividly present. The leaps from one concept to yet others resulted from a patient building of experiences into patterns and schema for understanding what language could do, even without sight. Observing that a

¹⁴ See *Maternal Thinking*, by Sara Ruddick, for a discussion of the "acceptability" that directs a mother's thinking and her activity, in preparing a child for a social world (Ruddick 1980, 1995). Helen Keller represented many special problems in this regard because of her inability to see and interpret visual social cues, which she ultimately came to understand through other means.

“normal” child learns in a certain way caused Sullivan to consider the principles underlying the learning, which she articulated as “imitation” and “assimilation,” insights that become the subjects in Piagetian developmental psychology.¹⁵

The rural setting of the Keller home afforded many opportunities to learn from the natural setting. Keller learned how to treat and care for animals. Keller learned about babies being born from the hatchlings of chickens. Affection was something one gave animals and received in return. All of the textures of the natural world lie all about as each object, animal, or event acquired names inspired by endless questions. Sullivan used comparisons at hand to broaden her student’s understanding of concepts of causality, spatiality, and temporality. This was accomplished best outside using the myriad phenomena of nature to illustrate facts and describe living processes.

Sullivan recognized occurrences of developmental progress that one expects with a typical child. In a letter dated July 31, 1887 Sullivan wrote,

[Helen] has now reached the question stage of her development. It is “what” “why?” “when?” especially “why?” all day long, and as her intelligence grows her inquiries become more insistent. I remember how unbearable I used to find the inquisitiveness of my friend’s children; but now know that these questions indicate a child’s growing interest in the cause of things. The “why?” is the door through which he enters the world of reason and reflection. “Howe does a carpenter know to build a house?” “Who put the chicken in eggs?” “Why is Viney black?” “Flies bite—why?” “Can flies know not to bite?” “Why did father kill the sheep?” Of course she asks many questions that are not as intelligent as these. Her mind is not more logical than the minds of other children. On the whole, her questions are analogous to those that a bright three-year-old asks; but her desire to know is so earnest, the questions are never tedious, though they draw heavily on my meager store of information, and tax my ingenuity to the utmost (Keller 2003, 164-165).

¹⁵ Sullivan uses a concept that will later become central to Piaget, i.e., *assimilation* (Piaget, Cook, and Norton 1952).

Following the child did not mean that Sullivan was merely a passive observer, instead she remained passionately engaged keeping herself within the abilities of her student. Placing her student in a position for embodied contacts, Sullivan used her own hands to keep the relation between teacher and student one of continuous engagement. The objects that Keller could not see could often be tactilely inspected to elicit properties that needed names to fix them in identity. Again, Sullivan accommodated to the needs of her young pupil and what her pupil could do. Relevance was tied to context. Recounting their first meeting at the Keller homestead, the first word that Anne Sullivan fingerspelled into her young student's hand was "doll," a meaningful word to a child (Keller 2003, 139). Sullivan did not fingerspell into the student's hand "you are deaf and blind." Whatever sense of difference young Helen had of herself and others, her teacher did nothing to reinforce it. Instead, Sullivan used the child's curiosity to full advantage to keep a momentum of learning going strong and seamlessly. In a report to the Perkins School in 1892,

Not a day passes that [Helen] does not want to learn many new words, nor are these merely tangible and sensible objects. For instance, she one day wished to know the meaning of the following words: *Phenomenon, comprise, energy, reproduction, extraordinary, perpetual* and *mystery*. Some of these words have successive steps of meaning, beginning with what is simple and leading to what is abstract. It would have been a hopeless task to make Helen comprehend the more abstruse meanings of the word *mystery*, but she understood more readily that it signified something hidden or concealed, and when she makes greater progress she will grasp its more abstruse meaning as easily as she now does the simpler signification (Keller 2003, 200).

These observations are by no means pedestrian. They resonate with research questions today on the neurophysiology of social cognition.¹⁶

What a deaf-blind child and the hearing and seeing child have in common is the tightly knit relationship of sensory experience with embodiment.

Finding parity with how “normal” children learn drove Sullivan to find ways that her student could as much like other students as she could despite her disability. The following passage appears in an 1891 report to the Perkins School:

I regard my pupil as a free and active being, whose own spontaneous impulses must be my surest guide. I have always talked to Helen exactly as I would talk to a seeing and hearing child, and I have insisted that other people should do the same. Whenever any one asks me if she will understand this or that word I always reply: “Never mind whether she understands each separate word of a sentence or not. She will guess the meanings of the new words from their connection with others which are already intelligible to her.” In selecting books for Helen to read, I have never chosen them with reference to her deafness and blindness. She always reads such books as seeing and hearing children of her age read and enjoy. Of course, in the beginning it was necessary that the things described should be familiar and interesting, and the English pure and simple (Keller 2003, 201).

When a young Helen asked why she could not see as others did, Sullivan assured her that she could see as well but with her fingers (Keller 2003, 171). Despite her modesty about teaching, Sullivan’s success was nothing short of astonishing, but she believed it was merely the result of following her student. The following exchange with Keller age eleven, recounted in a report is exemplary.

A few evenings ago we were discussing the tariff. Helen wanted me to tell her about it. I said: “No. You cannot understand it yet.” She was quiet a moment, and

¹⁶ Many strands of research take up the question of social cognition raising questions about the sources and mechanisms of empathy as a neurological phenomenon. See Gallese, “The ‘Shared Manifold’ Hypothesis from Mirror Neurons to Empathy” (Gallese 2001). Also, for an overview of the evolutionary implications for the appearance of empathy among humans, see Lieberman, *Social: why are brains are wired to connect* (Lieberman 2013).

then asked, with spirit: “How do you know I cannot understand? I have a good mind! You must remember, dear teacher, that Greek parents were very particular with their children, and they used to let them listen to wise words, and I think they understood some of them.” I have found it best not to tell her that she cannot understand, because she is almost certain to become excited (Keller 2003, 199).

Sullivan’s child-centered approach to teaching served her pupil well. While Sullivan regarded what she actually did as simple and practical, there were favorable consequences that Sullivan could not have known or foreseen. In her own way, Sullivan expressed an essential principle of a Deweyan understanding of the relationship of the child with her environment. The child comes into the world with a body ready to grow, seeking knowledge through every resource available to her, beginning with her own body. There is inner and inherent logic to the cooperation of the sensory recourses every child possesses. Observing that a “normal” child learns in a certain way caused Sullivan to consider the principles underlying the learning, which she articulated as “imitation” and “assimilation,” insights that will be the subjects in Piagetian developmental psychology.¹⁷ Sullivan was thus well ahead of her time. The clarity of Sullivan’s thinking about teaching is reflected in the following quote.

It’s a great mistake, I think to put children off with falsehoods and nonsense, when their growing powers of observation and discrimination excite in them a desire to know about things. From the beginning, I have made it a practice to answer all of Helen’s questions to the best of my ability in way intelligible to her and at the same time truthfully.... (Keller 2003, 166).

Education was Helen Keller’s *favoring wind*, to borrow a metaphor from Dewey, uncovering the transactional nature of relations that provoke, inhibit, or advance the

¹⁷ Sullivan uses a concept that will later become central to Piaget, i.e., *assimilation* (Piaget, Cook, and Norton 1952).

growth. “If, and as far as the organism continues to develop, it is helped on as *favoring wind* [italics added] helps the runner” (Dewey 2005, 61). Anne Sullivan was the *favoring wind*. While in the beginning Sullivan worked hard to establish discipline – something dramatically a part of every portrayal of Sullivan’s early experience with her student, she wrote in a letter that she did not want to “break her spirit” (Keller 2003, 138). Sullivan recognized the strong spirit as a capability, and an advantage that she as a teacher could use to promote learning. The child’s curiosity was something Sullivan counted on and exploited to full advantage. The result was an independent mind evident from the very fact that Keller questioned the originality of her own mind at times, demonstrating a deeper insight about how all minds grow. No teacher can predict all of the results of her teaching. Under the best circumstances, the child will demonstrate an independence of mind the exact shape of which can never be foreseen. As this inquiry unfolds, this background serves to give context to my inquiry question, “How does one with a disability come to find and believe oneself capable?”

CHAPTER TWO

Sources

The primary sources for this inquiry are excerpts from Helen Keller's public addresses, letters, and Keller's first two autobiographies, *The Story of My Life* (Keller 2003) published as a book when Keller was still in college, and *The World I Live In* (Keller 1914) published five years later. Of these two texts, the second, *The World I Live In* is more relevant for capability consciousness because it is a phenomenological text that describes reflections leading to consciousness. This text can be read as a philosophical work about the larger problem of meaning, or from the perspective of developmental psychology or psychoanalysis on the process of identity development.

In *The Story of My Life*, Keller's own account makes up less than a third of the original published version, and proceeds, more or less chronologically, up to her time as a student at Radcliffe. In the original publication of *The Story of My Life*, letters by Anne Sullivan to a friend at the Perkins School were included along with reports Sullivan turned in to the School Director for the Perkins School Annual Reports. My other sources are taken from primarily from a collection of public addresses and text analysis by Lois J. Einhorn in book entitled, *Helen Keller Public Speaker: Sightless But Seen, Deaf but Heard* (1998).

I read all of these texts as phenomenological sources for understanding the process of education. Throughout this inquiry I quote Helen Keller extensively, and often in large block quotes, because the depth and power of what she writes needs a fuller context than isolated quotes interspersed with sentences of analysis can provide. If Keller is to have voice, then her voice has to appear with the fullness of her imagery, logic, and emotional power that characterizes her rhetoric. Hers is first-person perspective aware of the multiple voices necessary to explain and make herself recognizable to others. Keller's example demonstrates how others are crucial to developing a sense of one's own capability from the start.

My interest in Helen Keller asks more about her education than the simple fact she learned to fingerspell as a child. What this inquiry is resolutely not about is the sentimental story of overcoming tragedy, often the focus of interest in Keller as a child. Instead, I am interested in how Keller came to know and believe herself capable. Keller's fame played a role in her learning, but it was not responsible for her learning. Often in her public remarks about disability, Keller seemed to conform to a cultural narrative that disability was something to overcome, without sufficiently attending to the social constructions imposed on disability. In her remarks about herself, Keller clearly recognized when others imposed limits on what she could do, referring to "critics." Keller's desire to engage in the public realm drove her to defend her right to do so. Because she was a public figure by virtue of her disability, Keller's defense of herself became public.

Autobiographical narrative is an outward expression of subjectivity. Others are an intended audience. Narrative is data for self-comprehension and making oneself recognizable to others. These observations are consistent with narrative inquiry as a form of qualitative research, but also useful for a philosophical analysis of autobiographical text where the objective is to identify general themes that project meanings that transcend the text for application to other situations. In qualitative research, the subjectivity of the researcher becomes part of the inquiry process, and correspondingly, the identification of philosophical presuppositions embedded in an autobiographical text necessarily interact with the philosophical presuppositions of the inquirer to provoke, clarify, or reconstruct some larger meaning. Therefore, an autobiographical text involves some philosophical reflection on meaning.

The context of the narrative is critical to its understanding. The temporal dimensions of the text are critical in the construction of the truth (meaning) of the text for the subject who authors the text and for the researcher who reads the text. Hence, different forms of meaningful truth emerge and interact with each other as the researcher grapples with the nature of the original experience, and reflections that are imposed on to the text. Meanings gleaned from the text are a negotiation between the present consciousness of the researcher and the consciousness speaking from and within the text. Narrative is described by Denzin as “retrospective meaning-making—the shaping and ordering of past narrative... including the narrator’s point of view” (Denzin and Lincoln 2011, 656).

Autobiographical narratives remain temporally fluid, engaging the “what’s next” in light of what happened before, engaging a reader’s own temporal sense of self. Multiple

voices are read into the narrative, engaging the omniscient perspective of author with the author's subjectivity of the present and of their experience, with the reader's subjectivity and felt omniscience over the whole of the text. Like phenomenology, narrative inquiry is interested in life as lived in a meaningful present, reflected upon, and, with implications for the future, an already happened past that cannot be altered but remains constitutive for the present.

Of all of Keller's writings, it strikes me that *The World I Live In* is an embodied memoir, as Keller's narrative describes the specific nature of her embodiment in all its relations to the surrounding world. Keller wrote of the sensory-perceptual powers of her body, "Sometimes it seems as if the very substance of my flesh were so many eyes looking out at will into a new world every day" (Keller 1914, 41).¹⁸ Elsewhere Keller writes in *The World I Live In*, "Every atom in my body is a vibroscope" (Keller 1914, 49-50). Keller's narrative about the sensory powers of her body highlights sensitivity to the ways she was connected to the world round her. The significance of all these powers of body Keller learned, and in narrative she explains how she learned, and how she could deconstruct her sensory world in ways recognizable to her readers who did not share her experience.

Keller's narratives about her body as a sensory power resonate with many of the central questions of research in the cognitive sciences. I have discovered several scholarly

¹⁸ I want to acknowledge other fine work done on this little known classic by Helen Keller. See Clark and Foster, "Helen Keller and the Touch of Nature" (Clark and Foster 2002); Georgina Kleege, "The Empire of the Normal" (Kleege 2000); in addition to Justin Leiber, "Helen Keller Cognitive As Scientist" (Leiber 1996). Each of these authors recognizes *The World I Live In* as a phenomenological account of her sensory world.

articles that support this assertion quite clearly. One representative example, “Helen Keller: Cognitive Scientist” (1996) makes the point that what Keller wrote about her sensory and thought world is thoroughly grounded in recent research.

Helen’s case, as acutely described and argued by Keller, casts light on the current debate on the relationship of language, thought, sensory experience, and consciousness (Leiber 1996, 438).

Hence, Keller’s autobiographical texts resonate as narrative embodiment that might be read alongside theoretical work and experimentation. A case example rendered in narrative has possibilities for illuminating many fields of research at the same time, prompting changes in perspective that ask how the various field fit together to render human experience comprehensible. Even empirical research depends on propositions that pose questions and the autobiographical grants insight into the existential significance of empirical and theoretical questions.

Peregrinations

*She is my mother; my sisters are the Seasons;
My rising and falling march with theirs.
Born thus, I ask to be no other man
Than I am, and will know who I am.*

~Sophocles, *Oedipus the King*¹⁹

I am a disability studies philosopher of education. I view disability through a philosophical lens that raises questions for education, not only with persons with

¹⁹ This quote from “Oedipus the King” appears in Adrianna Cavarero’s *Relating Narratives: Storytelling and Selfhood* (Cavarero 2014, 11).

disabilities, but others who may not identify with disability as a social question. My concerns are theoretical and practical. I have arrived at this inquiry by a circuitous path. Most of my direct experience with disability has been with intellectual disability, so choosing Helen Keller for a case study may seem unusual, but this requires some preliminary comments.

Experiences I had as a child have facilitated understanding disability as more than a remedial problem. My earliest experience of disability was with the mental illness of a parent. Consequently, I experienced disability as an ontological question, before I had the philosophical vocabulary. Disability is as much a philosophical issue as it is a practical matter for day-to-day life. While graduate study in special education was necessary and useful for my work, I have always framed questions philosophically. To my good fortune, I have found philosophy of education eminently practical from its roots. Every path must lead somewhere into practice. I was introduced to John Dewey. I discovered in reading Dewey that his philosophy was synoptic in scope, taking data in from every field of study. Dewey's philosophy, I found, is an *embodied* philosophy. His writings on education pay attention to the student as an embodied entity with propensities, needs, and, most of all, a drive for a sense of meaning that embraces body and mind as one. Applying these insights to how education should operate seemed eminently practical for students with disabilities. In any event, my advisor, knowing that I worked in the field of disabilities suggested I think about Helen Keller, as a classic example of education and disability. This fruitful event followed a paper I presented in 2008 at the Philosophy of Education Society Conference in Boston with education and disability as its major concern. My

paper, entitled “Disability Consciousness: A Prolegomenon,” was a case study intended to demonstrate perspective changes through consciousness, something I explain more about below.

At the beginning of my career as a doctoral student, I enthusiastically reported my great interest in Hannah Arendt. Arendt, known primarily for her political writings, always couched theory in philosophical terms. I was particularly taken by Arendt’s discussion of the nature of thinking and consciousness in her last work *The Life of the Mind* (1981). My paper “Disability Consciousness: A Prolegomenon” (Surbaugh 2008) thus applied my interest in “consciousness” as philosophical question to an autobiographical novel about a boy with spastic quadriplegia. The book, Christopher Nolan’s *Under the Eye of the Clock* (1987), described a young boy’s experience attending a school with typical children who had never been around a person with a disability, like Joseph. I found the narrative intriguing because it involved Joseph’s own perspective of events and his interpretation of other points of view outside him. The dialogue inside Joseph’s head seemed very much like Arendt’s description of thinking as a dialogue with oneself. The complexity of the novel involved not only Joseph’s description of consciousness in the text, but also the author’s consciousness outside the text from an omniscient point of view. The perspective shifts were like a series of phenomenological lenses brought together to form a story. The consummation of the story occurs when others realize that Joseph has a perspective. He is a “person” like them in every essential way. Inside his “crippled body” there was a person sharing an intersubjective space with others. I illustrated this change through a series of vignettes intended to name phases in

the shift of consciousness that others around Joseph experienced. I called this expansion of perspective “disability consciousness.” When others experienced Joseph as a “defective” object in their midst, disability consciousness was absent. As others began to interact with Joseph, recognizing that his behavior very much signaled a consciousness, they began to allow Joseph into their world as they learned more about his. I called this phase “developing disability consciousness.” The final phase, “clear disability consciousness,” signaled events that demonstrated a full participation in a communal feeling that allowed for a rich inter-subjectively valued experience.

Later as I pondered a dissertation topic on “consciousness” and disability, I realized my case study did not sufficiently delve into why and how Joseph found himself capable. One clue emerged in Joseph’s acquiring his “unicorn stick,” a pointer protruding from a headband that enabled him to point to words to make sentences on an alphabet board. As a result, Joseph could communicate with others. The creation of text itself revealed capability. Nolan described Joseph’s consciousness from a first-person perspective and he also described Joseph’s ability to take the perspective others, and finally, he reveals Joseph’s presentation of events from an author’s omniscient point of view. To be sure, the text showed how Joseph railed against the physical limitations imposed by his disability. Because he could not walk or talk as others did, he was hurt and saddened by the ridicule he received from others. Others were cruelly oblivious to the fact that he understood what the ridicule meant. But despite the clear limiting conditions of Joseph’s circumstance, and even with the ridicule he endured from his classmates, his desire for communication only increased. The climax, again, comes when

others discover that Joseph does have a point of view, and, one that they could share. Over time, others discovered that Joseph had conveyed intentions that were meaningful. Joseph could communicate. Joseph could share with others a common space and share in the activities with all. These reflections on consciousness and capability prepared the ground that led me to think much harder about how one with a profound disability could come regard herself as capable. As a result, I had to leave behind my reference to “disability consciousness” since a concern about capability could in no way be clear using disability consciousness a positive concept.

It was in the context to listening to me grapple with concepts related to disability that my advisor suggested Helen Keller for a potential case study. I recall vividly when my advisor read a passage from Suzanne K. Langer’s *Philosophy in the Key of Life* (Langer 1957) about Helen Keller.

There is a famous passage in the autobiography of Helen Keller, in which this remarkable woman describes the dawn of language upon her mind... One day, her teacher took her out for a walk—and there the great advent of language occurred.

[Langer quoting the text] “We walked down the path to the well-house, attracted by the fragrance of honeysuckle on which it was covered. Someone was drawing water and my teacher placed my hand under the spout. As the cool water gushed over my hand she spelled into the other hand the word *water*, first slowly, than rapidly. I stood with my whole attention fixed upon the motion of her fingers. Suddenly, I felt a misty consciousness as something forgotten—the thrill of a returning thought; and somehow the mystery of language was revealed to me” (Langer 1957, 62-63).²⁰

²⁰ As Langer points out, the miracle of language lies in its reliance on symbol to communicate across contexts. Thus, transformed into a system of symbols, experience is rendered into language. In the human infant communication progresses with the emergence of “joint attention” that establishes the intentionality of communication (Tomasello 2003). Without intentionality, there is no communication. Intentionality not only directs one’s own behavior, it

The reference to consciousness is explicit, but I found the link in the connection that language made possible. For Keller language became capability. Keller's grasp of the "mystery of language" was at once the portal where all learning would emerge. I discovered, in reading more of what Keller wrote about herself from her point of view, the very heart of self-claimed capability. Keller referred to the moment at the well as the "dawn" of her soul. With language, Keller *became a person*. This moment of awakening refracts meaning back into every experience of learning. Keller's awakening was a functional learning, but also becoming symbolic for the attainment of identity. This is evident in her description of prelingual life as "before the soul dawn" (Keller 1914). In Keller's last book, *Teacher*, published in 1955 and dedicated to Anne Sullivan, Keller referred to herself as "phantom" to emphasize her heartfelt belief in the vacancy of her prelingual self (Keller 1955, 37).

Keller writes in *The World I Live In*, "Before my teacher came to me, I did not know that I am. I lived in a no-world" (Keller 1914, 109). If self-narrative is one's truth, then education was Helen Keller's truth. In Keller's retrospective account I found in *The*

is the means by which one can perceive others have mental states as well. The ascription of intention is the basis of all belief formation, shared experience, and, indeed, the foundation of feelings of empathy, where one puts oneself into the place of someone else. See also David Bleich. *Subjective Criticism*, (Bleich 1978). "Helen Keller's account, *unlike any other available* [italics added] details the transition from the sensorimotor state of consciousness, without language, to a symbolic state in which language activated her awareness of herself" (Bleich 1978, 65). According to Bleich, the capacity for symbolization as a representational function of consciousness gives rise to a process he calls re-symbolization which occurs as a desire for explanation that is thoroughly subjective in character. Returning to Langer [quoted by Bleich], "I believe there is a primary need in man, which other creatures probably do not have and activates all his apparently unzoological aims, his wistful fancies, his consciousness of value...(Langer, 45, 46).

Story of My Life and *The World I Live In* fertile ground for exploring the capability consciousness.

If this was the moment that “awakened” Keller’s soul, what could it tell us about identity, one’s consciousness of oneself? The implications beckon for further scrutiny. The strange, perhaps whimsical movements of fingers in her palm, meant “that cool wonderful something,” *water* (Keller 2003, 27). Seen from a developmental perspective this moment signals transference of meaning from something real to something rendered symbolically. Moreover, the role of intention necessary for language received focused reinforcement. Keller learned she had an “analogous mind” separate from her teacher. No child can carry out any thought or action without a sharing of mind with another. Without this ability, there is no mind, which for purposes of this inquiry I will define as a sense of identity. This working definition follows Dewey’s description of mind as “the ownership of meanings” (Dewey 1971, [c1938]), which requires an owner with a distinct perception of separateness that distinguishes an “I.” The sense of “I can” follows the perception of “I.” The child from birth explores what she can do, with a bodily memory that builds on what was done before. “Mind” continues the child along the path for possessing “I can.” With this realization, I concluded that the “I can” comes

CHAPTER THREE

Capability and Consciousness

~ Capability

The word “capability,” like all condition nouns in the English language, has a complex and rich etymological history. The words “capable” and “habit” share a similar root. The sense of both of these two words, capable and habit, closet to my purpose are the words, “inhabit” or “hold.” The *OED* references “capable,” the adjectival” of the noun capability, as “to be able to take in,” receive or contain, or hold, having room or capacity (Dictionary 2004). From these etymological considerations, I am conceiving capability as “able to take in” linked with the words “habit” and “disposition” (Dictionary 2004) (c.f. *OED* “disposition” as a condition of being set in order”). Learning, I argue, is a process of taking in that which has practical or use value. I am highlighting learning as an adaptation that assimilates information in response to environmental demand. Once acquired, learning stands in wait for a demand for its use. Learning is assimilated into the repertoire of responsiveness that the individual possesses (Dewey 2002). However, before capability is realized there is a pre-reflective, non-cognitive potential that disposes a human organism to open itself and sense what is happening or could happen. Dewey argues in “The Reflex Arc in Psychology” (1896) that no behavior can be understood incrementally (Dewey 1998). The meaning and the trajectory of the behavior are found

in the ends it attains. Behaviors in a human infant are directed outward as an innate propensity. However, behaviors are more or less undifferentiated and become associated with a total event such as having nutritional needs met or being comforted. Behavioral sequences that are paired with ends are pre-reflectively grasped as they become habitual. Capabilities arise from propensities both innate and those built from experience. As Dewey argues about habits, habits lay in wait for their use. Hence, this is the foundation for a claim that the experience of capability precedes any knowing or self-possession of capability. The process is circular. With consciousness capability is reflected upon and contributes to a dispositional state I have named capability consciousness. In sum, capability is a dispositional possibility that follows an accumulation of experiences of capability. Experiences of capability demonstrate and reinforce agency as one experiences one's actions as having an impact on an environment.

