

Title: Persons as Things

Abstract:

Philosophers, more than anyone else, have waxed eloquent in their attempts to articulate the principle that we deserve to be treated as persons, and not merely as things. In Kant's hands it is the principle that we must recognize one another as self-legislating co-rulers of a kingdom of ends, noumena who transcend the phenomenal appearance of being subject to predictive laws and act according to our *conception* of laws. Perhaps philosophers have taken this thought to heart most forcefully because it articulates what we seek for our own work – that others engage with our arguments, rather than merely taking them as evidence for what sorts of ideas are in vogue at west coast departments, or as a way to trace out the various strands of influence of dissertation advisors on their students' second book projects.

I believe that there is something deeply right and central about the idea that we deserve to be treated as persons and not merely as things. Indeed, I think that there is much more that is right about it than my title would suggest. But the thought that motivates this paper is that this idea is often taken too far. Part of what I want to suggest is that not only is treating someone as a person *compatible* with treating them as a thing, but in fact, in many cases treating someone as the thing that they are is actually *required* in order to successfully engage with them as the person who they are. Both in philosophy and in life, I will be arguing, the fact that persons in fact *are* things places an important constraint on what it takes in order to most successfully relate to them as persons, and the mode of relating that is suggested by the strongest flights of Kantian fancy actually constitutes a particular kind of vice – a moral vice in our relations to others in ordinary life, and a philosophical vice, in our relations to others through their philosophical work.