

Abstract

How To Be a Kantian Pragmatist Feminist: Kant, Royce, and Respect for Persons

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Can Kant be of use to pragmatist feminism, and if so, how? My answer is that despite significant problems with Kant's work from a feminist perspective, some aspects of his moral philosophy can be helpful to pragmatist feminists. I will begin by briefly explaining pragmatism feminism, emphasizing the importance of experience for pragmatism and the subsequent pragmatist feminist question, "*Whose* experience?" (Seigfried 1996). I then will explain two reasons why pragmatist feminists rightly have tended to avoid Kantian philosophy: (i) its emphasis on reason over emotion and (ii) Kant's role as the father of modern scientific racism (Bernasconi 2001).

Even with these problems with Kant's philosophy, however, his concept of respect for persons can be valuable for pragmatist feminism. Working from Kant's *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785/1990), I will develop pragmatically the Kantian notion of respect for the dignity of others, basing it neither on rationality cut off from inclination and emotion (contra Kant) nor on self-abnegation (in agreement with Kant's insistence on duty to oneself), but on relationships of regard for others (in the spirit of Kant's realm of ends). Whether women, people of color, and other subordinated groups count as people worthy of respect is an important feminist issue, irreducible to other important issues such as fair access to and the just (re)distribution of material resources in a society. The problem of gendered and racial injustice in the United States, for example, is not merely economic or social. It is ontological: the fact that the personhood of women and people of color generally is regarded as less than that of men and

white people. This is the problem of the value gap, as Eddie S. Glaude Jr. has called it in his analysis of race and white domination. As Glaude (2016, 31) argues, “We talk about the value gap achievement gap in education or the wealth gap between white Americans and other groups, but reflects something more basic: that no matter our stated principles or the progress we think we’ve made, white people are valued more than others in [the United States], and that fact continues to shape the life chances of millions of Americans. The value gap is in our national DNA.”

We also can see the value gap with respect to gender in the fact that when women in the United States take over an occupation that previously had been dominated by men, the salary for that work drops. It is this pattern—and not, as sometimes is surmised, that women might be less educated or less qualified or refuse to pursue higher paying jobs—that explains why American women’s median earnings have remained about 20% behind that of men despite civil rights and other advancements for women in the United States. As sociologists Paula England, Asaf Levanon, and Paul Allison have documented (Miller 2016), there is considerable evidence that employers place lower value on work done by women. The amount that wages fell varied across different professions, but even after controlling for education, work experience, skill sets, and geography, when women became park rangers or camp directors, for example—jobs that shifted from predominantly male to predominantly female from 1950 to 2000—wages fell 57%. Likewise for the jobs of ticket agent (43% drop in wages), designer (34% drop), housekeeper (21% drop), and biologist (18% drop). In a reverse pattern that demonstrates the same problem, when computer programming transitioned in the second half of the twentieth century from a menial job done by women to a field dominated by men, wages and prestige went up.

The feminization of labor is an important economic issue with practical consequences in people's lives, but economics alone cannot explain these patterns, which are grounded in the disrespect of the personhood of women. We might say that what the *economic* data reflects is *ontological*: women's average ontological value is about 20% lower than that of men's average value. The numbers are even more striking, moreover, once we factor in race. White women might be ontologically/economically worth about 80% of (white) men, based on their average wages (as of 2012) African American women's personhood is worth about 64% (64 cents earned for every dollar earned by white men in the same job) and Latina women's personhood worth about 55% (55 cents) of that of full persons (white men).

Something like the Kantian notion of personhood thus is necessary to recognize and grapple with gender and racial injustice. At the same time, however, the concept of personhood—even when modified to avoid Kant's exclusive focus on rationality—is extremely problematic. Respect for rational beings entails disrespect via the distinction, even if only implicit, between the respected group ("persons") and another group ("non- or sub-persons") who does not receive the same respect (Mills 1998). Even if one expands the circle of who is respected (for example, by eliminating the criterion of rationality), the line must always drawn somewhere. Include all human beings, not just rational beings, but then the question emerges: why respect only humans? Do not non-human animals also deserve respect? Expand the circle to include non-human animals, and the question merely is pushed back one step: why aren't plants, trees, and other non-animal parts of nature deserving of respect? In practice, it is impossible to respect the dignity of others universally, and herein lies the (in)famous severity of Kant's moral philosophy. Respecting one group, however expansively one characterizes that group, involves the lack of

same respect granted to another group. The double-edged nature of respect thus makes Kantian respect a moral category that pragmatist feminists can't live with but also can't live without.

For help dealing with this paradox, I will turn to Josiah Royce's concept of loyalty to loyalty as developed in his *The Philosophy of Loyalty* (Royce 1908/1995; see also Foust 2012). I will argue that understanding Kantian respect in terms of Roycean loyalty can achieve three things. It helps feminists (i) avoid the emphasis on rationality central to Kant's moral philosophy, (ii) augment Kant's inclusion of self-respect as an important component of respect, and most importantly (iii) bring self-respect in better alignment with respect for others by treating respect as an aspirational ideal rather than an exclusionary concept. My goal in this final section of the paper will not be to make detailed comparisons of Kant and Royce (see Grady 1975 for helpful work of that sort), but to see how Royce might help save the valuable aspects of Kant's moral philosophy for pragmatist feminist uses.

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