My choice of the word "capability" as opposed to "capacity" is simple to explain. Capability seems to me to have a practical assessment based on experience that implicates possibilities. "Capacity" on the other hand seems to have a connotation of a known limit. Capability can mean potential, and it can mean a known ability, making capability an ideal choice for expressing the modal phrase "I can" as a matter of learning with practical significance. The connotation of potentiality implied by the word capability is aptly captured in the so-called "capabilities approach" theorized by Martha Nussbaum and Amartya Sen that asks what individuals can do when resources are made available to

them as a matter of justice.²¹ Nussbaum in particular has theorized the capabilities approach and its practical applications for individuals with disability (Nussbaum 2007, 109). This connection of capability with resources is vitally important to capability consciousness since capability depends on both the powers one has and the environment in which one lives.

~ **Consciousness**

The word “consciousness” is complex because of its relationship in English and in its Latin cognates to other words such as “conscious” and “conscience” (Dictionary 2004)²² Use of the word consciousness denotes the phenomenon of awareness and connotes knowing self. In everyday life one, when awake, one might be described as being in a state of consciousness. However, one is still unaware of everything that has a

²¹ The Capabilities Approach (sic) may be provisionally defined as an approach to comparative quality-of-life assessment and to theorizing about social justice. It holds that the key question to ask, when comparing societies and assessing them for basic decency or justice is, “What is each person able to do and to be? In other words, the approach takes *each person as an end*, asking not just what about the total or average well-being but the opportunities available to each person. It is *focused* on choice or freedom, holding that crucial good societies should be promoting for their people is asset of opportunities, or substantial freedoms, which people then may or may not exercise in action; the choice is theirs. It thus commits itself to respect people’s power of self-determination (Nussbaum 2011, 18-19).

²² *OED* “consciousness”

<http://www.oed.com.ezproxy.lib.ou.edu/view/Entry/39477?redirectedFrom=consciousness#eid>
accessed December 14, 2014

OED “conscious”

<http://www.oed.com.ezproxy.lib.ou.edu/view/Entry/39475?redirectedFrom=conscious#eid>;

“Conscience”

<http://www.oed.com.ezproxy.lib.ou.edu/view/Entry/39460?rskey=zb9EAh&result=1#eid>

direct impact on one's state. Consciousness can mean the possibilities for becoming aware, and awareness is a condition for knowledge. In neither case can conscious or the state of being conscious, i.e., consciousness, escape semantic difficulties since awareness is never total. In philosophy, phenomenology asks about how things appear in consciousness. This question can never escape the fact that every thought about what appears in consciousness is always an afterthought. There are other considerations for the concept of consciousness related to words with the same etymological root (Dictionary 2004).²³

The etymology of “conscious” and “conscience” is derived from the Latin *consciūs* meaning to share knowledge (Dictionary 2004).²⁴ In French the same word i.e., *conscience*, is used for consciousness and conscience, whereas in English two words denote different processes that both share in common, the connotation of “awareness” (Arendt 1978, 190).²⁵ Conscious thus means “inwardly aware” versus conscience, a faculty that “judges what is good and bad” (Dictionary 2004).²⁶

To simplify matters, I have turned to Hannah Arendt and her working definition of consciousness that one is “for oneself,” putting together the various denotative and

²³ *OED* “conscious” <http://www.oed.com.ezproxy.lib.ou.edu/view/Entry/39475>.

²⁴ See citation above for “conscious” for reference to “conscious.”

²⁵ Arendt writes that it took a long time for consciousness and conscience to be separated in language.

²⁶ *OED* “conscience.” <http://www.oed.com.ezproxy.lib.ou.edu/view/Entry/39460?rskey=zb9EAh&result=1#eid>

connotative uses of the word consciousness.²⁷ This simple definition suits my purpose to analyze a narrative that is clearly a reflection on consciousness and experience. For Hannah Arendt and for many phenomenologists, whatever consciousness is, it is embodied.²⁸ Hence, there is more to be said about consciousness as it pertains to this inquiry because I am concerned with knowing and identity formation.

The consciousness literature is abundant, particularly in the cognitive sciences. I cannot cite every possible relevant piece of literature on consciousness as a topic of cognitive research (Zelazo, Moscovitch, and Thompson 2007). I focus on sources that grant consciousness an embodied foundation and I am interested in not only consciousness as awareness, but all of the unconscious or pre-reflective substrates that contribute to the coherence of experience and the exercise of felt agency, the broad outlines of which Dewey had already traced in his voluminous works.

Indeed, John Dewey is a unifying figure for this inquiry. In recent years, some philosophers with interest in the cognitive sciences have noted that Dewey conceptualized embodiment and environment as constitutive of experience and felt meaning early on (Rockwell 2005, Johnson 2007). Dewey theorized the role of body in perception and

²⁷ Arendt refers to the Greek word *syneidenai* as equivalent to the English word consciousness which she renders as “to know with myself,” which combines knowing and knower as one and the same (Arendt 1978, 74). One being “for” oneself describes how one can be the subject of one’s own thoughts.

²⁸ Arendt’s meditation on thinking augments my discussion of consciousness precisely because her insights are a crystallization of the phenomenological tradition through Husserl and Heidegger (Arendt 1978). Arendt’s reference to consciousness as reflexive and dialogic through language illumines a reading of Keller’s description of coming to personhood through language through which she developed her will and her intellect. While Arendt describes thinking and memory as making the absent present she, too, roots thought in metaphors that are drawn from the bodily senses.

knowledge as dependent on each other (Dewey 1958, 333). His understanding of body, knowing, and unity of behavior are apparent even in his 1896 article “The Reflex Arc in Psychology” (Dewey 1998). Dewey rejected a stimulus-response model of behavior as failing to take into account meaning arising from an organic unity of meaning (Dewey 1998, Pronko and Herman 1982). In this scheme, unlike tenets of behaviorism, the stimulus does not control the response rather the response shapes the meaning of the stimulus as a relation (See Chemero 2011, 19-20). Considered as a unit of analysis, the stimulus and the response form a circle not an arc from which meaning is derived from the whole. The body is central to an experience of meaning – significance – arises from a whole. Dewey writes in “Qualitative Thought” (Dewey 1984) to describe the experience of significance holistically,

The only way that a form can operate as an immediate link is by the mode of a directly experienced quality, something present and prior to and independent of all reflective analysis, something of the same nature which controls artistic construction. In psychological language it is felt and the feeling is made explicit or a term of thought in the idea of another promontory (Dewey 1984, 204).

Feeling signals an intentional consciousness, something the classical phenomenologists asserted as well, where consciousness is always about something (Dermot 2000, 8 & 246). There is no objectless consciousness. Consciousness always has content. Intentionality and feeling are pre-reflective substrates, structures of consciousness. Consciousness is a condition for responsiveness but not necessarily in the

form of complete and constant awareness of behavior.²⁹ However, one cannot conclude that when exercising a behavior, that one is, strictly speaking, unconscious. Dewey's conception of habit, again, draws attention to the workings of habit that are purposeful, but not conscious to the doer. Habit frames the background narrative, imbuing the content of narrative with feelings that accompany a reflection that reflect themes of experience. All narrative appears as the fruit of an afterthought, collecting the seamless process of perceptions, transformed into conceptions, and, only then rendered communicative by the telling to oneself or others. Reflection is a necessary part of narrative. Reflection is a process of temporal movement between past and present, foregrounding a future, where one may or may not be present. Placing oneself in a narrative stream involves recollections filled with emotional history that qualifies the content of what is remembered. Conceptualizing experience as a phenomenological stream of happenings, or from the perspective of the cognitive sciences that ask how one experiences anything at all, takes for granted that what is experienced has an internal coherence whether the content is real or illusory. Narrative is indifferent to the mechanisms of sensory data and its relations to perception, because one does not stand outside of one's sensory perception.

²⁹ To underscore how consciousness has both a pre-reflective and reflective aspects, I turn to Dewey's *Experience and Nature* (Dewey 1958). Dewey takes aim at cognition as the only means of knowing experience. This point is necessary to dislodge the privileging of cognition in the sciences. The immediacy of feeling has to depend on a substrate that precedes conscious awareness that, while subject to reflection, rises up without intentional control apart from the relations that already exist between the human organism and the environment. Again, returning to Dewey's argument in "The Reflex Arc in Psychology," Dewey's claims that the response names the significance of the stimulus (Dewey 1998). The meaning is found in the circle of relations. Meaning arises not incrementally, but only in reference to a whole sequence of behavior. In order for this to work, consciousness as an explicit awareness is not what makes meaning, it only reflects on a meaning already there.

One does not see oneself seeing, hear oneself hearing, or touch oneself touching, etc., yet, narrative proceeds on the assumption that one has seen, heard, or touched something that exists now in recollection.

~ “Capability + Consciousness”

Putting together the concepts of “capability” and “consciousness” together to form a new concept draws on the meaning of each word. From the *Oxford Dictionary of the English Language (OED)*, the etymological meaning of the word capability draws on several interrelated words (Dictionary 2004).³⁰ The Latin “capabilis” is related to the words, “habit,” “ability,” and “capacity.” Each of these words, “capability” (or “capable” from the Latin, *capabilis*), “ability,” and “capacity” (Latin, *capacitas*) share the same cognate roots with the words “habit” (Latin, *habilis*), meaning “to dwell” or “reside.” While “habit” is generally understood as repetitive behavior, habit’s connotation of “dwelling” or “residing” point to a broader context of relations between a “self” and the “World.” The word “habitation” retains the sense of “habit” as “dwelling,” recognizable in the word “inhabit.” The word “ability” in English actually evolved from the word habit, and means “to make” or “to do,” or simply “to be able.” The prefix of “cap” in capability means “to hold,” or to “contain,” or “take into one’s hands.”

This etymological survey of the words “consciousness” and “capability” permit, I argue, my use of the concept of capability consciousness as involving not only behavior

³⁰ *OED* “capability”

<http://www.oed.com.ezproxy.lib.ou.edu/view/Entry/27353?redirectedFrom=capability+#eid>
“habit” <http://www.oed.com.ezproxy.lib.ou.edu/view/Entry/82980?rskey=1o7f4i&result=3#eid>.

and potential behavior, but also disposition as an orientation towards oneself described in criteria for a clear case and cases where capability is not a thematizing dimension of one's identity.

To illustrate capability consciousness as a learned attitude or disposition, I turn to John Dewey's discussion of "habit," a central feature of his moral philosophy. My objective is to conceptualize capability consciousness as having many of the attributes that Dewey describes as the essential features of habit. Dewey writes in *Human Nature and Social Conduct* (2002) that *habit* is "profitably compared with physiological functioning," because it becomes a feature of embodied behavior (Dewey 2002, 14). Habits construct the self. Habits are for Dewey the equivalent of "will," in the sense that habits function to actualize the self, propelling the individual forward purposefully into the world (Dewey 2002, 42).

The essence of a habit is acquired predisposition to ways or modes of response, not to particular acts except as, under special conditions, those express a way of behaving. Habits mean a special sensitiveness or accessibility to certain classes of stimuli, standing predilections and aversions, rather than bare recurrences of specific acts. [Again] it means will" (Dewey 2002, 42).

Habits are thus dispositions or pre-reflective tendencies toward activities that are acquired through learning. Habits function as "ways of using and incorporating the environment" through reciprocal relationships between the self and the surrounding world" (Dewey 2002, 15). Habit forms interpenetrate the self, and become constitutive of character. Habits individuate a person and Dewey asserts that habits are the equivalent of will, when he claims, "we are the habit" (full quote below).

Functionally, habits are dispositions toward certain kinds of behavior that remain relatively stable over time, and as constitutive of one's character, become a lens for self-perception for oneself and for others. Habits are not simply repetitive behaviors, but orientations toward certain kinds of behavior that are characterized by certain ways of thinking. Habits embed themselves organically into the physical behavior of the self, and in this fashion unite with physiological function.

Important to Dewey's treatment of habit is his rejection of any form of metaphysical dualism, in the form of body versus mind, or body and brain, or separating the physical from the social. Indeed, in *Experience and Nature*, Dewey introduces the concept of "body-mind" to describe the inseparability of mind and the body (Dewey 1958, 248-297). Moreover, Dewey's metaphysics used "situation" as a concept to emphasize experience as relations between organisms and environments (Dewey 1984).

The connections between organisms and environment and its implications for framing experience and knowing are described in *Art as Experience* (Dewey 2005). Dewey describes aesthetic experience as a heightened demarcation of the relations between a conscious self, situated in an interactive context, and an environment (Dewey 2005, 30).

No creature lives merely under its skin; its cutaneous organ are *means of connection* [italics added] with what lies beyond its bodily frame, and to which in order to live, it must adjust itself by accommodation and defense but also by conquest... The career and destiny of living being are bound up its interchanges with its environment, not externally, but in the most intimate way (Dewey 2005, 12).

With these considerations in mind, Dewey frames consciousness as a self-bound intentionality that recognizes meaningful patterns and forms that fund the formation of

purposes. Against the common perception that habits are simply repetitive behaviors, something Dewey takes pains to assert, I propose that consciousness and habit are indeed related as habits expand the resources of consciousness for the formation of purposes. Dewey holds that consciousness is the medium by which patterns are recognized.

The distinguishing contribution of consciousness is the relations found in nature. Through consciousness, [the human being] converts the relations of cause and effect that are found in nature into relations of means and consequence... Consciousness itself is the inception of such a transformation (Dewey 2005, 25).

Interchanges with the environment become as habitual as tendencies within consciousness itself. Relations of cause and effect become habitual ways of thinking, that, in turn, form dispositions that guide and direct activity without conscious recognition. Habits are the unseen foundations in the execution of purposeful activities, hence Dewey's reference to "predisposition" evident in both execution and later in conscious formulation of aims and purposes. Purpose is executed through a whole series of behaviors. I walk to the door in order to exit, not in order to lift one foot after another mechanistically. All my activity takes on a "in order to" character that connects sequences into purposeful ends. Habit is agency of purpose, according to Dewey:

All habits are demands for certain kinds of activity; and they constitute the self. In any intelligible sense of the word will, *they are will* [italics added]. They form our effective desires and furnish us with working capacities. They rule our thoughts, determining which shall appear and be strong and which will pass from the light into obscurity (Dewey 2002, 25).

"Working capacities" frame the possibilities for what a person will do, want to do, and what they believe that they can do. Capability consciousness as a habit of mind becomes a disposition that informs the content and self-perception of who one is. Given Dewey's

broad description of habit as formative of identity, I will describe capability consciousness as a thematizing property of one's identity.

PART TWO

CHAPTER FOUR

I am the happy object of a rare friendship [which] makes my teacher a seer of capabilities folded away in me that darkness and silence would hide from most people.

~Helen Keller

Theory of Capability Consciousness

In this chapter, I outline the theory of capability consciousness drawn from a reading of Helen Keller's narratives about herself. At the foundation of this theory is the concept of parity that assumes every student exists in a web of relations that implicate identity. Helen Keller accepted differences with others, but in her case, she acted to define which differences mattered. In the end, I show that Helen Keller is an exemplary case of capability consciousness because she claimed parity through a different means; she experienced the same epistemological and ontological consequences as those with sight and hearing. What Keller represents as an exemplary case is not the content or specific parameters of her achievements, but rather an illustration of the full habitation of the capabilities that she did have. In other words, Keller provides insight on the internal perception of what capability consciousness means for one's identity as a capable person. Differences of ability dictate different degrees of achievable capability vis-à-vis others. However, a full habitation of what one can do, should, and ought to be is something that education holds as a central aim.

Helen Keller believed her fundamental capability lay in her grasp and use of language. Keller defended her capability to know and enter the public realm with thoughts and opinions about how things should be. This form of capability was something important to Keller based on what she learned and knew she could do. Of course, not everyone has the capabilities that Keller had, but the conditions that promote the capability we all possess are based on the parity of circumstances based on propensity and need, and all of the conditions under which humans live together successfully. The following are set of six propositions I draw from a reading of Keller's narratives that form the conceptual structure for a theory of capability consciousness.

1. *Keller believed herself capable. Keller believed in capabilities that not only remediated disability but also cancelled limitation.*

Keller believed her direct sensory experience was sufficient for her to imaginatively construct epistemological parities with individuals who could see and hear. Keller learned that what she had in common with others was the composite resources of sense and cognition to form knowledge. Moreover, Keller came to understand so well she could articulate her experience and epistemological competence in a rhetorically compelling manner. Keller's capability for this form of epistemological defense was self-reinforcing and constituted an experience of clear capability consciousness. In her favor was an education that suited the experiential base of her early life. She was ready to learn language, something that her teacher understood and used. As I discuss later, the nurturing care that Keller received in early life is essential to the capability consciousness of any child with or without a disability.

The world simply opens up to the sensory resources the child has. However, the world opening up to her is the normal world. As I have stressed earlier a *disabled* identity is learned. Only when the child perceives limitation vis-à-vis others, and begins to understand the concept of comparison imposed by others, does she feel or experience limitation. If, however, the environment is shaped to advantage the resources the child does have, then a repertoire of capabilities can build to overcome or subvert whatever perceived limitation the child has, for example, the use of sign with a child born deaf. Sign is widely recognized as a language with a cultural community to support its existence. In circumstances where the hearing and the deaf learn sign and use it, there may be no perception of disability, a fact made plain in Groce's historical account of the inclusive community of deaf with hearing individuals on Martha's Vineyard (Groce 2001). There are numerous of other examples of circumstances that render physical disability less problematic for navigation, or technologies that augment capabilities to communicate. In any case, the communicability of what one knows had many potential means of expression and access.

2. *Keller connected herself with others, by using her powers of her own embodiment to defend her parity with others as a knowing subject.*³¹

One learns that one is disabled with experience. Keller understands this when she writes that the deaf-blind child does not fear the darkness but finds it “kindly” (Keller 1914, 122). One learns disability before one can “unlearn” disability, meaning that even though one learns that others name one as disabled, one’s learning can contest limitations that are attributed to one’s disability, however defined. A pattern of learning occurs. First from the perspective of the child, there is no disability, only the ways in which the child can influence and interact with the environment. Then, there is learning from others that one has attributes that others consider abnormal, again, learning and forming one’s identity is relational and perspectival. One learns to take the perspective of the other, to see themselves as others see them. In Keller’s case, it was her intellect and facility with language that supported her own view of herself as capable. These attributes were her primary means of connection with others in ways she found meaningful. When she

³¹ “Embodiment” is a central concept in this inquiry. It is used in many different genres of the sciences and humanities. I am using the concept both metaphysically and ontologically. As an example of this use, Gibbs writes, “A body is not just something we own, it is something we are” (Gibbs 2006, 14). Further, he writes, “I claim that the regularities of people’s kinesthetic-tactile experience not only constitute the core of their conceptions of personhood, but form the foundation of higher order cognition” (15). The complexity of relations between concepts like body, mind, self, soul, etc., is so difficult and interconnected that frequently the concepts are used interchangeably. Dewey is acutely aware of these difficulties and always takes great pains to point out the nuances of difference and where similarities of use are appropriate. In any case, this inquiry proceeds under the same metaphysical premise that Dewey asserts throughout his oeuvre that dualisms are often false and misleading. The basis of my use of concepts of self, selfhood, mind, etc., are all unified under the rubric of the first person perspective of “having” a body, and that one’s body is a means of expressing identity. Keller was temperamentally a dualist but in her discussion of her first-person perspective is necessarily embodied in character, a point I make later.

encountered obstacles or instances less than clear, she could use the resources of her body to clarify descriptions of her sensations, articulate thoughts, and connect pieces of information.

Helen Keller learned to overcome limiting conditions and obstacles to further learning and enable a fuller more satisfying connection with others. Experience with overcoming obstacles is part of the life of every child. If the child is successful with learning, whatever is learned becomes part of the repertoire of the child's behavior. Overcoming of obstacles, learning new things are greeted by others as signs of growth and possibility, hence, the importance of the relational dimension of learning. What the child can do becomes part of the child's self-perceived identity and how others construct an identity perspective about the child. Under favorable circumstances of learning, a child gains resources to challenge situations or others who threaten the child with a disabled identity. Direct experience intersects with instruction. An educator constructs circumstances where the child can be successful, and then introduces circumstances that require that the child encounter a degree of manageable struggle. A good teacher introduces lessons that the child is ready to learn.³² Skills necessary for this new learning have to be in some nascent state, before the child can be successful with further aid by the teacher. Under favorable circumstances, the child desires novelty and explores the world about her. She uses what she knows to explore what she does not know, all the

³² This statement appears as a proposition; however, citations for its support are numerous. Dewey will suffice in this case, see *The Child and the Curriculum* (Dewey 2001). Acknowledgement of stages of growth is part of classical treatises on education. See John Locke, *Some thought on Education* (Locke 1996) or Rousseau's *Emile* (Rousseau and Bloom 1979).

while supported by others who provide protection when it is needed and allow freedoms that are important to the child's autonomy and self-reliance.

3. *Keller faced serious skepticism over her capabilities to know, experienced as questions over the legitimacy of her identity as hers.*

Early in Helen Keller's life, she faced skepticism about her capability. This continued into adulthood and because of Keller's interest in politics she had to defend her voice as legitimate and informed. Keller learned that others believed that her deaf-blindness cut her off from the world, which required a defense to counter such beliefs. Even the nature of Keller's relationship with her teacher generated negative appraisals of Keller's capabilities. The closeness of Keller's relationship with her teacher caused some to suspect that whatever capability Keller displayed could not be her own. Because Keller understood such beliefs, she used strategies she learned involving rhetoric and argument to make a case for her own epistemological identity. Keller became adept at using analogies, metaphors, and various forms of logical argument. Many were persuaded, and some were not, but Keller developed the confidence to hold her own views about the world and could articulate complexities that many others could not do.

Something must happen for the child to understand that others view them differently. However, the child can be taught that difference is natural and everyone compensates for skills that they do not have through the support of others. A child may learn other ways to do and participate in things that are socially valued. These other means of adaptation help children redress others' perspectives that believe participation is not possible. Exposure to children with disabilities doing all manner of things can enlighten

others who have had no sustained contact with marked disability in children. In Keller's case, she addressed skepticism in direct rhetorical confrontation through systematic deconstruction of the contingent nature of all sensory experience and construction of knowledge.

Limitation and limiting conditions need not simply limit or obstruct learning. Moreover, limiting conditions can function positively to motivate. Also, favoring circumstances can intervene providing conditions that encourage growth and flourishing. Education can operate as just such a favoring condition.

A child with a disability often faces skepticism concerning her capability. Supportive others must equip the child with a full sense of inhabiting what they can do, and that what they can do is valuable to others as well. Positive caregivers and teachers moderate the environment interceding when necessary to protect a child with disabilities from experiences of damaging failure and sometimes from the prejudices of others that communicate messages of invalidity and incompetence to the child. Children can be taught to exercise self-advocacy that is recognizable to others. Others can work to change environmental circumstances to serve the child's growing sense of identity and worth. The consequence of such supports is a sense of capability consciousness that continues into adulthood. One is empowered to demand inclusion in the goods of society, and in decisions that affect not only one's interests but also the interests of all.

4. *Keller attributed her capabilities to education and demonstrated great skill in describing how education informed and supported her capabilities.*

Keller believed her capabilities were the clear result of her education. She understood her education as her teacher's guidance through direct experience, enhancing her powers of thought and connection. For Keller education was a constructive process that built and furthered understanding with every new experience. Connection granted her own experience, meaning that she learned to describe in a common language with others. Keller's exploration of the world was concentrated by an intensive exploration of the world about her, accompanied by a constant influx of information connected to sense experience. Keller's skills at rhetorical self-defense depended on the relentless exposure to comparisons that generalized understandings that were more complex. Analogy was a fundamental strategy deployed in Keller's education by her teacher.

5. *Keller's self-narratives illustrate a disposition toward being capable as a way of being.*

Keller's approach to life was based on the capabilities that she had and valued. Keller's descriptive narratives about the beauty of her sensory experience testify to a full habitation of her sensory and intellectual powers. This suggests that there is an aesthetic dimension to capability consciousness that incorporates feelings generated by a satisfying pleasing experience. Keller's political interests were not shared in common with her teacher (Nielsen 2009, 191). Politics served instead as an expression of her individual desire to connect with others in ways of her choosing (Nielsen 2004, 43). The unique circumstances of Keller's life and the extraordinary support she received through her notoriety were a consequence of the interest in how her deaf-blindness differed from the

typically abled and this worked in her favor. However, her education was premised on a full use of her sensory powers to enjoy the world as it opened up for her.

