Snobbery
Dr. Clea F. Rees

• Which characters (real or otherwise) come to mind when thinking about snobbery?

Last week, we saw that Kant thinks that your worth as a person makes you worthy of respect, and that this is not only the basis of the duties others have to you but also of duties you have to yourself. Not only should other people not manipulate and use you for their own gain or pleasure, you should not treat yourself in these ways either.

For both Kant and Hill, these ideas are based on Kant’s conception of the Categorical Imperative. As we noted last time, Kant offers us several, allegedly equivalent, formulations of this principle. Of these, the Formula of Humanity as an End in Itself (FHEI) is probably the most helpful here.

Formula of Humanity as an End in Itself states that one should always act so as to treat rational beings as ends in themselves, and never as mere means.

People are worthy of respect because they are rational — because they are able to reason and, in particular, to recognise moral demands.

Discussion: Terminology

• In a group, discuss questions 1 and 2 (theses and terminology).

• Which kinds of snobbery do the examples you thought of earlier demonstrate?

Two Kinds of Value

In more Kantian terminology, persons — rational beings — have dignity as opposed to mere price. Dignity and price are different kinds of value.

Price is the kind of value which things have.

E.g. oranges, laptops, tins of baked beans and Ming vases have price.

It is often reasonable to trade something with price for some different thing with price.

E.g. suppose that you have one hundred tins of beans but no oranges, while I have five hundred oranges but no beans. Assuming that we both enjoy both beans and oranges, we may each have good reason to do a deal. Of course, it may be that the value of a tin of beans is greater than that of a single orange. In that case, we may have good reason to agree a deal which involves my trading three or four or five oranges for one tin of beans. Or it might be that the value of an orange is greater than that of a tin of beans. In that case, we might have good reason to agree to exchange one of my oranges for two or three of your tins of beans.

Dignity is value of the sort possessed by persons i.e. by rational beings.

• All healthy, adult human beings have dignity.

You don’t need to act rationally in order to be a person — the capacity is enough. It is the ability to recognise the force of reasons and to make choices in accordance with reason which is the basis of dignity on Hill’s account (e.g. 171).

Cf. figure 1.

What has dignity cannot be reasonably exchanged for any amount of what has mere price.

• However many oranges we collect, their value will never equal that of a human being.

• The right answer to the question, ‘how much for Mike?’ is that Mike has a value which cannot be equalled by any amount of mere money.

We never have good reason to trade a person for things with mere price.

Beings with dignity cannot reasonably be traded at all.

E.g. if one can save either one drowning person or five, one cannot justify saving the five by arguing that ‘five are five times as valuable as one’ or that ‘five are worth more than one’.

\[\text{\textsuperscript{1}}\text{Note that this is a point about justification. It does not necessarily follow that one cannot justify saving the five rather than the one. The point is simply that one cannot justify doing so in a particular way.}\]
In contrast to Hill and Kant, Dixon (2005) argues that more fundamental than our capacity for rational governance (autonomy) is the fact that we have interests. Of course, not only persons have interests: other sentient beings have them, too. On Dixon’s view, we ought not think human beings too ‘special’ either. Instead, ‘we should accord inherent value to all sentient, conscious beings’ (2005, 421).
Rather than having a different kind of value from cats and porpoises, we have more of the same kind of value which they do. We have more value because we have ‘greater interests that arise from our more developed brains and our moral concern for other people’.

Figure 1: An alternative basis for persons’ value.

Whereas five oranges have five times the value of one orange, five persons do not have five times the value of one. Five persons have no more dignity than one person because dignity is not the kind of value one can think sensibly about in these terms.

Discussion: The Argument

- In a group, please discuss question 3. What is Hill’s argument?
- Clarify the conclusion.
  - The conclusion is the claim that the author is trying to persuade you of.
- What are the premises of this argument?
  - Premises are claims which an argument relies on i.e. the points it starts from.

Discussion: Evaluation

- In a group, please discuss question 6. Is Hill’s argument a good one?
- Is the argument valid?
  - An argument is valid if, and only if, the conclusion follows logically from the premises so that the premises could not possibly be true without the conclusion being true as well.
- Is the argument sound?
  - An argument is sound if, and only if, two conditions are satisfied (figure 2). First, the argument must be valid. Second, all of the premises must be true. It follows that the conclusion of a sound argument is true.

Reflection

- Does characterising people as ‘swarming’ into Europe express a snobbish attitude?
- Is moral snobbery a problem? Why or why not?
- What is the connection between snobbery, egalitarianism and modesty? (See e.g. Dixon 2005).

References

Consider Argument’s logic

Does Conclusion Follow Logically from Premises?

Yes

Valid

Yes: All True

Sound

No

Invalid & Unsound

No: At Least One False

Unsound

Consider Truth of Premises

Are All Premises True?

Figure 2: Validity and Soundness