

**The Devil And The Angel Are Both Inside Of Us: The Differences Between Intent And Action**

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### **Abstract**

Inspired by *The Disability Studies Reader*- Chapter 13: The Social Model of Disability (pages 195-203) by Lennard Davis (2016) and *Is Everyone Really Equal?*- Chapter 6: Understanding Privilege Through Ableism by Özlem Sensoy and Robin DiAngelo (2017), this paper explores the affects of society's intentions and actions when it comes to labels and how they affect minorities. Society has long thrived on labels to the point where they instil a sense of comfortability and understanding of the world around us. Labels, whether they are self inflicted or put on us by others, do however have positive and negative connotations which direct our intentions and actions towards other human beings. Though we may see our intentions and actions as being for the greater good when it comes to topics like social movements (ex. BLM) and individuals with disabilities, how we engage ourselves and take action for the affected group speaks louder than a simple thought. This paper argues that there are scenarios where a devilish intention is masked with a seemingly 'angelic' action and where an 'angelic' intention is mulled over by a 'devilish' action or inaction. This paper concludes by asking the rhetorical 'devil' inside of our society what they are actually afraid of happening by embracing those with exceptionalities and providing them with supports that do not require the use of labelling.

*Keywords:* privilege, disability, bipoc, prejudice, assimilate, "woke-ness"

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Humans love labels. They bring us power, rank, class, cultural, and social understanding of the world around us which provides a feeling of calm and security. How we choose to call and label ourselves is rooted in how we as individuals personally identify. However there are instances where labels are thrust upon us without any individual choice or say in the matter. After reading *The Disability Studies Reader*- Chapter 13: The Social Model of Disability (pages 195-203) by Lennard Davis (2016) and *Is Everyone Really Equal?*- Chapter 6: Understanding Privilege Through Ableism by Özlem Sensoy and Robin DiAngelo (2017), my attention has been drawn to the issue of how labels we put on ourselves and others affect the balance of our own personal 'good' and 'evil' spectrum. Where we fall on this spectrum comes down to two items: intent and action.

*Is everyone really equal?* poses a thought that really strikes me. “[...] [I]ntentions are irrelevant to receiving privilege” (Sensoy and DiAngelo). I see this as a gross oversimplification when it comes to aspects of our identity and labels. The 'devil' and 'angel' spectrum lives where the intent behind the action lies. For instance, let us say that someone identifies and labels themselves as an ally for the BLM movement. They could say “Oh, bipoc are treated horribly, we need to do something!”, which is the statement of their intent, but what about the action? The Sensoy and DiAngelo quote states that because they receive the privilege of being white, that any stand or action they take to support BLM is irrelevant. I would argue that if the person has been invited by a movement to participate and use their privilege to stand up against prejudice, that is

not even close to irrelevant. The ‘angel’ actions taken verify that their intentions are not just shallow mutterings of a ‘devil’.

In *The Disability Studies Reader*, Davis (2016) explores how the labels of disability and impairment are acted upon in the social model and the medical model. The medical model sees disability and impairment as a deficit that can, and should, be fixed to assimilate into society. The social model sees our attitudes and actions towards those with disabilities as something that has historical and/or cultural impact, but with a progressive movement towards Universal Design (pg. 195). *Is everyone really equal?* expands on this idea and states that “[l]abels such as ‘regular,’ ‘normal,’ ‘gifted,’ and ‘special’ shape the policies that social institutions (like schools and medicine) create that maintain this privilege and segregation” (Sensoy and DiAngelo, 2017, pg. 86). What I take away from this is that we, as neurotypical able-bodied individuals, see ourselves as the ‘angel’ in our spectrum. By acknowledging past errors, yet still creating/utilizing labels we feel best describe someone else’s “abnormality”, we are somehow finding a way to welcome these individuals into a society that has previously oppressed them under the new guise of ‘woke-ness’, medical advancement, and more supports for those with disabilities. If one’s intention is to keep the label, whether because it fits with their understanding of the world or because they do not acknowledge that labels can have negative connotations, they may in fact be on the spectrum of the ‘devil’. The action behind this intention still creates barriers that, in the end, benefit one’s own selfish understanding on what the world should look like. The ‘devil’ asks us to continue the use of labels in a guise of helping. Additionally, many supports created with ‘angel’ intentions that could be beneficial to those with a disability (ex. ODSP, counselling services, Worker’s Health resources, etc.) require the use of specific tests and labels to actually

access these services. If this were truly an 'angelic' action based on a pure intent, we would not necessitate the use of labels to ensure all members of our society are healthy (mentally and physically), clothed, and housed.

What is the fear here 'devil'? Are you afraid that opening up your understanding of disabilities and impairments on an individual basis, rather than a specific label, will compromise the integrity of your social programming? Are you afraid that people will use these supports that do not actually need them? Are you afraid to acknowledge your own biases and privilege? Are you afraid that those with positions of privilege standing up for the underdog will undermine your power and persuasion? Or, is it that the intentions behind your actions have finally been unearthed, or un-helled in your case?

## References

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