Again, the existence of unfavorable circumstances can serve an instrumental role to instigate a positive change. Responding to the unfavorable, one can marshal resources and reorganize an environment. To illustrate how unfavorable circumstances and opposing forces can instigate positive change I will cite specific incidents in Keller's life. Every obstacle carries with it the risk of disabling capability consciousness, but frequently in Keller's case she was able to marshal the internal and external resources she needed to transform obstacles into motivations. Marshaling emotional and cognitive resources is learned.

Many things other things are learned as well that influence one's cognitive and emotional resources. Certainly, one's adaptation to attitudes are not always positive contributions to capability consciousness. Keller's successful presentation to the public at times depended on a degree of concealing her disability, and packaging her image for public consumption (Nielsen 2004, 133). In some instances, Keller failed to generalize capability as a legitimate possibility for individuals with cognitive impairment, defending her view by using the same logic that applied to criticisms made of her (Nielsen 2004, 11). The concealment of Keller's disability for public presentation nevertheless does not detract from Keller's own assessment of the things that she could do with language.

From the reading of narrative, I propose criteria as constituent propositions for my theory of capability consciousness under circumstances of a clear case. These propositions arise from my analysis of text, and directly address my initial question on

how one with a disability can acquire a habitual identity of capability. Similarly, with disabling cases, and borderline cases, I will identify criteria drawn from my reading of text and an attempt to conceptualize what various descriptions and occurrences mean. A clear case as a thematizing identity involves the following:

1. **Capability disposition:** Belief that one is capable reflected in behavior and one's orientation to new situations through a positive appraisal of one's past and what one knows.
2. **Capability defense:** Emotional and behavioral resources to defend one's capability in the face of circumstances that would challenge one's capability.
3. **Capability propensity:** A curiosity to explore the propensities one has for growth and flourishing.

With clear capability consciousness comes a "capability disposition" reflected by a state of mind and one's orientation to possibilities.

One is habitually "disposed" to consider oneself as capable. In English, the etymology of the word "disposition" involves several different related senses (Dictionary 2004).³³ For example, disposition can mean "setting into order," or indicating a relative position; or to the "arrangement of parts." An additional sense important to my use of the word "disposition" is the sense of "existing in a possible state" or having "a natural tendency or bent of mind"; "[a] mental constitution; [or] turn of mind;" "tendency, or inclination"

³³ Oxford English Dictionary, <http://www.oed.com.ezproxy.lib.ou.edu/view/Entry/55123?redirectedFrom=disposition#eid>.

or “aptness for doing something.” As a way of being, “capability disposition” refers to ones being disposed to believing oneself capable as prereflectively given.³⁴ This sense of capability is demonstrated in Helen Keller’s refusal to allow deaf-blindness to deter her sense of possibility for herself as she confronted situations.

With capability consciousness “capability defense” draws on the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral strengths one has in the face of a situation that threaten one’s identity of capability. Learning to communicate is part of the exercise of one’s agency, and thus holds the potential for defense of one’s activities, or the means or ends involved in one’s behavior. Capability defense as a constituent criterion for clear capability consciousness resists the absorption of beliefs that one is incapable, and when necessary manifests resistance behaviors. Because language was central to Keller’s sense of her own capability it became the source of her resistance to circumstances that threatened her identity of capability. Consequently, Keller constructed for herself and others a robust epistemological defense of her capabilities to know and have knowledge.

Clear capability consciousness arises from innate attributes of the student as a living organism who learns, and incorporates learning for adaptation to new circumstances. This “capability propensity” is thus the favorable intersection of the student, as a biological organism, in the web of relations that she can potentially influence

³⁴ My connection of Dewey’s and disposition is not unprecedented from Dewey’s writings itself. In *Ethics* Dewey describes “Happiness” as a “disposition.” He writes, “Happiness is a matter of disposition we actively bring with us to meet situations, the qualities of mind and heart with which we greet and interpret situations (Dewey and Tufts 1932) See also “John Dewey on Happiness: Going Against the Grain of Contemporary Thought” (Fishman and McCarthy 2009).

or influence her. Critical to this concept of propensity is the fact that innate propensities, the resources of the student as a biological organism, never remain static, but evolve in predisposing a certain kind of responsiveness. The relationship of student to environment is actively relational and never simply passive. This is abundantly clear in Keller's narratives about herself, and in letters and reports that Anne Sullivan wrote about her pedagogy. In *The World I Live In*, Keller's deconstruction of sensory experience draws heavily on embodied arguments. She speculates about innate functions and processes that are native to all human beings regardless of disability. Clear capability consciousness arises from a favorable evaluation of oneself, one's "I am," as an acknowledgment of a specific unique identity concurrently developed with the modal phrase "I can."

A clear case always involves material and social circumstances that favor it. In *Art as Experience*³⁵ Dewey describes the human being as a "live creature" embedded in a web of relations with others and an environmental context. Dewey's metaphor of the "live creature" provides a useful concept for theorizing capability consciousness. (Dewey 2005).³⁵ The educational significance of this concept is to locate human beings as existing in the same factual and ontological circumstances—with needs, demands of environment, and resolutions of tensions involved in the maintenance of needs. Consciousness brings

³⁵ Dewey does not use the term "propensity," however, throughout my inquiry I associate Dewey with the term based on his description of the coming together of need and environment and its association with "experience." Etymologically, "propensity" connotes tendency with the some "built in" characteristic that is still responsive and triggered by something in the environment. An example might be facial recognition by infants that is "prewired" that with experience becomes more nuanced and differentiated. Hence a propensity is subject to learning that becomes part of the expansion of a larger propensity. Learning to communicate is integral to the desire to communicate.

intention and the formation of purpose to the fore as fundamental to webs of relationships that contend or support each other. This was fundamental to the establishment of an aim not to redress what she could not do, but what she could do with learning.

~ Capability Disposition

In a public address entitled “A New Light is Coming,” at Sagamore Beach, Massachusetts in 1913, Helen Keller asks an audience a question she supposes they have silently asked.³⁶ How could she have “first-hand” knowledge? How could she know about anything? Keller understands the questions others have about her, and she answers them directly. To make a point, Keller gives an example of a recent railroad accident.³⁷ She asks how anyone could know about an event they did not witness. As if indicted with a crime, Keller tells her audience, “I plead guilty to the charge of being deaf and blind” a seemingly damning circumstance for knowing anything at all (Einhorn 1998, 95). Keller asserts that she knows as they do about events she did not witness. Keller answers with the simple phrase, “I can read” followed by a litany of sources from which she draws information.

I can read the views of well-informed thinkers like Alfred Russell Wallace, Sir Oliver Lodge, Ruskin, H. G. Wells, Bernard Shaw, Karl Lautsky, Darwin and Karl Marx. Besides books, I have magazines in raised print published in America, England, France, Germany and Austria. [Einhorn 95]

³⁶ Keller Speech, July 8, 1913 entitled, “A New Light is Coming,” (Einhorn 1998).

³⁷ Keller is referring to a train wreck that occurred June 12, 1913 where five individuals were killed and scores of others were seriously injured. See <http://www3.gendisasters.com/connecticut/347/stamford%2C-ct-train-wreck%2C-jun-1913> accessed February 1, 2011.

Keller tells her audience, “To all events, I claim my right to discuss them.” She then more boldly distinguishes herself from others. Deaf-blindness is not her most important difference from others. It is an acquired difference through education. She tells her audience, “I have an advantage of a mind trained to think, and that is the [only] difference between myself and most people” (Einhorn 1998, 95). Claims like these were characteristic of Helen Keller’s public addresses—she was entitled to express views based on her knowledge and her experience. Keller understood clearly what she could not do as a result of deaf-blindness, but she refused to allow her deaf-blindness to rule out *tout court* her right to exist in a public world.

Helen Keller’s thematizing sense of herself as capable depended on experiences of capability. By early adulthood, Helen Keller’s grasp of herself as fully engaged in the world of public affairs was bolstered by her mastery of rhetoric and opportunities for conversations about public affairs. She had experienced great success engaging with many different perspectives and she expressed, to her satisfaction, her own point of view. Keller repeatedly used her public fame as a means to speak on matters that concerned society in general. In an address to the National Council of Women in 1932, Keller asserted her kinship with women as fundamental to her own view of herself as capable. In this address, Keller tells her audience they must “think down every wall that divides us” from our fellow creatures.

I believe that women have it in their power to make civilization minister to the comfort and happiness of all. But before we can accomplish this, we must understand the world we live in, physical and spiritual. By the physical, I mean our environment and how to control it. By the spiritual, I mean an intelligent study of economics, industry, and politics. What we need to learn is how to use wealth for progressive education, for public hygiene, for decrease of crime, delinquency,

and injustice, for art, beauty, and human happiness. Furthermore, I believe women can make the world safe from war, and it is last rampart that stands between humanity and a happier world. MRS. FRANKLIN AND FRIENDS, I am proud to be one of this gathering of the National Council of Women. I wish to express my interest in everything that concerns women [Einhorn 118].

Embedded in this address are many implicit disposing aspects about what Keller believed she could do. Fiercely devoted to peace, Keller frequently addressed groups to argue against war. Keller believed that *all* women had standing to study matters that were the traditional domains of men. All of the various matters that Keller raised she had studied, and she was confident of her grasp of public affairs and economic and political matters. In this way Keller used her own sense of “I can” to generalize and put forward a collective understanding of “we can.”

On its face, a deaf-blind woman making the claims she did is nothing short of astonishing, but she could not have done so, without a foundation of successes that fostered her acquiring a capability disposition. Learning from Keller I find that capability is context bound to things that are meaningful to the subject, and hence do not require mastery of things that have no relevance. Finding common cause based on similarity of circumstances engenders thought about collective capability posed as conditions for liberation. Generalizing one’s capability disposition depends on the existence of a capability disposition that is intimately one’s own. Learning from Keller illustrates how capability disposition does not depend upon highlighting what one cannot do, but acting because of what one can do.

Keller’s implicit reflections of her own capability traced back to her early education, which engendered her belief that she had a “mind trained to think.” In *The*

World I Live In, Keller hyperbolically claimed consciousness itself did not exist before her teacher arrived.

When I learned the meaning of “I” and “me” and found that I was *something* [italics added], I began to think. Then consciousness first existed for me. Thus, it was not the sense of touch that brought me knowledge. It was the awakening of my soul that first rendered my senses their value, their cognizance of objects, names, qualities, and properties. Thought made conscious of love, joy, and all emotions. I was eager to know, then to *understand*, afterward to *reflect* on what I knew and *understand*, and the blind impetus, which had driven me hither and thither at the dictates of my sensations, vanished forever (Keller 1914, 117).

Keller’s triad construction of “knowing,” “understanding,” and “reflecting” are moments in the experience of identity. Knowing, understanding, and reflecting are not self-generated but the result of experiences with others that reinforce separation of one from others who also know, reflect, and understand. Confidence in one’s knowing, understanding, and reflection are all constructed in a reciprocity of interactions with others, which not only influences the content of one’s knowing, understanding, and reflecting, but also influences the thematic character of one’s identity as a subject of knowing, understanding, and reflection. From the foregoing quote, I find that a theory of capability consciousness asks how education can dispose oneself to believe that one is capable in ways that matter. Relevance is tied not only to a successful navigation of circumstances that one encounters, but the pleasure and satisfaction that one’s knowing, understanding, and reflection might bring. Keller explicitly names the cognizance of love and joy as constituent parts of her identity experience. *I know* what love is; *I understand* what love is, and I can *reflect* on the love I know and feel. To be sure, these are fundamental capabilities but their prereflective application is having the experience. “Love” as an example illustrates that recognition of it becomes habitual through

generalization to other experiences. To express that one loves someone or something is a positive affirmation of one's existence as a center of experience. With a disposition of capability, (what I have named "capability disposition" as a constituent concept for capability consciousness), Keller did not approach situations with the thought that she could not know or experience something; she greeted each situation with a habitual state of mind that she could know, understand, and reflect.

~ **Capability Defense**

Learning from Keller, clear capability consciousness is also the growth of one's emotional and cognitive resources that empower defense in circumstances that might challenge one's capability. Helen Keller claimed a capable identity, but her claim was subjected to tests, often by the public expression of doubt about what she could do and what she could understand. Helen Keller marshaled the resources she had to defend herself against claims that she had no identity of her own. From *The World I Live In*, in an essay entitled the "The Seeing Hand," Keller wrote:

In all my experiences and thought I am conscious of a hand. Whatever thrills me, is a hand that touches me in the dark, and touch is my reality. You might as well say that a sight that makes you glad, or a blow that which brings a stinging tears to your eyes, is unreal as to say that that those impressions are unreal which I have accumulated by means of touch. The delicate tremble of a butterfly's wings in my hand, the soft petals of violets curling in the cool folds of the leaves or lifting sweetly out of meadow-grass, the clear, firm outline of the face and limb, the smooth arch of a horse's neck and the velvety touch of his nose—all these, and a thousand resultant combinations, which take shape in my mind, constitute my world (Keller 1914, 6-7).

This passage is characteristic of the other essays that appear in *The World I Live In*, affirmatively claiming what Keller could do with the sensory and cognitive resources

she had. This affirmation is reflected in essays with titles like, “The Power of Touch,” “Finer Vibrations,” and “Analogies in Sense Perception” among others, that together present a full phenomenological account of Keller’s epistemological tools and ontological resources for meaning construction. Each essay involves a careful deconstruction of experience with insights about the composite construction of sense experience for all. In each essay, Keller writes to make herself recognizable to others through her defense of her knowing. Keller accomplishes recognizability in part through rhetorically constructed analogies that make sense to her readers. Keller draws attention to aspects of experiences that all of us have had, but because of the apparent dominance of sight and hearing do not recognize as a major part of a coherent experience. The capabilities Keller employs to construct her epistemological defense are not skills generalizable to all, but do illustrate that with capability consciousness there is strong motivation to protect one’s sense of capability and to do so in ways others will understand. Keller’s defense of herself though drawing on every aspect of her embodiment is primarily rhetorical and therefore intellectual, but it is important to note that what Keller defends are aspects of her identity that are important to her. Thus, she deploys a logic that depends on establishing parity with others through arguments largely based on identifying and deconstructing correspondences between her experience and that of others. To establish parity, she must argue that through the sensory capacities she has there are no experiences that the sighted and hearing have that she cannot bridge an understanding.

Between my experiences and the experiences of others there is no gulf of mute space which I may not bridge. For I have varied, instructive, contacts with all the world, with life, with atmosphere whose radiant activity enfolds all of us. The thrilling energy of all encasing air is warm and rapturous. Heat-waves and sound-

waves play upon my face in infinite variety and combination, until I am able to surmise what must be the myriad sounds that my senseless ears cannot hear (Keller 1914, 60).

In constructing her epistemological defense, Keller appeals to her embodiment as the source of sensory-based knowing. Her body is receptive to the information that the world gives, allowing her “to surmise” what her “senseless ears cannot hear.” Hence, there is a correspondence through the powers of embodiment. With language claimed as Keller’s prized capability, she could use and articulate the direct experiences of embodiment to establish parity that signaled the coherence of her experience with the coherent experience of others. Keller did not regard correspondence and with analogies as imitations of reality, but parts of reality accessible to others. On the role of correspondence Keller wrote,

As a working hypothesis, *correspondence is adequate to all life, through a whole range of phenomena* [italics added]. The flash of thought and its swiftness explain the lightening flash and the sweep of a comet through the heavens. My mental sky opens to me the vast celestial spaces and I proceed to fill them with images of my spiritual stars. I recognize truth by the clearness and guidance it gives my thought, and, knowing what clearness is, I can imagine what light is to the eye. *It is not a convention of language* [italics added], but a forcible feeling of reality, that at times make me start when I say, “Oh I see my mistake!” or “How dark, cheerless is his life!” I know these are metaphors. Still, *I must prove with them* [italics added], since there is nothing in our language to replace them. Deaf-blind metaphors to correspond do not exist and are not necessary. Because I can understand the word “reflect” figuratively, a mirror has never perplexed me. The manner in which my imagination perceives absent things enables me to see how glasses can magnify things, to bring them nearer, or remove them farther (Keller 1914, 125-126).

Through the use of correspondences, Keller establishes parity, but she also points out the contingency of all language through common use that abstracts sense-based words for epistemological referents. “I see” is an indication of understanding. “Oh, I see my

mistake!” is a simple statement that condenses events into a convention that everyone understands. Yet, Keller asserts that use of sense-based language that alludes to senses has the “force of reality,” attaching metaphysical significance to use of language. Knowledge of reality is constructed. Keller’s hand is her organ for sight and hearing. Imagination reflects experience but also assembles thoughts into manageable relations. The near and far of eyesight with eyeglasses is a masterful analogy for the clarity of understanding. Sense-based metaphors usually pertaining to sight, through words like clarity for truth, and sight for understanding, extend understanding even when the material basis is left far behind. No deaf-blind metaphors exist, Keller asserts. Keller’s primary sense-based source of language is obviously her hand, which she claims does the work of eyes and ears.

My hand is to me what your hearing and sight are to you. In large measure we travel the same highways, read the same books, speak the same language, yet our experiences are different. All my comings and goings turn on the hand as a pivot. It is the hand that binds me to the world of men and women. The hand is my feeler with which I reach through the darkness and seize every pleasure, every activity that my fingers encounter. With the dropping of a little word from another’s hand into mine, a slight flutter of the fingers began the intelligence, the joy, the fullness of my life (Keller 1914, 5).

These are still the same realities and tangibles, perceived by eyes and ears, but presented to her hand. Her hand is her pivot to survey her surroundings. The descriptions of tactile experience are common to all, yet less considered as sources of knowing. This parity of experience through substituting her experience for the reader’s experience is well suited to support her claims of knowledge parity. Sharing taken-for-granted experiences ground capability, and, then, serve as parts of an epistemological defense.

Similar experiences suggest a common structural basis for arguing for epistemological parity.

Keller's hand is the "pivot" on which of her experience depends and finds expression. The hand is the gateway to language and gatherer of all sensory impressions that inform perceptions. Both literally and symbolically, Keller's hand reaches out, pushes forward into space to be met by another hand that tells her she is "recognizable" as she "recognizes." Thinking of others that she knew instantiated the thought, "I am conscious of a hand" (Keller 1914, 6). All of the nuances of expression that accompany language Keller transcribes into reading others with her hand.

Few people who do not know me will understand, I think, how much I get of the mood of a friend who is engaged in oral conversation with somebody else. My hand follows his emotions; I touch his hand, his arm, his face ... As there are many beauties of the face, so the beauties of the hand are many. Touch has its ecstasies. The hands of people with strong individuality and sensitiveness are wonderfully mobile. In a *glance* [italics added] of their fingertips they express many shades of thought ... Not only the hand as easy to recognize as a face, it reveals its secrets more openly and unconsciously. People control their countenances, but the hand is under no such restraint. It relaxes and becomes listless when the spirit is dejected; the muscles tighten when the mind is excited or the heart glad; and permanent qualities stand written on it all the time (Keller 1914, 27).

Encounter for Keller was an intentional affair. She could sense others through smell and proximity, but others had to "encounter" Keller intentionally to communicate with her. Keller could sense many qualities about others to which she could attach an emotional tonality. The tonalities of relationships became habitual and attached to identity in just that same way that a seeing person recognizes a friend present or a friend present through remembering. Keller was acutely aware of the mobility of the face in expressing emotion based on long practice of having her hand placed on her teacher's

face. Touch-feel was a means of recognition, that is, recognizance that became part of the emotional history she gained from such intimate contact. Concealment of one's thoughts and emotions required disengagement in ways that vision does not allow. Hands are without the control that faces can muster when one does not wish to convey what one feels. Hands were recognizable for identity and for emotion.

Not only is the hand as to recognize as the face, but it reveals its secrets more openly and unconsciously. People control their countenances, but the hand is under no such restraint. It relaxes and becomes listless when the spirit is low and dejected; the muscles tighten when the mind is excited or heart glad, and permanent qualities stand written on it all the time (Keller 1914, 23-27).

Recognizing subtleties like these were the fruits, Keller claimed, of her education, through no doubt endless repetitions by her teacher taking her hand, holding, placing young Helen's hand on her face to feel what happens to faces and hands under different emotional contexts. Habit became a goal of teaching, to make things obvious to sight then habitual to touch and understanding. The hand was the receptacle into which the teacher would place all manner of things to build a tactual vocabulary. Tactual vocabulary was literally inscribed into a young Helen's hand, providing the inferential reservoir for building concepts. Concepts of distance and temporality, change and appearance occurred by directing and guiding the hand. All of these concepts require movement to foment understanding and transfer into language; for example, we conceptualize time spatially and conceptualize a process as following the direction of a line. The use of metaphors becomes metaphorical itself, signaling how metaphors extend and grow understanding,

becoming integrated into the use of language.³⁸ Metaphors are the stepping-stones of inference and generalization based on things already familiar and known. Even the concept of “transfer” or “connection” is based on the experience of movement and connection. The existential importance of knowing that everything has a name is its intimate relationship to knowing that one, too, has a name, making oneself recognizable to self and to others. Arendt describes “naming things” as a way of “appropriating the world,” and “disalienating” oneself from the strangeness of the new (Arendt 1978, 100). This appropriation of the world always depends on the appropriation of an identity. Language makes this possible.

Language depends on metaphorical structures, something extensively highlighted by Johnson and Lakoff in *Metaphors We Live By* (1981). Physical experience generates descriptive concepts for abstraction. Understanding “up” or “down” requires the movement experience of up and down. Concepts of location and movement depend on the body’s sense of internal movement, proprioception, and perception of exterior information through exteroception. Sense-based reference allows talk of time as “space,” or “height” and “depth” as emotional qualities. Vision, the dominant metaphor for knowing, too, requires a muscle experience to recognize what is seen. To understand the

³⁸ Arendt on metaphor: “Mental activities, driven to language as the only medium for their manifestation, each draw their metaphors from a different bodily sense, and their plausibility depends upon an innate affinity between certain mental and certain sensory data. Thus, from the outset of formal philosophy, thinking has been thought in terms of seeing, and since thinking is the most fundamental and radical mental activities, it is quite true that vision “has tended to serve as the model of perception in general and thus as the measure of the other senses” [Arendt quoting Hans Jonas]. The predominance of sight is so deeply embedded in Greek speech and therefore our conceptual language that we seldom find any consideration bestowed on it, as though it belonged among things too obvious to be noticed (Arendt 1978).

full presence of an object from particular vantage points requires an experience of the object from multiple directions. The *seen* tomato is not a two dimensional blot on a screen, but a three dimensional object located in a surrounding space (Noe 2004). The seen side conceals the other side, but through experience, what is not seen is perceptually known. Bearing in mind how all of these examples depend on embodiment enhances the plausibility of Keller's explanations. The three-dimensions of space and objects are available to her and inform in the same ways that the seeing person learns to see. Without movement, what is registered on the back of the retina is static and without focus (O'Regan and Noë 2001). Hence, again, all of the powers of the body are involved. Keller knows her world in an embodied way because all knowing depends on embodiment as its foundation. Thus, the consciousness of capability requires all of the resources of embodiment to maintain a disposition of capability, defend it, and build on the body's innate powers.

The argument from physiology assumes sufficient parity with others that sensate meaning is constructed in the same manner but with different emphases; in Keller's case, with her dependence on touch, smell, and taste. The argument from physiology will become clearer in the next section on propensity. Keller's argument from physiology highlights that all students as biological organisms are exquisitely sensitive to environment. We learn from Keller that defending capability consciousness relies on the attention one gives to the all of the resources of embodiment and its communicability.

~ Capability Propensity

As I have argued previously, propensity refers both to innate resources of the student as a biological organism and one's exploration of embodied propensities. Keller learned that her entire body could give her information about her environment. She even discovered analogies between her sense experience and the sense experiences of others with sight and hearing. For example, sound was in fact waves traveling through air. This explanation made sense to Keller as she discovered that sound is also conducted through solids such as walls and floors. This is an example of an innate tendency, the capability of perceiving movement and vibration through internal means of sense. Keller highlights the importance of vibration as a source of information in "The Power of Touch," where she claims the capability of sensing rhythm and intensity through sound conducted across floors.

One day, in the dining-room of a hotel, a tactual dissonance arrested my attention. I sat and listened with my feet. I found that two waiters were walking back and forth, but not with the same gait. A band was playing and I feel music-waves along a floor. One of the waiters walked in time to the band, graceful and light, while the other disregarded the music and rushed from table to table to the beat of some discord in his own mind (Keller 1914, 44-45).

Strong bass sounds vibrate rhythms felt through feet in contact with the floor. Vibrations then travel upward through bones and flesh, affecting the body's internal means of kinesthetic sense that calculates the nature, the force and direction of the input (Stillman 2002, 49-50). This is an experience common to all. What one sees registers more strongly perhaps than what one feels, which mysteriously either fades into the background or becomes an unrecognizable part of total experience.

