

Self-Respect

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Formula of Humanity and Duties to Ourselves

Recall Kant's second formulation of the Categorical Imperative.

The Formula of Humanity:

Act that you use humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any others, always at the same time as an end, never merely as a means.

[Kant 4: 429]

This formulation of the principle makes explicit that we should not treat *ourselves* as a mere means. What does this mean? Is that even possible?

Question: Do we have moral duties to ourselves? Can you wrong *yourself*?

Rights and Duties.

Here's a reason to think that we cannot have moral duties to ourselves (or, at least, if we do have them, we can never violate that duty): I should be able to do whatever I want just so long as it doesn't infringe on the rights of others. I have rights. But I cannot violate *my own* rights because rights can be waived, and I am always in a position to waive my own rights to myself.

Is this a good argument? Maybe some rights cannot be waived?

What *are* rights anyway? How does this connect up with Kant?

Kantian Rights:

You have a right to something if any moral person is obligated to provide that something to you.

We can come to have certain rights in various ways — by being promised something, by signing a contract, by being granted a position of some kind of authority, etc. But some rights we just *have* in virtue of being a person.

Duty to Avoid Servility?

Consider the following three cases:

- Uncle Tom
- Deferential Wife

- Self-Deprecator

Are these three characters doing something morally wrong in virtue of not respecting a duty they owe to *themselves*?

Servility. A *servile* person is someone who tends to disavow his or her own moral rights, either, because he or she (1) doesn't understand them, or because he or she (2) has little concern for the status they grant him or her.

Here is Hill's argument that we have a duty to *ourselves* not to be servile:

Argument Against Servility

P1 We have rights.

P2 Being servile consists in failing to respect one's own rights.

P3 We have a duty to respect our own rights.

C We have a duty not to be servile.

Is this a good argument? What reasons are given for the premises? In particular, if we are able to waive our rights on certain occasions, why think that **P3** is, in general, true?

What Does it Mean to Have a Duty to Oneself?

1. **Object of Duty.** "To say that a duty is *to* a given person sometimes merely indicates who is the object of that duty." How should *that* person be treated? What do we owe to *that* person? Etc.
2. **Right to Complain.** "When we say that a duty is *to* a certain person, we often indicate thereby the person especially entitled to complain in case the duty is not fulfilled."
3. **Source of Duty.** "To say that I have a duty to another person may indicate that the argument to show that I have such a duty turns upon a promise to that person, his authority over me, my having accepted special benefits from him, or, more generally, his rights."