Sensitivity to vibration is closely aligned with touch, as the body and “body image” both drives and senses internal movement and is sensitive to external conditions like temperature, density, and malleability. Keller catches these embodied sensory capacities beautifully with the following:

There are tactual vibrations which do not belong to skin-touch. They penetrate the skin, the nerves, the bones, like pain, heat, and cold. The beat of a drum smites me through the chest to the shoulder-blades. The din of the train, the bridge, and grinding machinery retains its “old-man-at-the sea” grip upon me long after its cause has been left behind. If vibration and motion combine in my touch for any length of time, the earth seems to run away while I stand still. When I step off of a train, the platform swirls round, and I find it difficult to walk steadily (Keller 1914, 49).

Such perceptual observations are common experiences of everyone.

Movement that is discordant with the body’s own kinesthetic sense of internal and external movement quickly disturbs the body’s sense of balance through the vestibular system, rendering one unsteady, unsure of movement, and even disoriented. The body is indeed a somatosensory system that registers and attempts to integrate information for productive movement (Dijkerman and de Haan 2007). Internal body systems that connect with external perception are “unseen” but always active. The intertwining of cognition with movement is something Dewey understood very clearly in his early article on *The*

Reflex Arc in Psychology, connecting movement with meaning (Dewey 1998b).³⁹ Raising questions of cognitive science Keller asks,

Can it be that the brain is so constituted that it will continue activity of sight and hearing, after the eye and ear have been destroyed?

It might seem that the five senses work intelligently together only when resident in the same body. Yet when two or three are left unaided, they reach out for compliments in another body that they yoke easily with a borrowed team. When my hand aches from overtouching, I find relief in the sight of another mind which commands light, harmony, color. Now, if five senses will not remain disassociated, the life of the deaf-blind cannot be severed from the life of the seeing (Keller 1914, 87).

Keller's questions and insights are stunning. Keller raises questions about the nature of multi-modal and cross-modal functioning of sense perception, and how parts of the brain devoted to specific functions can be recruited to fulfill different functions. In the quote above, Keller's observations raise research questions of today that include representational capabilities of the blind, the function of social cognition. There is research that suggests that the blind do in fact have representational capabilities analogous to sight (Cattaneo et al. 2008, Cattaneo and Vecchi 2011).

Clearly, the questions Keller raises are signs of well-developed and capable intellect, but the significance rests not on the sophistication of the information, but rather

³⁹ Current research supports her view that sensory modes are not discrete, self-standing sources of information. All are part of embodiment, and the body in totality contributes by the full integration of each sensory mode on a foundation of sensorimotor skills that involve proprioception and the coupling of muscle coordination with specific kinds of activities. Framed this way, some have argued our primary sensory ability is movement (Noe 2004, Sheets-Johnstone 2011). By movement of the body is environment encountered whether one moves or is moved. Movement places the individual in the position to experience different. Movement is the first exploration of body, and it is the first thing recognizable and interesting to an infant. Dewey's discussion in "The Reflex Arc in Psychology" invoking William James' example of a child placing in his hand into a "me" (James 1890, 23) emphasizes a coupling of movement that derives its significance from the whole.

on Keller's testimony about the body as an organ for knowing. Learning from this insight about embodiment, educators should ask how embodiment could be used to encourage a sense of capability in others.

Believing touch was integral to her education allowed Keller to establish a context for further learning about such things as a voice, singing, sounds made by animals and other happenings in the environment such as industrial noise and the activities of carpenters. Tapping into all of the resources of body, Keller could understand a great deal about the world all beginning with the human propensity to reach out to the world from birth. When seeking to enable capability consciousness an educator builds on what the student can do, all the while realizing that the child possesses many of the same motivations that all children have as part their complement of innate propensities and those acquired from learning that are necessarily built out of innate propensities. Motivations are mediated through felt qualities driven by needs that are organic and social in origin, as Dewey wrote long ago. The connection of any "form" requires and is accompanied by a "directly experienced quality" (Dewey 1984). The lesson for the educator learning from what Keller said about her experiences of learning is that she associated qualities and feelings with everything she encountered. Hence, any theory of capability consciousness requires that one attend to the quality of the experience involved in learning, and this requires an embodied approach and embodied thought about how one teaches.

The Disabling (Contrary) Case

“If it could be brought home to her that such likeness in her case could only be attained by the sacrifice of truth...”

~The Nation Magazine, Book Review of ‘The Story of My Life’

“The narratable self is at once the transcendental subject and elusive object of all autobiographical exercises of memory.”

~Adrianna Cavarero, Relating Narratives: Storytelling and Selfhood

The theory of capability consciousness requires a clear understanding of circumstances that disable its possibility. I have argued that clear capability consciousness requires favoring circumstances for its development. Helen Keller would not have accomplished what she had with language without her early education with Anne Sullivan. While Keller had suffered frustrating circumstances as a prelingual child, Keller, after reflecting on prelingual life, did not believe that she was a person until her education began. While this is hyperbolic, since Keller did have the attributes of personhood as a prelingual child, the things that ultimately mattered to Helen Keller were not possible in retrospect without language. Capability Consciousness is a state of mind characterized by openness to new experiences that are confidently encountered based on prior experiences of sensed capability. I identified the concepts of 1) capability disposition, 2) capability defense, and 3) capability propensity as integral to clear capability consciousness. In this section I identify concepts drawn from my reading of text that give examples of contrary or disabling cases of capability consciousness. Keller was largely successful in response to situations that threatened to “disable” her capability consciousness, but had any of the examples I cite been successful, Keller could not have believed herself generally capable despite her disabilities. The concepts that denote

disabling capability consciousness are the obverse of those that denote capability consciousness, although if intervening or mitigating circumstances are present then it is possible the disabling circumstance is arrested or eliminated, e.g., when a non-speaking child receives an augmentative communication device that allows an expression of agency. What was disabling before, an inability to communicate, is addressed positively. Also, as will become clear in texts by Keller about circumstances that threatened to disable her, these events sometimes caused her to marshal her defenses and resist turning a disabling situation into an enabling situation, as expressed in my concept of capability defense. First, I will identify the concepts that pertain to disabling or contrary cases of capability consciousness and then I will engage a close examination of the texts to highlight what informed the content of the concepts themselves. Conceptually, a contrary case involves:

1. **Disabling Disposition:** An attitudinal disposition of incapability that remains under the uncontested influence of others.
2. **Disabled Defense:** A lack of emotional or behavioral resources to apprehend or defend capability.
3. **Disabling Propensity:** A contraction of one's propensities for growth and flourishing.

A "disabling disposition" refers to a sense of self that premises incapability and an attitude of invalidity. One's existence is existentially and functionally in a mode of "I cannot." One conceives or feels oneself as having incapability as a dominating theme of one's identity. A positive sense of agency is lacking. As with a clear case, relations and

multiple perspectives have been influential in shaping a case of disabling disposition. An example occurs when others believe that disability is the defining characteristic of the child and the child acquiesces, through behavior or thought, that she is invalidated. Helen Keller faced circumstances that threatened her to disable capability consciousness that are paradigmatic for issues that many with disabilities face throughout life.

“Disabled defense” refers to the neutralization of the child’s forms of protest that defend her capability. This is manifest attitudinally and functionally in behavior. Examples of a disabled defense include acquiescence to conferred identities that function negatively and label someone as inherently limited both functionally and socially. From the perspective of others, negative attitudes locate the individual as a representative of a defective class of individuals without means of desirable connection with others. Helen Keller faced circumstances that threatened to disable her sense of self as capable based on the alleged limits of her understanding based upon sensory deficits. Although she ultimately did not acquiesce to statements carrying power to disable her sense of self, she was understandably forced to grapple with their meaning. In general, Keller marshaled her power for a robust defense of her sense of her own capability.

A “disabled propensity” refers to a contraction or a negation of a child’s innate attributes for connection, and experiences that support an expansive view of one’s agency from developing. An example of an innate propensity is the process of attachment that allows an infant to develop an enduring positive relationship with a caregiver with

consequences for later life.⁴⁰ Hence, relations with others are governed by a sense of distrust or fear of others as in the case of child who has been neglected or physically abused. Others contribute to a contraction of propensities toward growth physically and socially through failures to maintain a supportive environment for growth and flourishing. The clearest example of this in Helen Keller's case was the fact that she was physiologically without means to understand the meaning of "color."⁴¹ I briefly provide three vignettes as examples of the concepts related to contrary or disabled capability consciousness to illustrate the generalizability of the concept to other cases and forms of disability.

A student's academic performance deemed deficient can reinforce a contraction of propensities for further learning and growth. Attitudes that regard individuals with congenital disabilities as inherently defective, and historically, morally dangerous,

⁴⁰ For accounts on mother-infant attachment see for example Daniel N. Stern, *The Interpersonal World of The Infant* (New York, New York: Basic Books, 2000) and Beatrice Beebe, et al., "The Origins of 12-month Attachment: A Micro-analysis of 4-month mother-infant interaction," *Attachment & Human Development* (Routledge Taylor & Francis Group) 12, no. 1-2 (January-March 2010): 3-141.

⁴¹ Researching whether the congenitally blind can mentally represent anything like the visual experience of color is obviously difficult. Researching the abilities of blind individuals to make visuospatial representations presents fewer difficulties. Keller seems convinced that support for her use of analogy rests on a stronger ground than convention. Current research supports her view that sensory modes are not discrete, self-standing sources of information. All are part of embodiment, and the body in totality contributes through the full integration of each sensory mode on a foundation of sensorimotor skills that involve proprioception and the coupling of muscle coordination with specific kinds of activities. Framed this way, some have argued our primary sensory ability is movement (Noe 2004, Sheets-Johnstone 2011). Movement places the individual in the position to experience differences and differently. Movement is the first exploration of a body, and it is the first thing recognizable and interesting to an infant. Dewey's discussion in "The Reflex Arc in Psychology" invoking William James' example of a child placing in his hand into a "me" (James 1890, 23) emphasizes a coupling of movement that derives its significance from the whole.

contribute to neglectful circumstances that are also examples of a process of disabling consciousness. Three vignettes appear to illustrate disabled consciousness:

- A student's "difference" no matter how it may be defined, is greeted with disdain, hostility, or even antipathy, e.g., a child with multiple physical impairments assumed as cognitively impaired when no such impairment exists.
- Characteristics of the child define the child negatively. For example, beliefs that females will have less aptitude for science, or that a child whose culture influences the practice of not looking others in the eye is somehow inattentive or slow.
- A student who otherwise appears "normal" yet cannot read absorbs the messages of others that define the student as defective, because a child of a certain age *should be able* to read.

The core feature of a disabling consciousness case for the student is an imposition of invalidity that contracts possibilities both materially and socially. A disabled consciousness of one's capability is one that separates the student from a community. With respect to others, language plays a significant role when children are referred to or labeled as a "retard," "lame," or a "behavior." A disabled consciousness of capability can also occur when the student has capabilities but they are unrecognized as useful for education.

~ Disabling Disposition

To illustrate the concept of disabling disposition I will describe several events in Keller's life when she encountered criticism and questions about her capability of

knowing and understanding. One occurred when she was a child over a story she had written. The issue was plagiarism, but the underlying question concerned whether Keller was limited to parroting living solely through a vicarious identity. Later in life when Keller went to college, she encountered challenges that also raised questions about the originality of her mind. Ultimately Keller was able to resist through an epistemological defense, which most likely became robust through the nature of the challenge. Keller's affective resistance was enabled and encouraged by experience and the support of others, but Keller's successful resistance was not inevitable or certain. I will recount biographical events that highlight how Keller resisted threats leveled at her identity. My purpose is twofold, one to illustrate how Keller resisted through phenomenological accounts of her experience, and two, to demonstrate that what Keller said about how experience is constructed is common to all, including individuals with disability who do not have the capability of articulating the phenomenology of their own experience. There may be nevertheless learned strategies of resistance for any child, no matter the nature of the disability. Educators with any child with disability should recognize the commonalities of experience and recognize agency embedded in whatever the child does. Knowing one has a disability is *learned*, as I have repeatedly stressed. Placing emphasis attitudinally on a child as being disabled is *disabling*. Such attitudes begin with "You can't" and are reflected by the child as, "I cannot." Keller's story is an exemplar for how one learns capability and then confronts attitudinal obstacles that define one as incapable.

As a child, Helen Keller generally experienced learning unhampered by outside negative attitudes that suggested she could not learn, or that her learning was inherently

flawed. By 1903 when Keller was in college, questions about Helen Keller's capability to know were not new to her. At age eleven Helen Keller faced an "investigation" at the Perkins School for the Blind for allegedly "plagiarizing" a children's story (Swan 1991, Keller 2003). This experience profoundly affected Keller. The depth of indictment left a mark on Keller that is apparent in the opening paragraph of *The Story of My Life*,

It is with a kind of fear that I tell the history of my life. I have as it were, a superstitious hesitation in lifting the veil that clings to my childhood like a golden mist." She adds, "When I try to classify my earliest impressions fact and fancy look alike.... The woman paints the child's experiences in her own fantasy" (Keller 2003, 12).

Keller's fears expressed here are deep and searching. Elsewhere she tells readers of *The Story of My Life* that that she worried afterwards that whatever she wrote was original or something she read elsewhere. Everyone is dependent on others for the earliest account of one's life, and Keller describes the experience of telling one's story from the beginning as inherently problematic and dependent. Keller's own account of being accused of plagiarism as an eleven-year-old child remained deeply traumatic. The incident followed Keller's authorship of a story she called "the Frost King" and gave as a birthday gift to the Perkins Schools Director Michael Anagnos. Later, after Anagnos published the story, a reader found a striking similarity to an already published children's story by Margaret Canby, "The Frost Fairies" (Keller 2003, 23).

As controversy brewed, Anagnos assembled a panel from the Perkins School faculty to investigate. After "testimony" from an eleven-year-old Helen Keller and review of a report by Anne Sullivan on the matter, a vote acquitted Keller of the charge of deliberate plagiarism with Anagnos breaking a tie vote in Keller's favor. Accusations that

Sullivan was behind the plagiarism had circulated around the Perkins School for months. The official explanation claimed that Helen had indeed been exposed to the book some years before, when she stayed with Sophia Hopkins, Sullivan's friend at the Perkins School who was found to have the book. The author of "The Frost Fairies," Margaret Canby, never expressed anger over the situation, and indeed marveled at Helen Keller's memory and the flourishes she added to the original story (Herrmann 1998, 84). In any case, Keller's own account paints a picture of devastation and self-questioning.

The winter of 1892 was darkened by one cloud in my childhood's bright sky. Joy deserted my heart, and for a long, long time, I lived in doubt, anxiety and fear. Books lost their charm for me, and even now the thought of those dreadful days chills my heart. A little story called "the Frost King," which I had written as a birthday gift was at the root of the trouble" (Keller 2003, 55-56).

Indeed, trouble it was; a rift developed between Anne Sullivan and Perkins Director Michael Anagnos that was never repaired. Once Keller's most devoted champion, Anagnos later commented bitterly, "Helen Keller is living a lie" (Lash 1997, 168). His once professed deep belief in Keller's capability had become instead a belief that Keller had been taught to deceive.

Despite the break with Anagnos, Sullivan moved forward with other patrons of her student to prepare for and finance college. Through yet more drama over control over Keller's life and education, Sullivan maintained a close presence as the relationship between teacher and student continued more as a friendship. Public interest in Keller continued and she was eventually asked to write an autobiography that was to appear in segments in a magazine. Keller wrote *The Story of My Life* while she was a student at Radcliffe, written first as magazine articles that were later edited and published in book

form in 1903. The original book included Keller's autobiographical text, letters, and reports by Anne Sullivan, with essays by John Macy, a Harvard instructor, engaged to edit the text for publication. Macy also wrote essays for the book that included descriptions of Helen and an assessment and explanation of Sullivan's teaching methods.⁴²

Keller's autobiographical text, makes up less than a third of the original published version of *The Story of My Life*, and proceeds, more or less chronologically, up to her time as a student at Radcliffe. Early on, Keller had expressed the desire to go to college. Keller's account of her experience at Radcliffe was not glowing, describing some of her professors as detached and pedantic in scholarship. College was not "the universal Athens" she had hoped for (Keller 2003, 84). Keller could directly interact with only a few of her professors or her student peers who had learned to fingerspell. Anne Sullivan attended all of Keller's classes with her, and acted as an interpreter with almost all of her peers. Sullivan transcribed lectures with lightning speed into Keller's hands, and at night read and fingerspelled the content of textbooks that could not be obtained in braille. Sullivan's ubiquitous presence with Radcliffe student Helen Keller caused problems for

⁴² John William Macy (1872-1932) and Anne Sullivan married in 1905. Keller, Sullivan, and Macy lived together for several years in Wrentham, Massachusetts. The marriage lasted only until 1914; however, Sullivan refused to grant Macy a divorce. Macy continued a slide into alcoholism and died in 1932. For more information about the complicated relationship between Helen Keller, her teacher, and John Macy see Kim Nielsen, *Beyond The Miracle Worker: the extraordinary friendship between Anne Sullivan and Helen Keller* (Nielsen 2009), Lash, Herrmann (1998), and Nielsen, *Helen Keller: Radical Lives* (2004).

both of them. Some claimed it was really Anne Sullivan attending college not Helen Keller.

School administrators, fearing for the reputation of the school, wanted Keller's academic work to be assiduously proven her own. To this end, special proctors were established for administering Keller's exams, with Anne Sullivan banned from the same building when examinations were administered. All these steps were taken despite the fact Keller had passed her entrance exams, under essentially the same circumstances, with distinction in Latin. Keller had mastered Latin and German and before even attending college. Knowing that others suspected that Keller could not claim the capabilities she had, which by this time Keller realized, could not have been without emotional and identity consequences.

The difficulties encountered were daunting. Attending all classes and then reading textbooks to Keller took a huge toll on Anne Sullivan, further damaging her own fragile eyesight (Nielsen 2009, 6).⁴³ To complete exams and written assignments Keller learned to type expertly on both a special braille typewriter as well as a conventional one for the benefit of her instructors. Keller and Sullivan were ever mindful that all of Keller's work was her own, and, this added to Keller's apprehension and care that anything she wrote or said was indeed original to her.

As I stressed in the discussion on clear capability consciousness, in later life Keller used what she had learned from her own embodied experience to defend her

⁴³ Sullivan suffered from childhood from "Trachoma," an infection causing a buildup of scar tissue under her eyelids that abraded the corneas (Nielsen 2009).

knowledge and self-representation in ways that others could recognize her as a person. Because Keller relished traveling in the realm of intellect and language use she mastered the use of analogies, correspondences, and metaphors for logical argument with the hope that others following the same rules of logic would have difficulty dismissing her, though some continued to raise questions. No doubt, to maintain an identity of capability in the face of those whom she characteristically described as “critics” required continued emotional work. Of course, this would not have been possible without the supporting relations of others who knew Keller well, validated her knowing, and encouraged her learning. There are certain incidents in Keller’s life that crystalized general questions about Keller’s capability to know. Persons with marked disabilities regularly encounter circumstances that tend to invalidate their worth as persons, and when such instances occur, acquiring and maintaining an identity of capability is threatened. If a disability is said to disqualify a person for participation in something, then the one with a disability is placed on the defensive, suffering attitudes that are disabling. Learning from Keller’s defense of herself as a person should remind educators that the personhood of a child with a disability should be assumed and not something the child has to defend. However, through learning and enabling a sense of capability, the child gains the emotional and cognitive resources they need to defend capability against others. The child must acquire a habitual disposition of capability.

~ Disabled Defense

A book review of *The Story of My Life* appearing in *The Nation Magazine* in 1903, questioned Helen Keller's knowing as mere "hearsay" knowledge. Keller could not possibly own who she was.

It seems so cruel to criticize this unfortunate girl who has made so much of *nothing* [italics added]... All of her knowledge is hearsay knowledge, her very sensations are for the most part vicarious, and yet she writes of things beyond her power of perception with the assurance of one who has *verified* [italics added] every word.

If it could be brought home to her that such likeness in her case could only be attained by the sacrifice of truth; if she could only realize that it is better to be one's self, however limited or afflicted than the best imitation of somebody else that could be achieved (1903).

With the review in *The Nation Magazine*, a contrary case against Keller appeared publicly. Keller found her sense of capability in language acquisition and the development of her mind. Her prodigious intelligence and wide reading testified to her intellectual acumen. This, however, was not convincing to everyone. The scope of Keller's defense had to go beyond the defense of ideas and knowledge of current events; she had to patiently explain how her sensory world entitled her to know about even the most basic of things. *The Nation* review makes assumptions no doubt based on beliefs and prejudices that were widespread in public consciousness. No matter how qualified with sympathy, the review was an *ad hominem* attack, attacking Keller existentially. *Ad hominem* criticisms are at the heart of my concept of disabling defense. From the start, the person is stripped from any standing to make a defense. Consider in another context when one with a cognitive disability is told either directly or indirectly by attitude, "You cannot do or understand that: you are 'retarded.'" Such existentially damaging

assessments need not permanently disable identity, as it did not in Keller's case, but, again, relationships of support are crucial to the individual marshaling the emotional resources to resist.

The existential nature of the attack emerges as the review proceeds with great clarity. Keller's education is deemed "an experiment."

In Helen Keller's life and education we have an experiment tried under perfect conditions, showing how little are (sic) for observation and experience to the trade of the author.

... No one can help feeling the utmost sympathy for her *deprivations* [italics added], the greatest admiration for her pluck. And yet the criticisms must be expressed.... Literary sincerity is so entirely absent from it that the subject spills over from the realm of literature into that of ethics... (1903)

Again, the criticism that the blind cannot understand sense-based language occurs in a cloud of ignorance of the composite physiology of relations involved in the construction of human cognitive and sensory experience. *The Nation* Review represented the ignorance of the time but still stands as intuitively correct for common perceptions of the limitations that deaf-blindness would impose. One wonders if the reviewer would have evaluated Keller differently had he met Helen Keller and observed directly the capabilities she could demonstrate. In any case, the existential effect of such overt criticisms introduced notions not only an alleged vicarious identity, these effects assert an ethical collusion that implied Keller's teacher was some kind of charlatan. When Keller defended herself in print five years later in *The World I Live In*, she would cite again and again her education as the enabling force for learning how to articulate what she could know and how. Against claims that she was only a person vicariously, Keller invoked not only a self-defense, but also a solidarity with others who were deaf-blind.

Critics delight to tell us what we cannot do [italic added]. They assume that blindness and deafness sever us completely from things which seeing and hearing enjoy, and hence they assert we have no moral right to talk about beauty, the skies, mountains, the song of the birds, and colors. They declare that the very sensations from a sense of touch are “vicarious” as though our friends felt the sun for us! They deny *a priori* what they have not seen and *I have felt* [italics added]. Some brave doubters have even gone so far as even to deny my existence (Keller 1914, 39).

The belief that Keller could not transcend the limitations of deaf-blindness frequently centered around her use of color and sound language in her writing. Keller appeared in print as if she were someone who could see colors and hear sound and this simply could not be truthful. Keller had no alternative but to defend her use of language with language.

I understand how scarlet can differ from crimson because I know that the smell of orange is not the smell of a grape. I can also conceive that colors have shades, and guess what shades are. In smell and taste there are varieties not broad enough to be fundamental; so I call them shades... The freshness of a flower in my hand is analogous to the freshness of in the apple newly picked. I make use of analogies like these to enlarge my conceptions of colors. Some analogies which I draw between qualities in surface and vibration, taste and smell, are drawn by others between sight, hearing, and touch. This fact encourages me to persevere, to try to bridge the gap between the eye and the hand. (105-106)

Keller skillfully deployed analogies to demonstrate the contingent constructions of all sense experience, and the dependence of multiple senses to make sense of the world.

⁴⁴ All of the senses, the ones she had, and, in the case of individuals with five senses,

⁴⁴ Analogies are tools of inference that everyone uses without much thought, but making them explicit serves Keller’s purpose to convert them into powerful arguments. Assumptions about what is experienced are also commonly overlooked, and Keller implies that a certain faith is involved in knowing sense perceptions, which is often incomplete and fragmented. Keller raises a concept like Merleau-Ponty’s “perceptual faith,” that is both contingent on what one senses, and intersubjectively taken for granted as real (Merleau-Ponty 1968, 14). Without perceptual

work together to construct one intelligible world. How could Keller do these things? In answering this question, Keller credited repeatedly her education. Young Helen Keller was placed in contact with everything about her, accumulating an enormous inventory of tactual data from which she could make mental leaps from the concrete to the more abstract. Keller gained mastery of every form of expression in language from rhetoric to idioms – she understood that when she said, “I see” this meant understanding, and when she said, “I hear” this mean someone had communicated to her.

Since my education began I have always had things described to me. I have always had described to me with their colours and sounds by one with keen senses and a fine feeling for the significant. Therefore I habitually think of things as coloured and resonant. Habit accounts for part. The soul sense accounts for another part. The brain with its five-sensed construction asserts its right and accounts for the rest. Inclusive of all, the unity of the world demands that colour be kept in it, whether I have cognizance of it or not. Rather than be shut out, I take part in it by discussing it, imagining it, happy in the happiness of those near me who gaze at the lovely hues sunset or the rainbow. (109)

While parts of this excerpt seem to support a somewhat vicarious participation in the experiences of sight and sound, Keller hints that her participation is more than just a simple participation by proxy with her assertion of the “law of inner completeness.” Keller’s defense through an appeal to physiology is perhaps the one that carries with it

faith, the very structure of reality collapses if one merely turns one’s back on something perceived. This analogy is not the best, but Keller argues that she can perceive things as *there* by the same form of encounter, such as smell and touch, and understand what a seeing person means by the concept of a seen forest. Keller skillfully deconstructs what the seeing taken for granted as true, without direct perceptual contact, as license for her own abilities to “see” things and describe them with characteristics drawn from sight. Keller leverages the subjectivity of others against her own, to use intersubjectively informed knowing as an argument for her own knowing.

the greatest force for contemporary verification and the one least likely to register with common prejudices about deaf-blindness.⁴⁵

The blind child—the deaf-blind child—has inherited the mind of seeing and hearing ancestors—a mind measured to five senses. Therefore he must be influenced, even if it be unknown to himself, by the light, colour, song which have been transmitted through the language he is taught, for the chambers of the mind are ready to receive that language. The brain of the race is so permeated with colour that it dyes even the speech of the blind. Every object I think of is stained with the hue that belongs to it by association and memory.

Keller refused to allow deaf-blindness to impair her sense of capability to engage the things that mattered to her. This is an important point worth reiterating to clarify the nature of capability consciousness – Keller’s assumption of capability concerned matters for which she had a history of affirmative experiences supported by others. Describing her sensory world as rich went against common perception that the experience of deaf-blindness could only be impoverished. Keller understood this very well in counter explanations that indeed her sensory and intellectual experience was very rich and satisfying to her. Keller’s nuanced descriptions of sensory experiences could cause others

⁴⁵ Research suggests that representational and imaging capacities of the brain are much more developed and functional than has been realized. Some researchers conclude that the blind possess “analog” skills to perform functions thought only the sighted possess (Cattaneo et al. 2008, Cattaneo and Vecchi 2011). The plasticity of the brain, through the recruitment of different parts of the brain to compensate for missing sensory functions like vision, are matters of vigorous research in the cognitive and neurosciences. I can cite numerous examples without coming close to being exhaustive that implicate or support questions implicit in Keller’s observations (Vanlierde et al. 2003, Röder and Rösler 2004, Obretenova et al. 2009, Merabet and Pascual-Leone 2010, Cattaneo and Vecchi 2011, Fernández and Merabet 2011). Keller’s inhabitation of her senses is complete, and while her conception of the interactive environment does not go so far as Dewey’s sketch of complex interaction in *Art As Experience*, phenomenologically, Keller conjures the plethora of the sensible that make her sensory world full and rich, through abundant textures, smells, and tastes that entertain, locate, and fill her with thoughts. Keller’s thesis of embodied knowing is well supported in research conducted since her death.

to reflect on common experiences that they, too, had which were aesthetically and somatically rich.

Am I to be denied the use of such adjectives as "freshness" and "sparkle," "dark" and "gloomy"? I have walked in the fields at early morning. I have felt a rose-bush laden with dew and fragrance. I have felt the curves and graces of my kitten at play. I have known the sweet, shy ways of little children. I have known the sad opposites of all these, a ghastly touch picture. Remember, I have sometimes travelled over a dusty road as far as my feet could go. At a sudden turn I have stepped upon starved, ignoble weeds, and reaching out my hands, I have touched a fair tree out of which a sounds that my senseless ears have not heard (Keller 1914).

An indictment of her sensory comprehension sufficient for language use was a devastating indictment of personhood. This is clear from Keller's vigorous defense of her ability to know as a "right" she could claim. Criticisms about the capability to know followed Keller well into maturity. In the 1930s, two decades after the publication of *The World I Live In*, Keller again faced broad criticism attributed to her early education as inherently flawed.

~ Disabled Propensity

As a type of a contrary case, disabled propensity attacks the foundation of one's physiological capacities to learn and know. Others regard one's "I can" as dubious. To criticize one's very sensate capacities does enormous damage to one's sense of worth as a human being. From the beginning, an obstacle stands in the way of possibilities for felt growth. One is illegitimate ontologically and exists in a liminal state of being. One's resources are undercut from the start.

In a book entitled *The Blind in American Society* (Cutsforth 1951) the author claimed that Keller's illegitimate use of sensory language was the result of a faulty education he called "verbalism" (Cutsforth 1951). The author Thomas Cutsforth traced this method to a literary approach to educating the blind developed by Samuel Gridley Howe, the founder of the Perkins School for the Blind where Anne Sullivan was educated. This method emphasized literary convention, and, from Cutsforth's perspective, caused blind students to use language for the purpose of social acceptability. This method alienated the blind from the reality of their own experience and taught them to express appreciation for a sensory experience they could not have. Sullivan, Cutsforth argued, taught Helen Keller in precisely this fashion, resulting in Keller using language in her writing that was illegitimate to her true sensory world. Framing the practice as unfairly forcing conformity, Cutsforth claimed that the blind were thus taught to ignore their own native ways of understanding and sensing the world.⁴⁶ "By charitably giving the blind what they cannot use, we have robbed them most of what they possess" (Cutsforth 1951, 50).

In substance, this criticism was nothing new and is already present in *The Nation Magazine* review of *The Story of My Life*. Similarly, to the review, Cutsforth cites whole passages from *The Story of My Life* to bolster his charge of a faulty pedagogy achieved through verbalism. Nothing is cited from *The World I Live In*, and while this book is filled

⁴⁶ "...The underlying purpose of verbalism is that of meeting social approval. It is an attempt to represent things as nearly as possible as they would appear to others in a social situation. Socially and educationally the blind are expected to appreciate things not as they experience them but as others experience them" (Cutsforth 1951).

with literary and poetic flourish, it deals concretely with questions about language that Cutsforth raises. Today, Cutsforth's thesis stands in opposition to research about the sensory world of the blind and their capacities to form image-like representations. Some researchers suggest that the blind see, but see differently, based on other sensory capacities they possess (Cattaneo et al. 2008, Cattaneo and Vecchi 2011). How new research might change Cutsforth's view is of course now speculative, but an encounter with the text, *The World I Live In* is never reported. The substance of contemporary research has to do with the cooperation and recruitment of different modes of perception working together to generate representational experience. Cutsforth argued that the compensatory powers of the blind were limited. Blindness "utterly changed and reorganized the mental life of the blind" (Cutsforth 1951, 2). While it is correct that reorganization of mental life is probable in blindness, it does not follow that the blind are without any resources to represent imagery in an intelligible way (Röder and Rösler 2004, Obretenova et al. 2009, Rödera and Wallace 2010, Merabet and Pascual-Leone 2010, Cattaneo and Vecchi 2011, Fernández and Merabet 2011).

Helen Keller was aware of Cutsforth's critique, as was Sullivan who chose not to respond (Herrmann 1998, 245-247). Keller never responded directly to Cutsforth but clearly remained bitter over his charges. In the 1950s, after Cutsforth again published a critique of "verbalism," Keller used her formidable influence to block Cutsforth from receiving an achievement award from the American Federation of the Blind. No doubt, Cutsforth's views struck Keller as a personal attack, but even more, an attack on her beloved teacher.

Comparing what Cutsforth had to say about Keller, and what Keller wrote about her discovery of language, uncovers strikingly similar metaphors.

Have you ever been at sea in a dense fog, when it seemed as if a tangible white darkness shut you in, and the great ship, tense and anxious, groped her way toward the shore with plummet and sounding-line, and you waited with beating heart for something to happen? I was that ship before my education began, only I was without compass or sounding-line, and had no way of knowing how near the harbour was. "Light! Give me Light!" was the wordless cry of my soul, and the light of love shone on me that very hour (Keller 2003, 27-28).

And Cutsforth:

Helen, in her writings appears, much less a living experiencing person. Her pretenses at enjoying that which she does not experience give the feeling of a soul cut loose from its moorings, drifting between reality and mirage, *incapable* [italics added] of moving in either direction but with her back turned toward the former she is making elaborate gestures towards nothingness which lies ahead and forever out of her reach (Cutsforth 1951, 56).

Reading these two excerpts side-by-side strikes a reverse mirror experience, where very similar metaphors are used to create an entirely different perception. Metaphors are similarly used to symbolize bearings and location and capabilities to sense and know, but in the first case, Helen Keller is lost adrift at sea, and in the second one, Helen is assured through language a sounding-line to hold fast to reality as it is. Keller believed language a legitimate mooring and Cutsforth, on the other hand, believed that language, and certain kinds of language, merely showed Keller "adrift" in "nothingness." A starker contrast is inconceivable, and the criticism could not be more personal, implicating not only Keller's personhood, but attacking her beloved teacher. A capability, to invoke Shakespeare, might impress, but it could not convince. Sullivan's pedagogy was nowhere "objective," but only resulted in her student's acceptability. She merely learned to feign appreciation for experiences she could not have. No doubt, old wounds

from *The Nation Review* and the “Frost King Incident” bubbled underneath and reenergized all of her resources for defense.

In essence, the assertions made in *The Nation Review* and by Cutsforth portrayed Keller as a discredited identity. Keller was only a person vicariously. Keller suffered a false consciousness about herself. If one were to construct a contrary experiential case for Helen Keller, the substance of this kind of criticism is on target, striking at the heart of Keller’s sense of her own capability. Keller’s long ago encounter with the charge of plagiarism, as an eleven-year-old child, seemed to repeat itself every time Keller was forced to defend herself (Swan 1991).⁴⁷

Criticisms of Keller’s epistemological standing were, as I have indicated, existential in consequence. In substance, such criticisms risked disabling Keller’s own sense of capability. She could have permanently succumbed to a disabled sense of her own capability, but in fact she did not. But this too was by no means certain, even as she had relationships and tools to mount an epistemological defense to meet the challenge. The evidence in the clear case account is that challenges to Keller’s epistemological standing only motivated her to not only overcome them, but also disarm them with the

⁴⁷ See Jim Swan, “Touching Words, Helen Keller, Plagiarism, Authorship” (Swan 1991) for very searching account of Helen Keller’s experience with charges of plagiarism. Swan cites an incident where Keller responded to a charge that she had “lifted word for word” a passage from an English Unitarian Minister. Keller responded “forthrightly,” saying it was difficult for her to trace “fugitive word and paragraphs” to their origin. She described reading and hearing something read to her as a “promiscuous” activity. When Mark Twain read *The Story of My Life*, he was outraged by the Frost King incident and wrote Keller that all writing was plagiarism, and that the charge was absurd. Twain wrote, “Oh dear me how unspeakably funny and owlishly idiotic and grotesque was that plagiarism farce! As if there were very much in human utterance, oral or written, *except* [italics original] plagiarism! For substantially all ideas are second hand consciously or unconsciously drawn from a million outside sources,” quoted from (Herrmann 1998, 136).

power of her rhetorical skills. Nothing in this account suggests that Keller was at some point forever without self-doubt; and like everyone, Keller was subject to a range of emotions, but, nevertheless there is no evidence that Keller remained in a state of paralysis over her own sense of capability.

Capability Consciousness: Borderline Cases

Borderline cases of capability consciousness share aspects and characteristics of a clear case and a disabling case. In Helen Keller's life and narratives there is evidence of situations that potentially disable a clear case of capability consciousness, but these situations did so in such a fashion that consciousness of capability was present but its full expression was hampered by circumstances that clouded insight and distorted her sense of self. Like clear cases and disabling cases, a borderline case is never self-generated but occurs in response to forces that enable it, encourage, and sustain it, until and unless other forces intervene and enhance insight about how a fuller sense of capability that is relationally sensitive and positive can result. The most basic form is often a stage in the development of clear capability consciousness. One has a sense of one's capability but one is without sufficient means to express it. For example, when Keller made the association between an external reality and a symbolic expression of that form – fingerspelled letters spelling the word “w-a-t-e-r” referred to that “cool wonderful something” that Keller experienced in the presence and contact with water, she understood what water was, but had no way to productively and reliably communicate this understanding to others. Had this not occurred, Keller would have remained in circumstances of a borderline sense of capability consciousness. Other instances included

when Keller's presentation of capability to the public was in part accomplished by concealing disability either in appearance or in functioning. Though others might guess that Keller needed a great deal of assistance for even the most basic tasks, photographs of Keller never intimated that this was the case. Correspondingly, others might have concentrated on Keller's disability and what she needed assistance with, and not consider the capabilities that Keller did have that, when placed at parity with others, in some ways made her exceptional. Keller did not always generalize her life circumstances to that of others with disabilities. For example, Keller failed to consider that her construction of a meaningful life was not the only meaningful life a person with disabilities could have. Individuals with significant cognitive disability could never do what Keller could do with her mind, but this did not render them ontologically incapable, meaning those with a severe intellectual disability could in fact have a very meaningful life and feel and believe they were a capable person, signaled by a satisfying sense of self through agency. Again, earlier descriptions taken from Keller's narratives are intended to serve as exemplary representations of different case forms. Conceptually rendered, borderline cases involve:

1. **Disconnected capability:** One is without means to express a capability to others.
2. **Cloaked disability:** Limiting capability consciousness to a narrative of overcoming disability by concealment.
3. **Separating capability:** A consciousness of capability that depends on emotionally and attitudinally separating oneself from others.

A borderline case is always one where some of the elements of capability consciousness are present. However, also present are distortions that disable consciousness of one's relations with others and oneself that are fundamental to one's fullest clear capability consciousness.

An example of "disconnected capability" as a borderline case might be one similar to the situation described in the brief synopsis of Christopher Nolan's autobiographical narrative where the protagonist "Joseph's" capabilities of thought and engagement are not realized in part because of the prejudices of others and the lack of means to express his thoughts about engagement.

"Cloaked disability" refers to a situation where one's capability rests on one's abilities to "cloak" disability to appear "normal." One is aware that others find disability a diminutive condition and thus directs all powers toward cloaking the disability.

Perhaps the classic example is President Franklin Roosevelt's reluctance to let the public know he was at some point unable to walk unassisted. The need to cover or cloak one's disability strongly implicates the negative attitudes of others. Situations like this divide the consciousness of those with a disability and foster the belief that one's disability cancels capability. Institutionalized beliefs become a norm and reinforce the need to conceal one's disability for social acceptability.

"Separated capability" refers to instances where one's capability involves separating oneself from those who have similar disabilities because attitudinal forces cause one to reject disability, therefore enforcing self-segregation. Like "cloaked disability," one must deny the legitimacy of others who have disabilities as a category

named “other” than oneself. Lost is a sense of the relations and perspectives that enable in the face of disability. Ability is relative and differences of ability mean different things depending upon the means and ends available to construct for oneself. The following two vignettes are drawn from my work in the field of disabilities:

1. During my employment in a direct care position at a large institution, I recall an instance where a woman with spastic quadriplegia was believed to have profound intellectual disability for thirty plus years. In fact, she was without means of communication that was finally rectified with an augmentative communication device that she could operate despite profound physical handicaps.
2. At this same institution, some individuals with milder intellectual disability were referred to as “low grade.” Labels like “high grade” or “low grade” were used clinically but quickly became part of everyday speech as a form of an insult, similarly to the frequently used pejorative of calling someone a “retard.”
3. While working at a group home for young women, I recall a resident who would not attend social functions with her housemates because she did not want to “hang out” with “retarded people.” She could not generalize rights or any social standing that she claimed for herself based on perceptions of others’ differences.

Case distinctions and criteria place into relief what a clear case of capability consciousness can look like. No standard of achievement is implied by my criteria for each case type, because capability is relative to circumstances that include innate propensities and those that are acquired. Capability, to be sure, is bound by the gifts of the child, but these gifts never emerge without favorable circumstances to enable and

encourage them. Helen Keller's narratives about herself situate her as having great intellectual gifts, but it is important to remember that without the favorable circumstances of her teacher, she might have remained in a nascent state, unable to complete the accomplishments that occurred over the course of her lifetime.

Learning a simple sign to communicate what one wants for a child with autism, for example, is a huge accomplishment; and for the child, and for the teacher, this can be a clear case of capability consciousness residing in the child. Learning one sign serves as a foundation for learning other signs thus expanding the child's sense of agency and the perception of the child's agency on the part of others. Any given person cannot do many things and there are many things that any given person might wish they could do. However, capability consciousness, as I deploy it, is a sense of capability that precedes any given specific capability, and is manifest in capabilities that one actually exercises. Helen Keller believed she had sufficient parity with others to think and act about things important to her.

In an account of her early life, Keller recounts being frustrated over being unable to communicate with others in ways that others seemed to communicate (Keller 2003, 17). Again, Keller's reflections require the caveat, which applies to all humans, that the earliest prelingual experiences are filtered through what others had told her. A borderline case has many but not all the elements of a clear case. The capability that one claims has contradictory elements that threaten the integrity of the claim.

~ Disconnected Capability

There is little question that in her prelingual state as a young child Keller's behavior would express frustration when felt needs were not met. Keller did not emphasize when attributing capability to her education the considerable skills she did have as a prelingual child and how, developmentally, these were the necessary foundation for language. Being unable to express wants, even in prelingual consciousness, is an example of a borderline case of disconnected capability. Simply put, one knows what one wants, and that others are key to meeting this want, but one is unable to communicate it effectively. One is without the means to actualize one's claim of felt capability. The knowledge and belief are present but the means are not. There is a sense of ends but no provisional means to these ends. The teacher's role in a disconnected capability is enormous because she must connect the capability she detects to a functional means of expression. A borderline case of disconnected capability is one where capability remains in a contradictory state and yet unconnected to a means for self-validation or inspire validation by others. For example, Keller could not but be aware that administrators at Radcliffe were highly ambivalent about her admission. This ambivalence was evident in the extraordinary steps to overpower unfair accommodations with a system of monitoring. There was considerable worry that Helen Keller should receive no unfair advantage because of her disability (Herrmann 1998, 125-127).

~ Cloaked Disability

Cloaked disability refers to a situation where one with a disability is in a state of denial about certain realities of one's embodiment. Capability consciousness, on the other hand, embraces one's embodiment as the source of one's true happiness and identity.

Throughout Helen Keller's life, her public persona was closely guarded under many competing circumstances. Sullivan was of necessity concerned that her student be presentable to others socially. Sullivan taught Keller how polite conversations unfolded and made her aware of all of the nuances of social interaction. The Perkins School Director Michael Anagnos did much more than this; he shaped an image of Keller as exemplar par excellence of the Perkins School. Nearly everything Keller wrote as a child was published. Keller's public images as a child were always of a perfectly dressed, well-brought-up "normal" child. Keller was posed carefully in the highly stylized manner of nineteenth century portraits in luxuriant settings, with overstuffed furniture, drapery, books, and pets in the scene.

Prior to the replacement of Keller's eyes with glass replicates in 1909, she was always photographed from one side to conceal her damaged left eye that protruded slightly (Nielsen 2004, 134). There is little doubt, that Keller's parents and her teacher would have insisted that photographs of Helen be flattering to any viewer. Anagnos aggressively used whatever Sullivan provided in the way of photographs and academic

artifacts to full advantage to present Keller as a Perkins School “prodigy” (Nielsen 2009, 125).⁴⁸

Anagnos, like his predecessor Samuel Gridley Howe, had objectives that transcended the educational needs of their respective students, Helen Keller and Laura Bridgman⁴⁹ (Glitter 2001). Howe was keen to use Laura as means of proving a nascent religious nature apart from any specific religious influences. Anagnos wished to use Keller as a means of publicity for the Perkins School and to perpetuate Howe’s reputation for educational innovation in teaching the blind to read (Nielsen 2009, 95). Motives were not pure, and the presentation of both individuals to the public included carefully scripted means of erasing disability to make both appear if not near normal, yet still miraculous. The narrative of overcoming or excising disability lies deep in the Western consciousness from the Gospels of Jesus and his restoration of eyesight and repair of physical disability (Stiker 1999b). The borderline aspect of this cultural rendition of disability lies not with a parity understanding of individuals but with disability having the power to render a person an imperfect soul.

⁴⁸ Sullivan expressed distaste about Anagnos’ portrayal of young Helen in the press. See Sullivan letter dated May 22, 1887 where she confides to her friend Sophia Hopkins that “my beautiful shall not be transformed into a prodigy if I can help it” (Keller 2003, 159).

⁴⁹ Samuel Gridley Howe possessed a strong interest in natural theology. Howe attempted unsuccessfully to regiment those who had contact with Bridgman, particularly care-givers and additional tutors, to prevent others from imparting their own religious sensibilities on Bridgman’s education and moral growth. Howe was a “New England Unitarian,” under the influence of phrenology who believed that “a universal religious disposition had a “physiological basis in the cerebral Organ of Veneration (Gitter, 142).” As a “liberal Christian,” Howe was engaged in the “bitter feud” between Unitarians and Calvinist Evangelicals raging in New England during the nineteenth century. Ultimately, Bridgman became a devout evangelical, believing in all the theological and moral teachings that Howe rejected.

~ Separating Capability

Separating capability occurs when an individual's capability comes at the expense of separating oneself from others who possess the same or similar disability. In this sense, separating capability is like cloaked disability. One's identity of capability comes at the expense of denial of some aspect of oneself. This is not the same as asserting a claim over one's identity vis-à-vis others, but instead a way of acquiescing to conditions that demean one's identity to begin with. In Keller's case, the criticism that she separated herself from others with disability is something that comes largely from those who accused her of giving insufficient attention to disability as an institutional problem and too much attention on disability as something to overcome as an individual problem. Applying "separating capability" to Keller as an example of a borderline case of capability consciousness is perhaps too subjective a claim since this charge is based to a large extent on the fact that Keller belonged to a different cultural milieu from today. In any case, Keller held views on vocational training for the blind that emphasized self-sufficiency, when in fact her means of "self-sufficiency" was of an entirely different kind (Nielsen 2004, 29-30).

In *Blind Rage: Letters to Helen Keller* (Kleege 2006), Georgina Kleege, a disability studies scholar, who is blind herself, writes letters to a dead Helen Keller that begin with a resentment at having been told by others that she be "more like Helen Keller." Kleege captures the complicated relationship many with disability might feel toward Helen Keller, predominantly based on Keller's portrayal in culture. Kleege follows the narrative of *The Story of My Life*, making observations that often demonstrate

sympathy towards the circumstances that Helen Keller faced. Keller's disability politics are appropriately described as conservative. She did not connect the impetus for her advocacy for independence with all of its relations to a neoliberal narrative that ignores the institutional and cultural foundations of prejudice against disability. Nielsen writes that despite her advocacy for people with disabilities,

... [Helen Keller] rarely explored the political implications of disability. For most of her life, the disability politics she adopted were frequently conservative, consistently patronizing, and occasionally repugnant. These politics regarded disability as inherently debilitating in mind, body, and spirit. They attributed the primary cause of debilitation to physiology, rather than social causes. Like Franklin Roosevelt, her life as the exception served to prove rather than contradict these political models for it frames disability as a problem to be conquered, and once conquered a problem left behind (Nielsen 2004, 9).

The extent to which Helen Keller could be faulted for not transcending an individualist narrative of disability remains in my view a flawed exercise. She was a figure of her own historical time, and the social construction of reality extended to the construction of politics and the ideas from which identities are framed. As an example figure of her time, Keller expressed agreement with medical opinions that framed disability as occasion for eugenicist thinking, something rampant in American and British culture in the early decades of the twentieth century. Keller weighed in on the "Bollinger baby" controversy, where a physician, Dr. Haiselden, withheld a life-saving surgery for a baby born with multiple disabilities with the belief that the child's life could not be worthwhile (Pernick 1996). Keller agreed, and ignoring in sweeping fashion a logic that applied to her own case as a child, proposed in a letter to a newspaper that physicians on a panel should decide which children born should be saved and which ought to be allowed to die (Nielsen 2004, 35-37, Keller 1915). Keller was certainly not alone in espousing

eugenicist sentiments at the time, something she shared with many political progressives and even religious figures and educators (Winfield 2007). Keller wrote in her letter that the child at the center of the controversy would surely have grown up to be a “criminal” (Keller 1915).

Much of the discussion aroused by Dr. Haiselden when he permitted the Bollinger baby to die centers around a belief in the sacredness of life. If many of those that object to the physician's course would take the trouble to analyze their idea of "life," I think they would find that it means just to breathe. Surely they must admit that such an existence is not worth while. It is the possibilities of happiness, intelligence and power that give life its sanctity, and they are absent in the case of a poor, misshapen, paralyzed, unthinking creature. I think there are many more clear cases of such hopeless death-in-life than the critics of Dr. Haiselden realize. The toleration of such anomalies tends to lessen the sacredness in which normal life is held (Keller 1915).

Keller's use of the phrase “existence not worth while,” is eerily anticipatory of the same rhetoric used by the Nazis to justify genocidal practices against individuals with disabilities (Mostert 2002). Keller never again expressed similar views that as a researcher I am aware. At the time, the clarity of a “student's” borderline case is striking in this example. Keller exempted herself from any parallels of her early life in the eyes of others, and her opinions about the Bollinger child. While the child would certainly have had intellectual disability with multiple physical disabilities, he could probably have survived with corrective surgery. Keller could have no way of knowing what the child's potential for learning might be, nor the degree to which the child's capabilities could inhabit his being. From her capabilities, Helen Keller judged another in ways that she would not allow herself to be judged. She therefore was insufficiently conscious of the capability of others as something to be developed. This parsing of disabilities based on

things that could not possibly be known makes this incident a powerful example of separating capability.

Exploring how Keller's views changed when it became known that individuals with disabilities were the first victims of mass killing initiated by the Nazi's is a fascinating study. Keller did register her objections to the Nazis wholesale killing of blind Jews in World War II, and lobbied to make the issue more widely known. Keller had been a lifelong opponent of militarism, opposed the United States entry into World War I, and greeted involvement in World War II with great trepidation despite her opposition to the Nazis (Nielsen 2004, 72). The war with Japan caused Keller great anguish over the many friends she made when she visited Japan before the war in 1937 (Nielsen 2004, 65). Following the war, she returned to Japan to visit Hiroshima, an event that left her deeply shaken (Nielsen 2004, 96). Keller wished to be more involved in politics than she was and her disability prevented her from being more centrally received in public discourse, causing her great resentment. Instead, she was permitted to act as an ambassador of good will, and used this role to visit wounded soldiers all over the world.

What Keller actually said about disability and education would strike contemporary disability advocates as regressive. Keller fully endorsed vocational education for the blind for economic independence. "Use" colored Keller's views and her own struggle with the question of economic independence; yet she could have made it clearer in her own words about disability education and how much of what she could do depended on the fortunes of her unique circumstances. Keller desired a college education for herself, to be like others, hence, her failure to advocate for inclusive education remains

a question mark. The evidence that Keller's views grew and evolved is evident from her silences too. Keller appears not to have written anything else endorsing eugenics as a social and medical policy to manage disability.

Had Keller reflected more on her own compensatory capabilities developed through her education, and had she considered how others might have seen her in the condition that she called herself "phantom," perhaps she would not have been quick to assume that capabilities of every child are written only by their disability. The Bollinger baby had more marked physical and cognitive disability than Helen Keller had following her illness at nineteen months, but Keller's assumptions about the suffering of the child were based on conventions, and not experience, or taking a first-person point of view of the child's possible experience of love and nurturance. The Bollinger baby was born with a physical anomaly, an imperforate anus that could have been surgically corrected to allow the child to survive. Instead, the child was allowed to die a horrible death that pales in comparison with possibilities that care and attention might have made. Keller privileged her mind and language, as the source of her parity with others, not her body, despite the fact that when she provided a phenomenological account of her capability it was the adaptive capacities of her body that made her an equal.

Applying what I have learned about the complex attitudinal shifts that Keller experienced and how historical and cultural forces intersected with Keller's own sense of capability provides instructive insights about the social psychology of disability identity. Capability consciousness is fragile when it built upon a veneer of exceptionality. So long

as this kind of attitude remains a motivating force for shaping and claiming one's identity,
it is continually vulnerable to challenge.

Constituting Capability Consciousness

“Necessity gives to the eye a precious power of seeing, and in the same way, a precious power of to the whole body. Sometimes it seems as the very substance of my flesh were so many eyes looking out at will upon a world new created every day.”

~Helen Keller, *The World I Live In*

Keller acknowledged questions about her knowing preemptively, then pushed them aside to raise topics that were important to her. Identity and knowing were equitable concepts central to claiming rights. “At all events, I claim my right to discuss them” (Einhorn 1998, 95). Because Keller realized that others, not just her critics, had questions about her capability to know, when Keller wrote about herself in *The World I Live In*, she wrote to make herself recognizable to others, so that others could imagine her world, “where the hand reigned supreme” (Keller 1914, 4). Using what others believe about the blind as trackless and wandering, Keller proposes to serve as a guide for the seeing, while noting, “The blind are not supposed to be the best of guides” (Keller 1914, 4). In the essay, “The Seeing Hand” she establishes the role of her hand in sensing and knowing.

My hand is to me what your hearing and sight are to you. In large measure we travel the same highways, read the same books, speak the same language, yet are experiences are different. All my comings and goings turn on the hand as a pivot. It is the hand that binds me to the world of men and women. The hand is my feeler with which I reach through the darkness and seize every pleasure, every activity that my fingers encounter. With the dropping of a little word from another’s hand into mine, a slight flutter of the fingers began the intelligence, the joy, the fullness of my life (Keller 1914, 5).

The message she gives readers is one of parity with others despite differences. There are still the same realities and tangibles perceived by eyes and ears present to her hand. Her hand pivots like eyes surveying a meaningful horizon. There are books she

reads and innumerable sensibilities and pleasures to be seized within reach of her hand. Keller harkens back to education and the intelligence that began hers – when her teacher dropped a word into her hand as a child. Nothing is out of bounds; the metaphorical highways of life stretch out before her into a distant but inevitable future. Through her hands, Keller is connected to others with the hand’s resident power of embodiment. The hand sees with intimacy and directness, and, unlike in the experience of the eyes, refuses dispassionate observation. However, Keller knows and trusts that her description of the embodied powers of her hand raise to consciousness the experience of hands common to all. The hand is an organ of embodied recognition, when one recalls a shape, searching for an object like one searching for a key deep in a pocket. The key is not seen, but its configuration is sensed by the touch, and its presence is tangible and unmistakable. A key’s shape beckons for its use based on an impulse to find it. Embodied knowing is tangible. Keller’s hand organizes her mental life as memory is channeled with the hand. The memory of the hand is visceral and personal.

In all my experiences and thought I am conscious of a hand. Whatever thrills me, is a hand that touches me in the dark, and touch is my reality. You might as well say that a sight that makes you glad, or a blow that which brings a stinging tears to your eyes, is unreal as to say that those impressions are unreal which I have accumulated by means of touch. The delicate tremble of a butterfly’s wings in my hand, the soft petals of violets curling in the cool folds of the leaves or lifting sweetly out of meadow-grass, the clear, firm outline of the face and limb, the smooth arch of a horse’s neck and the velvety touch of his nose—all these, and a thousand resultant combinations, which take shape in my mind, constitute my world (Keller 1914, 6-7).

The relationship of her hands and consciousness are abiding themes of Keller’s description of her own embodiment. Through what she calls her “tactual memory,” her hands remember, and reflect (Keller 1914, 11). Elsewhere she will describe “talking” to

herself or remembering a conversation by fingerspelling into her own hand (Keller 1914, 118). With her hands, Keller tangibly represents to herself the division in consciousness described in Arendt's discussion of consciousness as a "two-in-one," as if Keller's hands could assume a second identity allowing her to appear to herself (Arendt 1978, 185).

I know my physical ideas, that is, ideas derived from material objects, appear to me first in ideas similar to those of touch. Instantly they pass into intellectual meanings. Afterward the meaning finds expression in what is called "inner speech" (Keller 1914, 118).

Thought embodied through hands can bridge the physical with the intelligible content of the mind. Hands conjure and instigate memory; and hands as her first organ of speech reenact thought inwardly and externally through self-narrative. Keller insists that the connection of hand and mind exists through the "silent worker of imagination which decrees reality out of chaos" (Keller 1914, 13). Through hands, Keller perceived aesthetic beauty, sensed balance and proportion and all of the features that sight frames as the beautiful. In the same way, the beautiful was incorporated into imagination, in order to connect the sensed with the qualities derived from touch. What she found beautiful then entered her imagination, where Keller perceived the present or constructed the fanciful. From her own imagination Keller could "image" beauty channeled through her hands.

Eloquence to the touch resides not in straight lines, but in unstraight lines, or in many curved and straight lines together. They appear and disappear, are now deep, now shallow, now broken off or lengthened or swelling. They rise and sink beneath my fingers, they are full of sudden starts and pauses, and the infinite variety is inexhaustible and wonderful. So you see I am not shut out from the region of the beautiful, though my hand cannot perceive the brilliant colors in the sunrise or on a mountain, or reach into the blue depths of the sky (Keller 1914, 8).

In finding and believing herself capable, Keller first needed the "favoring wind" of education to combine her propensities as a human being, like Dewey's live creature,

with all of the possible circumstances of favorable, to demonstrate to herself and others a full habitation of herself as a capable individual. The next three sections explore further how Keller crafted an epistemologically significant ontology of defense of herself. At every turn, Keller will cite her education as the source of not only her knowing but also her way of being. The concepts of capability disposition, capability defense, and capability propensities are all discernibly present in what Keller says about her capabilities. The circumstances under which any child comes to capability consciousness will differ, and the range of individual specific capabilities will differ as well. However, arguably any child can gain through education a belief and knowledge of her capability and make meaningful connections with others, and thereby possess resources, both behaviorally and emotionally, that defend against a feeling or belief of incompetence or invalidity. Inevitably, a child with a profound disability encounters, as Helen Keller did, circumstances – obstacles – that threaten her knowledge and belief in her own sense of capability. Experiences of capability fostered by education can inscribe and impress capability to form an embodied unity of mind, body, feeling, and thought.

~ Enabling Capability Consciousness

Clear, contrary, and borderline cases of capability consciousness involve the multiple perspectives of the student, the teacher, and others. Each involves relationships and perspectives that influence each other. The criteria for a contrary case for the student pose a disposition of incapability that instigates or reinforces a lack of emotional or behavioral resources that can contract the student's possibilities for growth and flourishing. For the teacher, a contrary case involves a disposition that sees only disability

and inhibits viewing a student in any other way. For the “other” as a general abstraction for all others, individuals and social institutions, a contrary case often depends on prejudice or a fixed negative attitude toward anyone regarded as disabled. A situation that imposes a contrary case need not remain that way. Indeed, education can intervene to change or influence attitudes, or instigate an educational intervention. From the perspective of the teacher, viewing a student as capable in her own way may inspire an educational approach that advantages a child’s education from the start.

Negative attitudes stand against capability consciousness, specifically, beliefs that associate disability with a lapse in the natural order of things. Disability is emblematic of undesirable otherness that drives a stake into the heart of moral and epistemological certainty. Manifestations of this phenomenon are all attempts to render disability invisible, and disassociate it from the implicit artificial and reified construction of what is normal. While an impairment of function is never welcomed, disability as a categorizing label has become a potent pejorative psychic projection with the result that its bearers are always some form of “other” (Wendell 1996). Snyder and Mitchell write,

We primarily get to know disabled people, both historically and in our own moment, through representations of their lives, experiences, and bodies that have been manufactured by those outside of the immediate disability experience. Unless one seeks out specific gatherings of people with disabilities, operates in allegiance with an independent living center or is incarcerated with dozens of one’s fellow disabled citizens, one receives cultural perspectives on disability filtered through documents and images at best secondhand to these experiences (Snyder and Mitchell 2010, 19-20).

Against this cultural lacuna, education stands as a possible liberating force. Education can disrupt representations through the citation of alternative examples that are personal and communicative. Something must happen to the consciousness of both the

bearer of the putative disability and others who hold the power to define what is normal. Education has the potential to disrupt the label through a critical encounter with the singular case that can reframe the “what” of the label i.e., a categorical generalization, with the “who” of the person, i.e., the identity of the individual, in ways that find deeper and more inclusive generalizations of simple humanness. Examples, i.e., exemplary cases, represented through narrative or media that can contest the attitude, are helpful. Hence, a shift in attitude involves recognizing that individuals with a disability are not unlike oneself in ways that matter. What matters requires simple examples, as one begins to understand differences of experience from differences of being human in its most general sense. Without encounters with individuality, any means to enable capability consciousness from the inside or outside are disabled.

A child with an early onset or congenital disability does not know she is disabled; she must learn the label of disability from others. And while she must unlearn disability herself, this cannot occur apart from influences that undermine perceptions of incapacity. In the beginning, outward-directed propensities construct an experiential basis for an agentic identity that is inherently positive in a capability sense. Helen Keller understood this when she wrote,

So, in the midst of life, eager, imperious life, the deaf-blind child, fettered to the bare rock of circumstance, spider-like, sends out gossamer threads of thought into the measureless void that surrounds him. Patiently he builds up a knowledge of the world he lives in, and his soul meets the beauty of the world, where the sun shines always, and the birds sing. To the blind child the dark is kindly. In it he finds nothing extraordinary or terrible. It is his familiar world; even the groping from place to place, the halting steps, the dependence upon others, do not seem strange to him. He does not know how many countless pleasures the dark shuts out from him. Not until he weighs his life in the scale of others' knowledge does he realize what it is to live forever in the dark (Keller 1914, 122-123).

Despite the forty-eight years since Helen Keller's death, the attitudes she faced during her lifetime remain contemporary concerns. Keller contested the attitudes she believed limited her and challenged her capability. Keller believed that education made her a person. With majestic assurance, Keller believed that education "awakened her soul," with her life before education described as "before the soul's dawning" (Keller 1914). Keller did not appreciate the importance of many of the skills she had as a prelingual child, however, her first-person account remains valuable testimony to how a person with a profound disability came to believe, demonstrate, and assert her capability. Through narrative, Keller explained how the world opened up to her in rich and significant ways, granting her parity status with individuals who could see and hear. Keller's rich words as a source of data involves that fact that in many of the narratives she left behind she explicitly describes how education influenced her, and how the world opened up to deaf-blindness. Keller described how her remaining senses of touch, smell, and taste worked together to create a gestalt of her perceptive experience. Her knowing was founded on the direct connections she possessed to sense the world about her. Keller came to understand how sight was disproportionately credited with knowing, something evident in language that associates light and sight with knowledge. Keller's particular disabilities perhaps enabled a more conscious and intentional reflection on how she came to know. The enabling of sense of capability in Helen Keller resulted in a mindful sense and reflection on the development of her sensory resources the typical person takes sight and hearing for granted, and rarely reflects on the composite construction that all of the sensory capabilities of the body contribute to knowing.

Throughout this inquiry, I have highlighted Helen Keller's capability consciousness as integrally a part of her embodied education. In the order of her learning, Keller's teacher began with what her student could do. "I can" came before her student could learn an attitudinal "I cannot." Anne Sullivan did not begin fingerspelling into her student's hand, "You are deaf-blind." Instead, based on what her student appeared to be able to do, she began to set a foundation for communication. Keller's embodied education began with her teacher's own embodiment and use of her bodily powers to establish a solid background of reciprocal affection and dependence. As I have described earlier, the child's propensities were greeted within the context of a favorable environment. Keller claimed that she had a mind "trained to think," but she also claimed she was trained by touch. Keller appreciated the acuties of her senses to faithfully inform and grant experience, coherence, and pleasure. In Keller's descriptions of her own learning there is a distinct sense that learning for her was a pleasurable experience. Pleasure is an integral part of Keller's assessment of her sensory experience and her acquaintance with possible characteristics of a thing. Keller found great pleasure apparent in the following passage, quoted earlier.

Eloquence to the touch resides not in straight lines, but in unstraight lines, or in many curved and straight lines together. They appear and disappear, are now deep, now shallow, now broken off or lengthened or swelling. They rise and sink beneath my fingers, they are full of sudden starts and pauses, and the infinite variety is inexhaustible and wonderful. So you see I am not shut out from the region of the beautiful, though my hand cannot perceive the brilliant colors in the sunrise on a mountain, or reach into the blue depths of the sky (Keller 1914, 8).

In Keller's phenomenologically reflective descriptions of ordinary but beautiful experience she could appeal to the embodied experience of her readers and imaginatively

take them back to the aesthetic foundations of their own embodiment. Keller's skillful use of her embodiment as means of epistemological defense had an aesthetic appeal. Once again, I repeat another passage from *The World I Live In*.

In all my experiences and thought I am conscious of a hand. Whatever thrills me, is a hand that touches me in the dark, and touch is my reality. You might as well say that a sight that makes you glad, or a blow that which brings a stinging tears to your eyes, is unreal as to say that those impressions are unreal which I have accumulated by means of touch. The delicate tremble of a butterfly's wings in my hand, the soft petals of violets curling in the cool folds of the leaves or lifting sweetly out of meadow-grass, the clear, firm outline of the face and limb, the smooth arch of a horse's neck and the velvety touch of his nose—all these, and a thousand resultant combinations, which take shape in my mind, constitute my world (Keller 1914, 6-7).

The coherent sensing of the world was not only educational it was beautiful. This connection of education with an aesthetic sensing of the world raises important questions for considering embodiment itself as a focal point for education. It is important to recall that Dewey's purpose in *Art as Experience* was to establish the sensate roots of aesthetics and the role played by aesthetics in the conscious apprehension of patterns of meaning. The pragmatic importance of the body as an aesthetic phenomenon is central to the thinking of Richard Shusterman, who proposes what he names somaesthetics as a disciplinary proposal for philosophically embodied inquiry. In what follows, I will briefly explore Shusterman's somaesthetics as a potentially useful form of inquiry and practice for enabling capability consciousness. To know and believe oneself as capable can not only be empowering, but it can also be a source of pleasure, not in the sense that one can simply dominate or control one's environment, as this might first to come to mind, but that one can unify one's experience as aesthetically pleasing. To learn is to grow and growth has roots in the beautiful as a fuller expression of each individual. Seen from the

perspective of others everyone has an “epiphany” with all of one’s properties unfolding before one’s eventual decline, as Arendt puts it, with poetic flourish (Arendt 1978, 22). Learning from Shusterman, I will sketch the relations of capability consciousness with the aesthetic powers of embodiment. Shusterman defines somaesthetics thus,

Somaesthetics may be provisionally defined as the critical, meliorative use of experience and use of one’s body as a locus of sensory-aesthetic appreciation (*aesthesis*) and creative self-fashioning. It is therefore also devoted to the knowledge, discourses, practices, and bodily disciplines that structure such somatic care or can improve it (Shusterman 1999, 302).

Shusterman divides somaesthetics into three different aspects of discipline: (1) analytic somaesthetics (2) pragmatic somaesthetics and (3) practical somaesthetics. Each has significance considered in light of forethought concerning the embodied nature of being, learning, and acting. “Analytic” somaesthetics takes into account the socio-political dimensions of body and “the basic perceptions and practices and their construction of reality” (Shusterman 1992a).⁵⁰ “Pragmatic somaesthetics” is characterized as having a “normative, prescriptive character— by proposing specific methods of somatic improvement and engaging in their comparative critique” (Shusterman 1992a, 272). Pragmatic somaesthetics has itself two different forms (1) “representational somaesthetics” that is concerned with bodily appearance and (2)

⁵⁰ Shusterman cites Michel Foucault’s description of disciplinary forces that shape body and behavior into specific forms as a result of the dispersion of power in a grid of relationships. He writes, “Michel Foucault’s seminal vision of the body as a docile, malleable site for inscribing social power reveals the crucial role somatics can play in political philosophy. It offers a way of understanding how complex hierarchies of power can be exercised and reproduced without any need to make them explicit in laws or officially enforce can thus be materialized and preserved by encoding them in somatic norms that, as bodily habits, typically get taken for granted and therefore escape critical consciousness” (Shusterman 1992b). See Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish* (Foucault 1995).

“experiential somaesthetics” that concerns the interior perceptions of embodiment for example the function of proprioception that is essential for perceiving one’s location and orientation in space, and coordinating movement with appropriate force and precision. And, finally “practical somaesthetics” that may be summarized as doing “body work” aimed at enhancing “self-knowledge” and “self-care” (Shusterman 1992a, 278).

Shusterman discusses ways that individuals can improve the quality of their own physical experience through an intentional and mindful reflection. This is as possible with individuals with a variety of different disabilities as it so for the range of functionings that human beings can manifest. Various forms of somaesthetics are certainly applicable to various ways Keller describes how she uses her entire body as a sense organ. Frequently when she does so, she emphasizes the richness of the experience, and often her examples are couched with descriptions of pleasurable experiences, though she does also cite unpleasant sensations that she recognizes as offensive to her sense of bodily harmony. While she is criticized for using metaphors from sight and sound, Keller’s poetic style of describing her experience, I claim, testifies to the depth and conscious consideration and reflection on what she experienced and what meaning her sensory experiences carry for her. Examples abound, many I have already cited, and several more I cite below relating to Shusterman’s explanation of somaesthetics’ potential as a pragmatic exercise in a philosophy of embodiment. First, I include a passage from Shusterman to set a conceptual context for what Keller writes about the phenomenology of her experience.

Somaesthetics... treats the body not only as an *object* [italics original] of aesthetic value and creation, but also as a crucial sensory *medium* for enhancing our

dealings with all other aesthetic objects and also with matters not standardly aesthetic. We can easily see, for example, somaesthetics' improvement of sensory acuity, muscular movement, and experiential awareness could fruitfully contribute to the understanding and practice of traditional arts like music, painting, and dance (a somaesthetic art par excellence), and how it could enhance our appreciation of the natural and constructed environments that we navigate and inhabit (Shusterman 1992a, 278).

Rather than claim a perfect accord between Helen Keller's early education and any of the various forms of Shusterman's somaesthetics, I claim Helen Keller's "somaesthetic" powers, based on her dependence on three senses instead five, as an illustration of the body as a crucial sensory medium for enriching experience and aesthetic appreciation. Keller's claim of epistemological parity rested on the use and dependence on her body to know and feel. On the one hand, there was exposure to countless sensory experiences guided by her teacher, and on the other she learned to attach words to feelings that became reflections on what she sensed, felt, and knew of the very significance of her being.

The thousand soft voices of the earth have truly found their way to me – the small rustle in tufts of grass, the silky swish of leaves, the buzz of insects, the hum of bees in blossoms I have plucked, the flutter of bird's wings after his bath, and the slender rippling vibration of water running over pebbles. Once having been felt, these loved voices rustle, buzz, hum, flutter, and ripple in my thought forever, an undying part of happy memories (Keller 1914).

The adjectival content is rich, poetic, and visual, but Keller's education provided aspect of the visual experience that were firmly undergirded by the equivalences provided by her other senses; where these are provided to everyone with the senses of touch, smell, and taste, they often remain little considered in favor of dominant descriptions through sight. Vibration is an aspect of sound that travels through air and is conducted through objects and even the body itself. Keller's teacher placed things in her hands to feel and

manipulate. Keller's hands were placed in contact with surfaces to sense the qualities of textures and feel the rush of movement and air against her face. The qualities of flutter and buzz and hum are discernable through touch, through the contact of these occurrences against the body, and particularly the hands.

Shusterman's "provisional definition" of somaesthetics sets an objective for "self-fashioning," meaning that one can take and have agency in one's "self-improvement." While this self-improvement might mean remediation or prevention of disability, it can also mean an improvement over the circumstances of experience where the means available to an individual to experience the world fruitfully is improved. For example, perception can be readily improved by orientation and location. If one cannot navigate oneself into a better position, one can be assisted in finding a better location to experience a phenomenon. I am reminded of my own experience in a large institutional setting many years ago when a talented Occupational Therapist experimented with positioning forms to gradually bring individuals with multiple handicaps (who had been neglected for years) into an upright position, with the midline of their body properly supported. Imagine the difference of visual and auditory experience from being flat on one's back in a bath-cart versus an upright sitting position to experience others more normally face to face! Hence, meliorative activities are both part of one what learns to do, and what others learn to do to benefit the quality of experience. With the assistance of others, and those favoring winds of environment, the means for enhancing self-knowledge became available.

Again, as Shusterman stresses, means of meliorative activities are learned. In the case of children, and particularly children with disability, there has to be an intentional

curriculum. Through educational influence, improvements in the quality of somatic experience become a habitual practice by a student. Sullivan's choices of curriculum, from sensory experience to reading literary classics, were both intellectually and aesthetically driven. Because of her student's deaf-blindness, movement was the central means of teaching. What the child could not see, she could feel, and what one could see but not touch, Keller learned to generalize from her own experience by extension. This is clear from reading Keller's descriptions of what she finds beautiful to her senses of touch, taste, and smell. It is clear from Keller's means of extrapolating sand, rock, and water into topographies of shores, mountains, rivers, and oceans.

Placing the student's hand into contact with myriad things about her promoted the acquisition of tactual memory to inform and enrich understanding. Movement of body and movement of location were both integral to teaching. Improving contact and improving location served as meliorative activities of somaesthetic importance. The somatic experiences of learning were integral to Keller's education. The intentionality of such instruction is evident.

Indeed, everything that could hum, or buzz or sing, or bloom, had a part of in my education—noisy-throated frogs, katydids and crickets held in my hand, until forgetting their embarrassment, they trilled their reedy note, little downy chickens and wildflowers, the dogwood blossoms, meadow violets and budding fruit trees. I felt the bursting cotton-bolls and fingered their soft fiber and fuzzy seeds; I felt the low sloughing of the wind through the cornstalks, the silky rustling of the long leaves, and the indignant snort of my pony, as we caught him in the pasture and put the bit in his mouth—ah me! How well I remember the spicy, clover smell of his breath (Keller 2003, 61).

The teacher reinforces her relationship with her student with a pleasurable intent. How much better does a child learn with the teacher's attention on the qualia of the child's

sensate states? Optimal learning comes with the child's perception of safety that allows her body to engage her resources for learning, not the least of which is her attachment system that promotes relationships with others.

Following Shusterman, I characterize such interactions as not only possible forms of somaesthetic care but also as forms of educational care. Hence, movement, a fundamental teacher of experience from the start, retained its importance for reinforcing the body as a "locus of sensory-aesthetic appreciation." Exposure to the experience of embodied beauty begets a desire for embodied beauty, as well as an appreciation of beauty both inherent and constructed.

Learners are embodied learners, and from this brief consideration of Shusterman applied to my analysis of capability consciousness I ask how can pleasure become a means of curricular intent for individuals with disability. How can Shusterman's concept of improving the quality of embodied experience speak to the ways in which special education objectives and methods might be constructed? I have written previously about the relationship of pleasure to learning (Surbaugh 2009). Learners do not exist separate from their bodies. They are biological entities with basic needs for sustenance and stimulation. Seldom considered is the fact that far from being simply an ethereal overlay, the stimulation that the live creature needs is not only to propel it to meet its needs, the forms of stimulation that energize the live creature are also aesthetic at their root. Dewey understood this and Shusterman reinforces this through his deconstruction of the concept of aesthetic as "aesthesis" – it is the interweaving of the live creature with its environment. All the reflected upon qualities of the live creature's experience are combined sensory-

cognitive perceptions. An aesthetically pleasing experience interweaves “body-mind” with environment. It is the substance of Dewey’s “body-mind” plus environment, recapitulating relations substantively and qualitatively, where meaning arises from a consideration of the interrelations of the whole. In an essay on Dewey’s *Art as Experience*, Shusterman considers the influence of Dewey’s preceding essay, “Qualitative Thought” (Dewey 1984),

Dewey argues that our experience, judgments, and thoughts about objects and events are never done in absolute isolation but only in terms of a contextual whole, which he calls a “situation.” But what creates a situation and gives it unity, structure, and limits that define it as an experience? Dewey claims it is a directly perceived “immediate quality.” The situation or experience is “held together, in spite of its internal complexity, by the fact that it is dominated and characterized throughout by a “single quality” grasped as a “direct presence”. [Continuing to quote Dewey] Moreover, in constituting the situation, this “immediate quality of the whole situation” also controls the distinction of objects or terms that thinking later identifies and employs as parts (relations, elements, objects, distinctions) of the situation or relevancy and force of very distinction and relation; it guides selection and rejection and the manner of utilization of all explicit terms” because such terms “are all its distinctions and relations” (Shusterman 2010, 33).

The significance of this extended passage on Dewey by Shusterman is to highlight how anything perceived remains pertinent to consciousness. It applies to the imparting of educational content to provide a context and a perspective both intellectually, and even proximately, as to where the instruction occurs and in what embodied state the child currently experiences. It matters to take into account how the child perceives and apprehends and what conditions enhance perception and apprehension. The fruits of learning appear in imagination a necessary part of executing agency.

In previous work I claimed that the pleasure is as important to learning as effort, and I further claimed that seldom is pleasure considered integral to the learning of

children with disability (Surbaugh 2009, 417). If pleasure is critical to learning, it is no less critical to children with disabilities who are also “live creatures.” Environment, however, as I noted, is often an obstacle to persons with disabilities, and for this reason, environment poses an educational question. While disability may modify how the world is available, the body is the means by which the live creature may take of stock of its powers and gain self-knowledge. This is precisely what education did for Helen Keller and its importance for all students— no matter their cognitive or physical gifts or impairments—is incontestable. For example, knowing that a child with autism uses movement to regulate her level of comfort and emotional state, informs the teacher what the child’s needs for stimulation are. Encouraging a child to regulate her emotions through means that do not cause harm is crucial for promoting self-knowledge, empowerment, and a fruitful capability. The teacher must understand how the child’s body enacts what it needs to reshape how this need is met, taking into account the capabilities of the child, the needs of the environment, and even attitudes of culture that might be inclined to misunderstand the meaning of the child’s behavior.

Dewey’s emphasis on the live creature’s pursuit of a homeostasis demonstrates more than just survival; it means the pursuit of pleasurable growth. Provocation is necessary – limiting conditions can promote growth provided there is a favorable wind to support the adaptive capabilities of the student as live creature. Disabilities as a social construction or as the occurrence of impaired function provoke us, but they need not provoke negatively; indeed, disability in an educational context can provoke – but the provocation is an occasion for adaptation and creativity.

CHAPTER FIVE

Capability Consciousness and Difference

“I do not like the world as it is, I am trying to make it a little more as I would have it.”
~Nielsen 2004⁵¹

The experience of the deaf-blind person, in a world of seeing, hearing people, is like that of a sailor on an island where the inhabitants speak a language unknown to him, whose life is unlike that he has lived. He is one, *they are many* [italics added]; there is no chance of compromise. He must learn to see with their eyes, to hear with their ears, to think their thoughts, to follow their ideals (Keller 1914, 124).

Reading this quote from *The World I Live In* raises a question. Did Keller believe that the deaf-blind must acquiesce to the world as it was, ruled by the seeing-hearing? Or, does Keller simply express a truism about the world as it is?⁵² The quote is both realistic and enigmatic in its implications for identity. When in a foreign land where inhabitants do not speak one’s language one is required to learn the language of the land. Without asserting the value of one language over another, what Keller asserts is a practical

⁵¹ This quote appears in an interview with the magazine, “The Christian Advocate,” February 20, 1913. In the article Keller responded to the question as to her greatest ambition “to help others see and hear as well as I can.”

⁵² Georgiana Kleege makes the point in “Helen Keller and the Empire of the Normal.” “Although Keller is making an analogy to cultural assimilation, she is not really claiming to belong to a separate culture, as we would today use the term Deaf Culture to designate users of American Sign Language as a linguistic group. The manual alphabet Keller employed was a form of transcribed English rather than a true sign language. So here, she represents herself as belonging to a culture of one. Her point is that in order to belong to seeing-hearing culture she has an obligation and a right to use the words and idioms that any speaker of the language uses, even those that assume the speaker or writer can see and hear” (Kleege 2000).

argument. There is a tension in what Keller says above. Just after the passage above, Keller writes to reinforce parity with seeing-hearing:

If the dark, silent world which surrounds him were essentially different from the sunlit, resonant world, it would be incomprehensible to his kind, and could never be discussed. If his feelings and sensations were fundamentally different from those of others, they would be inconceivable except to those who had similar sensations and feelings. If the mental consciousness of the deaf-blind person were absolutely dissimilar to that of his fellows, he would have no means of imagining what they think (Keller 1914, 124).

Throughout this inquiry, I describe capability consciousness as attitudinal expression of the modal phrase “I can,” that bridges identity with agency. “I can” in the global sense is a disposition of capability – in part unreflectively available as an orientation to the world, and, in part, consciously available when one reflects on what has done and can do. I conceptualize disability as a condition of function and/or social construction. As such, functional limitations and social construction act as limiting conditions. Limiting conditions inhibit and threaten the acquisition or maintenance of capability consciousness as a theme for one’s identity. If education is merely the introduction of content without taking into account how the student learns and for what purposes, it meets resistance, sometimes actively or because the child simply cannot help it. When resistance is encountered this is an occasion for adaption on the part of the educator, to further analyze how the child learns, what tools are needed, and how the environment can be altered to favor the child’s competences.

Attitudes about disability stand in the way, just as attitudes about gender roles, ethnicity, race, religion, and sexual orientation can stand in the way of education doing what it should. No matter what any of these considerations look like, disability, race,

ethnicity, or sexual orientation, or even static attitudes about gender roles, every student is in a state of equivalence as needful, adaptive, with propensities for growth. A propensity for growth requires motivation for its sustenance at each level of occurrence.

The psychology literature on motivation is vast. The work of Albert Bandura on theorizing conditions for self-efficacy is an example of concern over the conditions for optimal learning and performance (Bandura 1977). For some time self-determination has been a major curricular theme in special education, raising questions about conditions for agency (Wehmeyer 2004, Turnbull 2010). The topic of agency is studied in the social sciences and philosophy (Emirbayer and Mische 1998). Maslow's "needs hierarchy" has been influential in conceptualizing conditions for "self-actualization" (Maslow 1943, Maslow et al. 1970). All are concerned with conditions for human growth and flourishing. In some cases, disability has been explicitly present, for example the work of Wehmeyer et al. in special education (Wehmeyer 2004, Turnbull 2010), as well as Martha Nussbaum's work on the Capabilities Approach in economics and politics, (Sen 1980, Nussbaum 2007, Nussbaum 2011), and Eva Feder Kittay on cognitive disability, and many more.

Returning to the question of attitude, thinking about disability as an adaptive event undermines thinking of disability as simply an undesirable event. With function tied to environment, environment becomes the focus of concern not the inadequacies of the individual. Helen Keller obviously required considerable assistance to navigate an environment. Keller, however, remained focused first on what she could do. She could not defend herself based on things she could not do. Though Keller said "I plead guilty

to being deaf and blind,” still, this did not deter her from defending capabilities that she knew she had.

I have suggested that limiting conditions serve both positive and negative functions in conceptualizing capability consciousness. Limiting conditions can be provocations for adaptation and raise questions about which aspects of an environment can favor adaptation. Framed as an educational question, beginning with what one cannot do is itself a formidable limiting condition. Disability framed in a medical context as an illness likens disability to a pathology to be excised. At the start, disability is out of order, removing the perceptibility of disability as a source of other forms of capabilities.

Helen Keller described her teacher as “a seer of capabilities,” which did not mean that her teacher could remain unconcerned with what the student needed to learn based on cultural expectations. Building on strengths is not a novel idea in education. Paying attention to strengths allows the teacher to gain insights into how a student does learn and to create favoring conditions for a trajectory of learning. Dewey’s naturalistic conception of the human being as relational is helpful in imagining how relations can favor education.

The recursive nature of consciousness demands that the environment make sense and have significance if the student is to form a sense of purpose and connection to others. Education as “favoring wind” is an apt metaphor for individualizing education based on a student’s needs, however they are defined. Necessary is a “loving eye” (Frye), to take

in, assess, and plan curriculum based upon a student's capabilities (Frye 1983a).⁵³ My use of the metaphor of the "live creature" to frame any child, and every child with a disability, as adaptive, provides lessons for those who focus on disability as defect. Here again, focus on adaptation opens up a space to rethink disability as a part of the natural order of things. Every student adapts and the conditions that require adaptation bear a unique character in significant ways. No situation is precisely the same. Those aspects of environment under conscious control are part of the "environing" conditions that can bode well or ill for the student.

My reference to Couser's autosomatography as embodied memoir draws attention to the process of bodily narrating oneself to self. Drawing on Judith Butler's formulation of narrative expression as "giving an account of oneself," one, in part, gives an account by making oneself recognizable to others.⁵⁴ As Derrida has put it, the body is itself a form

⁵³ See Marilyn Frye, *The Politics of Reality* (Frye 1983a) for a discussion of attention by what she calls a "loving eye," and attention as a result of an "arrogant eye" (75). My use of "loving eye" requires I cite Frye for use, but further inspiration comes from Sara Ruddick's use of "attentive love" (Ruddick 1980) in her conception of maternal thinking, to describe the focus of mother's on the "preservation," "growth," "acceptability" of their children. Ruddick describes her concept of attentive love as the result of theorizing Simone Weil's concept of "attention" (Weil 1986) and its use by Iris Murdoch (Murdoch 2001).

⁵⁴ See Judith Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself* (Butler 2005). "If I try to give an account of myself, if I try to make myself recognizable and understandable, then I might begin with a narrative account of my life. But this narrative will be disoriented by what is not mine, or mine alone. And I will, to some degree, have to make myself substitutable in order to make myself recognizable. The narrative authority of the "I" must give way to the perspective and temporality of a set of norms that contest the singularity of my story (37).

of text.⁵⁵ The body as text suggests a process of continual re-writing, reconstructing, and taking apart and putting together again.

Couser's description of disability memoir includes giving a first-person account of oneself on what it means to be a particular body. Identities are not stable. They are always in process throughout the lifespan, but general themes can emerge that give continuity to experience and color how challenges and circumstances are narrated into self-perception. The need to make sense of one's experience, and reintegrate oppositional circumstances, are all parts of one's narrative account of oneself. In the shaping of identity, themes emerge such as desire to belong, or to demonstrate belonging, to distinguish oneself in ways that are favorably valued, to address judgment and justify one's behavior ethically and morally, or demonstrate how one is not culpable, or, ought to be held accountable for events or circumstances that affect others negatively. The old philosophical and religious concerns related to determinism versus freewill, whether pure, or conditioned, or qualified in some way, are also part of one's disposition towards experience.

Disability brings into relief difference—how it is identified, its interpretation, and its possibilities for focusing on what it means to be a human being. Considerations like these, too, are part of a larger dynamic where conferred identities are evaluated against experience. Jacques-Henri Stiker, a French scholar, writes that manifestation of disability as difference brings forth immediate questions of responsibility. Who has caused this to

⁵⁵ This brief account of Derrida's thought is indebted to Max Van Manen, "Phenomenology of Practice: meaning-giving methods in philosophical writing" (Van Manen 2014, 158-159).

be? It is the fear of the difference that disability evokes, that shapes cultural response by groups of the dominant-typical. Fear is a manifest part of all conceptions of disability as a moral lapse or a contagion, and finds association with death and decline, or brokenness and danger.

But a disability, even one people call *mild* [italics original] (with a questionable relativism, for everything depends on what you feel), does subject us to a great fear, disconcerting and isolated, to a prodigious negation. At this point we start denying it, by becoming obsessive, by experiencing everything as a function of the fright and the discomfort that it causes, by delimiting and closing it in. Above all, the difference must not become contagious (Stiker 1999b, 7).

Attempts to redress all disability as a treatment issue illustrate attempts to excise, or cover up anything that is associated with disability

Feminist philosopher, Susan Wendell, herself a person with Chronic Fatigue Syndrome, described the dynamic of disability “other” labeling thus:

When we make people “Other,” we group them together as objects of our experience instead of regarding them subjects of experience with whom we might identify, and see them primarily as symbolic of something else, usually, but not always, we reject and project fear on them (Wendell 1996, 112).

Wendell acknowledges that real limitation, such as loss of limb or spinal injury, may be part of disability; however, the meaning of limitation remains socially constructed in a deleterious fashion. Changes in the physical environment often radically expand or contract capabilities of persons with physical or sensory deficits. Changes in technology shift definitions of limitation and conceal the degree to which everyone remains dependent on a larger social network. Difference does not always mean defect. The members of the deaf community, for example, communicate as effectively as speaking persons do, although differently. People who require wheelchairs move as effectively as

people who ambulate in environments without obstacles. Difference need not mean an unconditional lack of ability. Indeed, on this foundation of capability is possibility.

Disabilities which impair tangible function, e.g., inability to walk, will never be greeted as desirable. However, adaptation is a problem faced by everyone, and, conceptually thinking of disability as part of the adaptive problem of being a human being can perhaps open a cultural space for thinking about disability differently. Difficulties run deep down into the concept of the “normal,” which misrepresents reality and forces the identification of many similarities that need not render the concept of adaptation as superfluous.⁵⁶ These observations are important because how education is framed attitudinally draws on currents of thought that define the ontology of disability in a pervasively negative fashion.

Helen Keller was not defeated by disability, but her overcoming was more complex, more nuanced, and much more interesting than a fictional narrative of a super heroine. There is criticism, however, that Keller’s views about herself were too driven by an individualistic narrative that placed too much of the burden on one person with a disability to prove something. Her own claims of autonomy are undermined by the actual

⁵⁶ See Lennard Davis, “Constructing Normalcy: The Bell Curve, The Novel, and Invention of the Disabled Body in the Nineteenth Century,” for a critical history perspective on the concept of normal or normality “[T]he whole constellation of words that describe... concept[s] ‘normal,’ ‘normalcy,’ ‘normality,’ ‘norm,’ ‘average,’ ‘abnormal,’ — all entered the European language rather late in human history. The word ‘normal’ as ‘constituting, conforming to, not deviating from or different from, the common type or standard, regular, usual’ only enters the English language around 1840” (Davis 1997). The construction of the concept passed through attempts by nation states to “categorize” population, and, fell under the influence of development of statistics considered necessary for controlling populations biologically and behaviorally.

circumstances of her life, particularly when she emphasized the need for the blind to be self-sufficient.

Nielsen describes the tensions within this claim, as Keller never herself achieved the financial independence she desired (Nielsen 2004, 34). This criticism has merit, and its occurrence is not surprising against the cultural backdrop and larger narrative of American culture that continues largely intact today: financial autonomy is a condition of personal freedom that one can and must earn, but such categorical assertions are a fiction. Liberty is almost completely conceptualized negatively, and this is part of the legacy of classical political and economic thought emerging in the enlightenment and post-enlightenment period. There are many limitations imposed by cultural construction with institutionalized impediments that keep whole groups of individuals subservient and trapped in imposed circumstances. Keller seems to have believed, too deeply perhaps, that individual work was the answer. The blind must support themselves, hence her emphasis on “training.” While acknowledging this legitimate criticism of Keller’s ideas, I propose that education itself is about overcoming and this overcoming can be directed against many different kinds of limitations. However, in this inquiry I link limitation with overcoming perceptions that one is ontologically incapable. As I claimed at the outset of this inquiry, capability consciousness is not the belief that one can do *anything*, it is that one fully inhabits what one can do, with the experience of capability to support it. If capability consciousness were to depend on the same facts of its self-perception as Helen Keller’s, for example, her belief in the liberation she received from language, capability consciousness could have no relevance for someone with a profound intellectual

disability. This is precisely the point. Capability consciousness will look differently depending on the subject involved, the capacities of the person's unique body, and the content of the "favoring wind" that education serves. Capability consciousness can be raised in three different senses in this inquiry, for example, 1) what is capability consciousness as a general concept? 2) What is capability consciousness to a subject? 3) What is the contingent role that education may play in fostering individual first-person senses of capability, whatever differences might be between an individual's capacities and the possibilities of developing capability? What I am conceptualizing as capability consciousness is what is meant by a disposition of "I can."

One can frame disability in different ways with respect to "I can." One can acknowledge difference as the "normal" phenomenon of variation, present in the human species as it is present in any other animal or plant species. One can group similar characteristics of physiological function in range, and declare a certain span of variation "normal" or "typical" – or more generally represented in a given population. One can acknowledge that culture and all the contingencies of environment impact what is regarded as significant. One can point to advances in medicine and technology as enfranchising individuals who under less fortunate medical or technical circumstances might not flourish or even survive. One might view disability, despite degrees of cultural change, as something cured, fixed, or remediated. One can place education in the context of all of these different ways of framing disability and find examples of practices or attitudes that view educating individuals with disability as curing, fixing, or remediating. Not even the emphasis on inclusion in special education has fostered acceptance of

disability as a state of beginning, which corresponds to all children undergoing development. The point of the resource room is not to accept the child as doing the same thing that other students are doing in the “regular” education classrooms, but to remediate them, to get them to do what they seem not be able to do without “special” help. Granted, this is a sweeping assertion, but my point is not to portray inclusion in the fullness of theory, but ask that we look at practice. No one disputes that some special education programs practice inclusion better than others. However, I can comfortably assert that most of the children and educators at schools believe that “something is wrong” with a student in special education. This habit of mind is the most significant limiting condition a student with disability faces from the perspective of the student, the teacher, and the public. Wrongness is inimical to the parity of live creatures as adaptive, in unique circumstances, and connected. Modifying teaching strategies for special education students can be seen neither as an exception or an annoyance if education focuses on developing each individual student’s capability consciousness.⁵⁷ One must begin knowing the concept of the live creature in order to reframe individualized teaching strategies as one element of the favoring wind of education.

Helen Keller was not educated as a young child in public school. Helen Keller did not encounter any form of standardized test until she sought admission to college. One hundred thirty years have passed since Keller’s education with Ann Sullivan began. The vast difference between today and the late nineteenth century may seem at the start to

⁵⁷ See Ann Turnbull, Rud Turnbull & Michael Wehmeyer, *Exceptional Lives: Special Education in Today's Schools* (Dewey) for an introduction to contemporary special education best practice (Turnbull 2010).

raise questions about Keller's relevance for contemporary culture and education. However, attitudes and ideas live long after their first emergence in the cultural consciousness. Beliefs about education use different vocabularies at different times, but the disputes that center on special education have remained strikingly similar to those prevalent in the early twentieth century. Attitudes about Helen Keller's disability as a child are not greatly different from beliefs held by many today. Eugenics has been replaced by genetic modification as a means of eradicating disabilities considered undesirable based on assumptions of what constitutes a meaningful life. This goes much beyond improvements in the quality of life that modern medical care has achieved.⁵⁸

In any case, the tyranny of the "normal" rules, even with incremental shifts in what normality can include. Helen Keller still illumines every genre of educational inquiry. She was at risk of institutionalization as child. Others could not see any hope for her in the culture in which she lived. Education in a classroom was out of the question. And even when Keller achieved parity or exceeded the accomplishments of children her age, there was doubt. As she grew into adulthood doubt became more than disbelief, it became enveloping criticism that questioned her epistemological stance to claim her own mind. Some years after Keller's childhood, the Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934) theorized special education as depending on marshaling of the compensatory resources of the child. He objected to what he believed was an almost exclusive focus on

⁵⁸ See *Quality of life and Human Difference: genetic testing, health care, and disability*, David Wasserman, Jerome Bickenbach, and Robert Wachbroit, Eds, for essays that address the intersection of developments in medicine and science and their ethical implications for individuals with disability in general (Wasserman 2005).

tabulating a child's weaknesses. Vygotsky was attuned to the role of culture in either encouraging and enabling a child to develop potential or blocking it. Interestingly, Vygotsky thought Keller an example of overcompensation that was culturally driven.

...[T]he the life Helen Keller did not contain anything mysterious. Her life graphically demonstrates that the process of overcompensation can be defined entirely by two factors: by popular social demand for development and education, and her reserve of psychological forces. This widespread social demand for Helen Keller's development and for a successful victory over her handicaps determined her fate. Her defect not only did not become a brake but was transformed into a drive that insured her development (Vygotsky 1993, 63-64).

Read in the full context of Vygotsky's theory of education for persons with disability, Vygotsky is actually doing several things at once. At the level of the individual, he takes seriously the psychic forces that drive an individual forward and he simultaneously points out how limiting conditions can supply the impetus to grow, something with which Dewey would not disagree. Dewey's caveat is simply that the demands of the environment exceed the individual's ability to gather together resources internally or externally to meet demands. What Vygotsky calls "compensation" is perhaps better expressed by Dewey's formulation of adaptation as something built into the existence of the live creature. At the level of the social, Vygotsky, like Dewey take culture as formative and either supportive or unsupportive to the propensities each child possesses, albeit in degrees of capacity.

Helen Keller embodies illustrations of all these insights supplied by Stiker, Arendt, Vygotsky, and Dewey. To frame Keller's narratives about herself as autosomatography places emphasis on the body as a text that speaks and is primarily adaptive before one "sees" disability. For educators, this means asking what can the child

do, knowing that adaptation is the foundation of every capability. In the final chapter, I will further develop capability consciousness as a phenomenological objective for students to experience and as a natural consequence of a child-centered pedagogy, built from propensities already present in the individual for biological, psychological and emotional growth. The narrative of the body is central to development of capability consciousness, or in Dewey's conception, the body-mind.

~ Conclusion: A Framework for Education

Part one, chapters one through three, identifies and applies concepts for framing the meaning of capability consciousness. Part two, chapter four, provides exemplary cases for various case forms I have named clear, contrary or disabling, and borderline. In this chapter, I draw conclusions based the results of my inquiry. In chapter four, part 2, I listed five propositions to support my use of Helen Keller as an exemplary case of capability consciousness. I will restate these propositions as aims:

1. Within the scope of their abilities, students must come to know and believe themselves capable. This knowledge and belief is manifest outwardly in behavior that reflects a sense of self.
2. Students with disability must fully inhabit what they can do with enjoyment, purpose in meaning.
3. Students with disability must be connected with others who recognize their individuality as the subject of knowing and experience.

4. Students must be allowed opportunities to exercise capabilities and to know without negative judgment or skepticism by others.
5. Students with disability must view education as meaningful and supportive of capabilities, including possibilities to learn new capabilities.

Supporting these aims requires a coherent philosophical foundation. To this end, this chapter will introduce what I will name “thematic concepts” some of which have already been discussed. I name this set of concepts as thematic because they are intended to pull together in summary fashion what my analysis of capability consciousness has led me to propose. These thematic concepts are:

- (1) Dewey’s concept of the “live creature” referring to the transactional organic enmeshing of human organism and environment (Dewey 2005);
- (2) Hannah Arendt’s concept of “plurality” as an ontological primary (Arendt 1978);
- (3) French historian/anthropologist Henri-Jacques Stiker’s concept of the “real,” by which he means that disability is part of the metaphysics of reality and not something aberrational (Stiker 1999a), and;
- (4) Philosopher Richard Shusterman’s concept of “somaesthetics” the improvement of bodily experience (Surbaugh 2009, Shusterman 1992b).

Each of these “thematic concepts” is ultimately founded on the role of embodiment in learning and living. Consciousness in the broadest sense makes disposition a possibility; and defense is an innate function of any living creature; and

propensity brings in all of the innate capabilities of a living organism, further favored or disfavored by the webs of relations that constitute their environment. For purposes of conceptual analysis, the other case forms of disabling or contrary, or borderline cases act to highlight what capability consciousness is not.

This inquiry began with the question: How does one with a profound disability come to find and know oneself as capable? To answer this question, I chose Helen Keller as a first-person perspective based on autobiographical texts that describe her capabilities as the result of her early education. From my reading of Keller's narrative, I named this proposed concept of self-claimed belief and knowledge of one's capability, capability consciousness. I have taken the reader through forms or case types in my reading of Helen Keller's narrative to theorize capability consciousness as a means and end for education in general, and for special education students in particular. Learning from Keller and from her early education, I conclude by proposing that capability consciousness requires recognition of the relational and perspectival dimensions of all learning, best advantaged through an environment that favors the child's ways of learning. This conclusion is significant because it orients teachers towards focusing attention first on a child's capabilities and not their putative disabilities. This practical and attitudinal shift of emphasis re-contextualizes disability as an opportunity for adaptation that regards all students as having an ontological parity⁵⁹ as learning, growing, and potentially flourishing

⁵⁹ See Justus Buchler definition of "ontological parity. Buchler argues that there is no basis to parse different degrees of "realness" for any entity, event, or circumstance. I cite Blucher because he theorizes the concept of ontological parity. My use therefore has a philosophical history. See *Metaphysics of Natural Complexes* (Buchler et al. 1990).

human beings. This conclusion is both practical and contributes to special education's historical commitment to individualized curriculum with a momentum towards self-determination and inclusion.

The importance of Helen Keller as a case example begins not with the content of Keller's accomplishment per se, but with the fact that she believed and knew herself to be capable. This was not assured from the time she became deaf-blind at nineteen months. Keller's becoming capable – and conscious of capability – depended on a teacher whose first skill was to observe her student carefully. With this observation, the teacher discovered what the child could do, and from these discoveries developed a curriculum for capabilities that advanced what the child could do, with what the child needed to know. In day-to-day instruction, which followed the child, the child's disability emerged only as a condition for adaptation and not a condition of lack that defined what she could do. What could be regarded as Keller's overcoming of disability was reframed in teaching practice as Helen Keller's *becoming*. This change of perspective is so simple, yet so difficult; it involves no revolutionary change in knowing how children learn, but a revolutionary change in regarding all children as competent to learn. To theorize capability consciousness as an educational concept is an integration of perspectives with one purpose—to teach the child habits of capability through experiences of capability. The hoped for result is a disposition of openness to experience aimed at full habitation of the potential that the child possesses as an individual with a unique course of development under favorable circumstances.

This principle does not require that children begin at the same place or reach the same degrees of capability, only that children fully inhabit the capabilities they have and can develop. Further research along the lines of this inquiry would be helpfully advanced by a variety of case studies involving a wide range of disabilities, both frank and cultural, to illuminate how educators have or might enable a sense of capability for a child as capable as a primary theme of outlook and experience. I hope to do just that.

Knowing “what” a child is – when framed as some category of disability – does not permit knowing *who* a child is. Parity lies in the processes of growth that all depend on relationships, propensities, and experience, along with the favoring wind of education. Capability, like propensity, is a contingency that requires provocations to open up properties. A child’s propensities wait to be greeted, and capability is the fruitful intersection of propensity and experience that equips a child for the next challenge. John Dewey’s dynamic view of the student as a needful and adaptive live creature applies to any student, no matter how gifted or apparently impaired.⁶⁰ Hannah Arendt’s conception of every child as a new possibility with the potential to break a chain of determinism opens a space for the diversity of children to become a plurality sharing a common world. Arendt’s dictum, “Plurality [as] the law of the earth” resists attempts to reduce each child from a subject “who” to categorical “what.” Stiker’s “the law of the real” resists attempts to level all disability into aberration, instead of legitimate possibility. Stiker and Arendt each point to the equality of the difference, instead of the difference as missing the mark of equality. To regard philosophy as foreign to the practices of education is to cede

⁶⁰ See John Dewey, *Art As Experience*

prejudice an unquestioned influence on that practice. Practice separated from a philosophy for educating can only turn into training that has little to do with how individuals actually grow and flourish. Shusterman's somaesthetics offers a curricular direction for education as an embodied pursuit. He reminds us of the somatic roots of all experience to mindfully focus on crucial aspects of experiences that are normally not reflected upon. Hence, education for all students should promote self-knowledge and the agency of self-fashioning. After all, it is the body and embodiment that is the source of beautiful experiences, as Shusterman has stated.

One function of education is aesthetic; yet this view is seldom considered and likely to be rejected as superfluous in a public climate that regards education as merely an economic handmaiden. Dewey's belief that education was necessary to foster democracy is as much an aesthetic belief as it is a civic belief. Education deployed as a socially valuable aesthetic function asks questions about what the world should look like and then asks how this look is changed and informed by different perspectives. With these perspectives we then recognize the world as a shared space and not a commodity where what one needs is provided only when someone else has something taken from them. It is false to believe that beauty is owned. Beauty—to be beautiful—must be experienced as beautiful, before any consideration of how its constituent parts were put together. To make a world accessible to people with disabilities is not only a practical concern, it is an aesthetic concern to open the world up as something beautiful and shared in common.

A child is never born knowing her disability will prevent her from doing, she only knows what she has learned she can do. As Keller put it, only later, when she “weighs

her life in the scales of others,” does she understand what disability is (Keller 1914, 123). Until that time, no *lack* is part of the child’s experience. Keller claimed that only she had the right to define any “lack” she might have.

Throughout this inquiry, I describe capability consciousness as an attitudinal expression of the modal phrase “I can,” a phrase that bridges identity with agency. “I can,” in the global sense, is a disposition of capability – in part unreflectively available as an orientation to the world, and, in part, consciously available when one reflects on what has done and can do. I conceptualize disability as a condition of function and/or social construction. As such, functional limitation and social construction act as limiting conditions. Limiting conditions inhibit and threaten the acquisition or maintenance of capability consciousness as a theme for one’s identity. Throughout this inquiry I have highlighted the role of environment as a necessary part of acquiring capability consciousness. One must experience capability to believe oneself capable. Socially constructed limiting conditions are contingent and require critical evaluation as to their origin and their role in stifling the growth and flourishing of students with disabilities. In my use of Dewey’s live creature, my purpose is to neutralize disability as simply an occasion for adaptation and learning, just as any skill learned is an adaptation to a circumstance. All live creatures are driven by needs and all will, according to their capacities and the favoring aspects of environment, adapt. Learning as adaptation simply means that new information is assimilated into what is already known and becomes available for use. All learning is context bound and all live creatures exist in contexts and face the same problems of adaptation in differences of degree, not kind. The student as

live creature is already situated to learn. Education can either favor this situation or inhibit it. Capability consciousness asks educators to consider what educational situations can favor its occurrence.

WORKS CITED

- Arendt, Hannah. 1978. *The Life of the Mind*. 1st ed. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.
- Bandura, Albert. 1977. "Self-Efficacy: Toward a Unifying Theory of Behavioral Change." *Psychological Review* 84 (2): 191–215. doi: 10.1037/0033-295X.84.2.191.
- Bartky, Sandra Lee. 1975. "Toward a Phenomenology of Feminist Consciousness." *Social Theory and Practice* 3:425–39.
- Bleich, David. 1978. *Subjective Criticism*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- "Book Review: The Story of My Life." 1903. *The Nation: A Weekly Journal*, April 30, 361–62
- Buchler, Justus, Kathleen Wallace, Armen Marsoobian, and Robert S. Corrington. 1990. *Metaphysics of Natural Complexes*. 2nd expanded ed. Albany: SUNY Press.
- Butler, Judith. 2005. *Giving an Account of Oneself*. New York: Fordham University Press.
- Cattaneo, Zaira, and Tomaso Vecchi. 2008. "Supramodality Effects in Visual and Haptic Spatial Processes." *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Learning, Memory, and Cognition* 34 (3): 631.
- Cattaneo, Zaira, and Tomaso Vecchi. 2011. *Blind Vision: The Neuroscience of Visual Impairment*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Cattaneo, Zaira, Tomaso Vecchi, Cesare Cornoldi, Irene Mammarella, Daniela Bonino, Emiliano Ricciardi, and Pietro Pietrini. 2008. "Imagery and Spatial Processes in Blindness and Visual Impairment." *Neuroscience & Biobehavioral Reviews* 32 (8): 1346–60.
- Cavarero, Adriana. 2014. *Relating Narratives: Storytelling and Selfhood*. New York: Routledge.
- Chemero, Anthony. 2011. *Radical Embodied Cognitive Science*. Boston: MIT press.
- Clark, Brett, and John Bellamy Foster. 2002. "Helen Keller and the Touch of Nature: An Introduction to Keller's *The World I Live In*." *Organization & Environment* 15 (3): 278–84.

- Cutsforth, Thomas D. 1951. *The Blind in School and Society: A Psychological Study*. New York: American Federation for the Blind.
- Damasio, Antonio R. 1999. *The feeling of What Happens : Body and Emotion in the Making of Consciousness*. 1st ed. New York: Harcourt Brace.
- Davis, Lennard J. 1997. "Constructing Normalcy: The Bell Curve, the Novel, and the Invention of the Disabled Body in the Nineteenth Century." In *The Disability Studies Reader*, edited by Lennard J. Davis, 9–28. New York: Routledge.
- de Beauvoir, Simone. 1974. *The Second Sex*. London: Penguin.
- Delano, Marfe Ferguson. 2008. *Helen's Eyes: A Photobiography of Annie Sullivan, Helen Keller's Teacher*. National Geographic Books.
- Denzin, Norman K., and Yvonna S. Lincoln. 2011. *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
- Dermot, Moran. 2000. *Introduction to Phenomenology*. London: Routledge.
- Dewey, John. 1958. *Experience and Nature*. Vol. 1. North Chelmsford, MA: Courier Corporation.
- Dewey, John. [1938] 1971. *Experience and Education, The Kappa Delta Pi lecture series*. New York: Collier Books.
- Dewey, John. 1984. Qualitative Thought. In *John Dewey: The Later Works*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.
- Dewey, John. 1998. "The Reflex Arc in Psychology." In *The Essential Dewey*, edited by Larry A. Hickman and Thomas M. Alexander, 3–10. Indianapolis, IN: University of Indiana.
- Dewey, John. 2001. *The School and Society & the Child and the Curriculum* Mineola, NY: Dover.
- Dewey, John. [1922] 2002. *Human Nature and Conduct*. Mineola, NY: Dover.
- Dewey, John. 2005. *Art as Experience*. New York: Perigee Books.
- Einhorn, Lois J. 1998. *Helen Keller, Public Speaker: Sightless but Seen, Deaf but Heard*. Great American Orators Series, no. 23. Westport, CN: Greenwood.
- Emirbayer, Mustafa, and Ann Mische. 1998. "What Is Agency?" *American Journal of Sociology* 103 (4): 962–1023.

- Fernández, Eduardo, and Lotfi B. Merabet. 2011. "Cortical Plasticity and Reorganization in Severe Vision Loss." In *Visual Prosthetics*, edited by Gislin Dagnelie, 77–92. New York: Springer.
- Foucault, Michel. 1995. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Translated by Alan Sheridan. New York: Vintage Books.
- Frye, Marilyn. 1983a. *The Politics of Reality : Essays in Feminist Theory*. Trumansburg, NY: Crossing.
- Frye, Marilyn. 1983b. "To See and Be Seen: The Politics of Reality." *Women, Knowledge, and Reality: Explorations in Feminist Philosophy*, edited by Ann Garry and Marilyn Pearsall, 77–92. New York: Routledge.
- Gallese, Vittorio. 2001. "The 'Shared Manifold' Hypothesis: From Mirror Neurons To Empathy." *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 8 (5–7): 33–50.
- Gallese, Vittorio, and Corrado Sinigaglia. 2010. "The Bodily Self as Power for Action." *Neuropsychologia* 48 (3): 746–55.
- Gibbs, Raymond W. Jr. 2006. *Embodiment and Cognitive Science*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Gibson, William. 2008. *The Miracle Worker*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Glitter, Elizabeth. 2001. *The Imprisoned Guest: Samuel Howe and Laura Bridgman, the Original Deaf-Blind Girl*. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux.
- Herrmann, Dorothy. 1998. *Helen Keller: A Life*. 1st ed. New York: Knopf.
- James, William. 1890. *The Principles of Psychology*. Vol. 2. Mineola, NY: Dover.
- Johnson, Mark. 2007. *The Meaning of the Body: Aesthetics of Human Understanding*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Keller, Helen. 1914. *The World I Live In*. New York: Century.
- Keller, Helen. 1915. "Correspondence to the Editor." *New Republic* 5 (59):172–74.
- Keller, Helen. 1955. *Teacher: Anne Sullivan Macy; A Tribute by the Foster-Child of Her Mind*. Garden City, NY: Dolphin Books.
- Keller, Helen. 2003. *The Story of My Life*. Restored Classic 1903–2003 ed. New York: W. W. Norton & Company.

- Keller, Helen. 1967. *Helen Keller, Her Socialist Years: Writings and Speeches*. New York: International.
- Kestenbaum, Victor. 1977. *The Phenomenological Sense of John Dewey: Habit and Meaning*. Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities.
- Kleege, Georgina. 2000. "Helen Keller and 'The Empire of the Normal.'" *American Quarterly* 52 (2): 322–25.
- Kleege, Georgina. 2006. *Blind Rage: Letters to Helen Keller*. Washington, DC : Gallaudet University Press,.
- Langer, Susanne Katherina Knauth. 1957. *Philosophy in a New Key: A Study in the Symbolism of Reason, Rite, and Art*. 3d ed. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Lash, Joseph P. 1997. *Helen and Teacher: The Story of Helen Keller and Anne Sullivan Macy*. Radcliffe Biography Series. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.
- Leiber, Justin. 1996. "Helen Keller as Cognitive Scientist." *Philosophical Psychology* 9 (4): 419–40. doi: 10.1080/09515089608573193.
- Lieberman, Matthew D. 2013. *Social: Why Are Brains Are Wired to Connect*. New York: Crown.
- Maslow, A. H. 1943. "A Theory of Human Motivation." *Psychological Review* 50 (4): 370–96. doi: 10.1037/h0054346.
- Maslow, Abraham Harold, Robert Frager, James Fadiman, Cynthia McReynolds, and Ruth Cox. 1970. *Motivation and Personality*. Vol. 2. New York: Harper & Row.
- Merabet, Lotfi B., and Alvaro Pascual-Leone. 2010. "Neural Reorganization Following Sensory Loss: The Opportunity of Change." *Nature Reviews Neuroscience* 11 (1): 44–52. doi: 10.1038/nrn2758.
- Merleau-Ponty, Maurice 1968. *The visible and the Invisible; followed by working notes*. Translated by Alphonso Lingis. Northwestern University Studies in Phenomenology & Existential Philosophy. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.
- Mostert, Mark P. 2002. "Useless Eaters: Disability as a Genocidal Marker in Nazi Germany." *Journal of Special Education* 36 (3): 155–68.
- Murdoch, Iris. 2001. *The Sovereignty of Good*. Routledge Classics. London: Routledge.

- Nielsen, Kim E. 2004. *The Radical Lives of Helen Keller*. The History of Disability Series. New York: New York University Press.
- Nielsen, Kim E. 2009. *Beyond the Miracle Worker: The Remarkable Life of Anne Sullivan Macy and Her Extraordinary Friendship with Helen Keller*. Boston: Beacon.
- Noe, Alva. 2004. *Action in Perception*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Nolan, Christopher. 1987. *Under the Eye of the Clock : The Life Story of Christopher Nolan*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Nussbaum, Martha. 2007. "Frontiers of justice. Disability, nationality, species membership." *Scandinavian Journal of Disability Research* 9 (2): 133–36.
- Nussbaum, Martha C. 2011. *Creating Capabilities*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Obretenova, Souzana, Mark A Halko, Ela B Plow, Alvaro Pascual-Leone, and Lotfi B. Merabet. 2009. "Neuroplasticity Associated with Tactile Language Communication in a Deaf-Blind Subject." *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience* 3.
- Pernick, Martin S. 1996. *The Black Stork: Eugenics and The Death of 'Defective' Babies in American Medicine and Motion Pictures Since 1915*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Piaget, Jean, Margaret Cook, and W. W. Norton. 1952. *The Origins of Intelligence in Children*. Vol. 8. New York: International Universities Press.
- Pronko, N. H., and D. T. Herman. 1982. "Dewey's Reflex Arc Concept to Transactionalism and Beyond." *Behaviorism* 10 (2): 229–54.
- Rizzolatti, Giacomo, Leonardo Fogassi, and Vittorio Gallese. 2009. "The Mirror Neuron System: A Motor-Based Mechanism for Action and Intention Understanding." In *The Cognitive Neurosciences*. 4th ed. Edited by Michael S. Gazzaniga, Emilio Bizzi, Leo M. Chalupa, Scott T. Grafton, Todd F. Heatherton, Christof Koch, Joseph E. LeDoux, Steven J. Luck, George R. Mangun, J. Anthony Movshon, Helen Neville, Elizabeth A. Phelps, Pasko Rakic, Daniel L. Schacter, Mrganka Sur and Brian A. Wandell, 625–40. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Rockwell, W. Teed. 2005. *Neither Brain nor Ghost: A Nondualist Alternative to the Mind-Brain Identity Theory*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

- Röder, Brigitte, and Frank Rösler. 2004. "Compensatory Plasticity as a Consequence of Sensory Loss." In *The Handbook Of Multisensory Processes*, edited by Gemma A. Calvert, Charles Spence, and Barry E. Stein, 719–47. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Rödera, Brigitte, and Mark Wallace. 2010. "Development and Plasticity of Multisensory Functions." *Restorative Neurology and Neuroscience* 28 (2): 141–42.
- Ruddick, Sara. 1980. "Maternal Thinking." *Feminist Studies* 6 (2): 342–67.
- Ruddick, Sara. 1995. *Maternal Thinking: Toward A Politics of Peace*. Boston: Beacon.
- Sen, Amartya. 1980. *Equality of What?* McMurrin S. Tanner Lectures on Human Values, vol. 1. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Sheets-Johnstone, Maxine. 2011. *The Primacy of Movement*. Vol. 82. Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- Shusterman, Richard. 1992. *Pragmatist Aesthetics : Living Beauty, Rethinking Art*. Cambridge, MA: B. Blackwell.
- Shusterman, Richard. 1999. "Somaesthetics: A Disciplinary Proposal." *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 57 (3): 299–313.
- Shusterman, Richard. 2010. "Dewey's Art as Experience: The Psychological Background." *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 44 (1): 26–43. doi: 10.1353/jae.0.0069.
- Siegel, Daniel J. 2012. *The Developing Mind: How Relationships and the Brain Interact to Shape Who We Are*. 2nd ed. New York: Guilford.
- Snyder, Sharon L., and David T. Mitchell. 2010. *Cultural Locations of Disability*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Stern, Daniel N. 2000. *Interpersonal World of the Infant: A View From Psychoanalysis and Development Psychology*. New York: Basic Books.
- Stern, Daniel N. 2002. *The First Relationship: Infant and Mother*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Stiker, Henri Jacques. 1999a. *A History of Disability*. Translated by William Sayers. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Stiker, Henri Jacques. 1999b. *A History of Disability / Henri-Jacques Stiker*. Translated by William Sayers. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

- Surbaugh, Michael. 2008. "Disability Consciousness: A Prolegomenon." *Philosophy of Education* 2008: 392-398.
- Surbaugh, Michael. 2009. "'Somaesthetics,' Education, and Disability." *Philosophy of Education* 2009: 417-424.
- Surbaugh, Michael. 2010. "Producing Islands of Self-Mastery: The Biopolitics of Self-Determination in Special Education." *Philosophy of Education* 2010: 108-116.
- Surbaugh, Michael. 2011. "The Equality of Difference: A Phenomenological Ontology for Disability and Education." *Philosophy of Education* 2011: 215-222.
- Surbaugh, Michael. 2012. "The Disabling Ontology of Ableism." *Philosophy of Education* 2012: 122-124.
- Swan, Jim. 1999. "Touching Words: Helen Keller, Plagiarism, Authorship." In *The Construction of Authorship: Textual Appropriation in Law and Literature*. : Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Terzi, Lorella. 2005. "A Capability Perspective on Impairment, Disability and Special Needs: Towards Social Justice In Education." *Theory and Research in Education* 3 (2): 197–223. doi: 10.1177/1477878505053301.
- Terzi, Lorella. 2008. *Justice and Equality in Education: A Capability Perspective on Disability and Special Educational Needs*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Tomasello, Michael. 2003. *Constructing a Language: A Usage-Based Theory of Language Acquisition*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Turnbull, Ann, Rud Turnbull, Michael Wehmeyer. 2010. *Exceptional Lives: Special Education in Today's Schools*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill.
- Van Manen, Max. 2014. *Phenomenology of Practice: Meaning-Giving Methods in Philosophical Research and Writing*. Edited by Janice M. Morse. *Developing Qualitative Inquiry Series*, vol. 13. Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast.
- Vanlierde, Annick, Anne G. De Volder, Marie-Chantal Wanet-Defalque, and Claude Veraart. 2003. "Occipito-Parietal Cortex Activation During Visuo-Spatial Imagery in Early Blind Humans." *NeuroImage* 19 (3): 698-709. doi: [http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S1053-8119\(03\)00153-8](http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S1053-8119(03)00153-8).
- Vygotsky, L. S. 1993. *The Collected Works of L. S. Vygotsky*. Vol. 2. New York: Plenum.
- Wallace, Kathleen. 1999. "Ontological Parity and/or Ordinality?" *Metaphilosophy* 30 (4): 302–18.

- Wasserman, David, Jerome Bickenbach, Robert Wachbroit. 2005. *Quality of Life and Human Difference: Genetic Testing, Health Care, and Disability*. Cambridge Studies in Philosophy and Public Policy. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Wehmeyer, Michael L. 2004. "Beyond Self-Determination: Causal Agency Theory." *Journal of Developmental and Physical Disabilities* 16 (4):337–59. doi: 10.1007/s10882-004-0691-x.
- Weil, Simone. 1986. *Simone Weil : An Anthology*. London: Virago.
- Wendell, Susan. 1996. *The Rejected Body: Feminist Philosophical Reflections on Disability*. New York: Routledge.
- Winfield, Ann Gibson. 2007. *Eugenics and Education in America: Institutionalized Racism and the Implications of History, Ideology, and Memory*. *Complicated Conversation: A Book Series of Curriculum Studies*, vol. 18. New York: Peter Lang.
- Zelazo, Philip David, Morris Moscovitch, and Evan Thompson. 2007. *The Cambridge Handbook of Consciousness*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.