

Understanding Objectification: Is There Special Wrongness Involved in Treating Human Beings Instrumentally?¹

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ABSTRACT: This article centres around *objectification*. It offers an analysis of the notions that are involved in this phenomenon, their moral wrongness, as well as the connections that exist between them. Martha Nussbaum has suggested that seven notions are involved in objectification: instrumentality, denial of autonomy, inertness, fungibility, violability, ownership, and denial of subjectivity. She espouses the view that the instrumentalisation of human beings (the treatment of human beings instrumentally to achieve our purposes) is *especially* problematic as compared to the other ways in which we can treat human beings as objects (for example, denying their autonomy and subjectivity, or treating them as violable). In this paper, I argue against the view that instrumentalisation should be thought of as more suspicious from a moral point of view than the rest of the ways in which people can be treated as objects. Singling out extreme instrumentality for being especially problematic might lead us to underestimate the wrongness involved in the other ways of treating human beings as objects, and can therefore potentially distort our understanding of what, more generally, is wrong with objectifying human beings.

KEY WORDS: Instrumentalisation, instrumentality, Kant, Nussbaum, objectification.

Introduction

This article centres around *objectification*, which we can define, roughly, as the seeing and/or treating a person as an object. Instrumentalising people, treating them instrumentally for our purposes, has been considered to be one of the most characteristic forms objectification can take.

¹ I am very grateful to the two anonymous reviewers of *Prolegomena* for their valuable comments and suggestions for improving my article.

Immanuel Kant has famously argued that when people exercise their sexuality outside the context of monogamous marriage they run the risk of being reduced to “objects of appetite”, mere tools for sexual purposes. Kant vividly states in the *Lectures on Ethics*:

...as an object of appetite, a person becomes a thing, and can be used and treated as such by everyone. ... [he/she is] used by all and sundry as an instrument for the satisfaction of sexual inclination. (Kant 1963: 163, 165)

Contemporary feminists Catharine MacKinnon and Andrea Dworkin are concerned that women in our patriarchal societies are treated by men as mere instruments for their purposes. Women, as MacKinnon puts it, “exist to the end of male pleasure” (MacKinnon 1987: 173).² Dworkin similarly writes:

The whole world outside man himself is viewed as the object world... Man uses objects – women, children, animals, sensate beings called objects as a matter of course – to feel his own power and presence. ... A man must function as the human centre of a chattel-oriented sensibility, surrounded by objects to be used so that he can experience his own power and pleasure.³

Kant, MacKinnon and Dworkin understand objectification in terms of instrumentalisation. For these thinkers, objectification is defined as the treatment of a person (a woman, in the case of MacKinnon and Dworkin) as a mere instrument for another’s purposes.

In her landmark article “Objectification” Martha Nussbaum offers a systematic analysis of objectification, and rightly argues that it is in fact a much more complex and multiple concept than Kant, MacKinnon and Dworkin took it to be (Nussbaum 1995: 251). Nussbaum claims that apart from instrumentality, there are six more notions involved in the phenomenon of objectification. Objectification, then, is not to be understood solely in terms of instrumentalisation.⁴ To objectify a person, according to Nussbaum, is to treat them in one or more of these seven ways: treat them as an instrument to achieve a further purpose, treat them in a way that denies their autonomy, treat them as inert, as fungible, as violable, as owned by another person, or, finally, treat them in a way that denies their subjectivity (ibid. 257).

Nussbaum, then, unlike Kant, MacKinnon and Dworkin, acknowledges the fact that we should not conceive objectification simply in terms

² MacKinnon’s views on sexual objectification can also be found in her (1989), (1989a), (1993), (1995), (1997).

³ Dworkin (1989: 104). For more on Dworkin’s ideas on pornography and objectification see Dworkin (1997) and (2000).

⁴ I would like to thank the anonymous reviewer of *Prolegomena* for encouraging me to further emphasize this point.

of instrumentalisation. However, Nussbaum, like the above mentioned thinkers, attributes instrumentality a special kind of status in her discussion of the phenomenon of objectification: she claims that, of all the notions involved in the idea of objectification, instrumentality is *especially problematic*. First of all, because treating people instrumentally constitutes the denial of their humanity (what I call the “Kantian critique” of instrumentality). Secondly, because instrumentalising human beings can lead to other forms of objectification (what I call the “pragmatic critique”) (ibid. 265).

In this article, my purpose is to clarify the concept of objectification, through an analysis of the notions involved in it and their relations with one another. I argue that instrumentality is not special in either of the above two ways as compared to the other notions involved in objectification. I begin, in Section A, with an analysis of Nussbaum’s own conception of objectification. Section B focuses on the claim that instrumentality is especially problematic. The reason Nussbaum endorses this claim, as I explain, is because she unfairly compares treating a person as a *mere instrument* (what I call “extreme instrumentality” or “extreme instrumentalisation”) to the treatment of a person in one or more of the other six ways *in moderation* (for example, the occasional denial of a person’s autonomy). I then proceed in the last two sections to fairer comparisons between the seven notions involved in objectification: In section C, I argue that all seven notions, when present in their extreme forms within certain contexts, constitute the denial of people’s humanity. Finally, in section D, I show that extreme instrumentality is not special in its capacity to lead to other forms of objectification.

A. Nussbaum’s conception of objectification.

Nussbaum defines objectification as “... the seeing and/or treating of someone as an object. ... treating one thing as another: One is treating *as an object*, what is really not an object, what is, in fact, a human being” (ibid. 251, 256–7). She explains that seven notions are involved in the idea of objectification:

1. *Instrumentality*: The objectifier treats the object as a tool for his or her purposes.
2. *Denial of autonomy*: The objectifier treats the object as lacking in autonomy and self-determination.
3. *Inertness*: The objectifier treats the object as lacking in agency, and perhaps also in activity.

4. *Fungibility*: The objectifier treats the object as interchangeable (a) with other objects of the same type, and/or (b) with objects of other types.
5. *Violability*: The objectifier treats the object as lacking in boundary- integrity, as something that it is permissible to break up, smash, break into.
6. *Ownership*: The objectifier treats the object as something that is owned by another, can be bought or sold, etc.
7. *Denial of subjectivity*: The objectifier treats the object as something whose experiences and feelings (if any) need not be taken into account (ibid. 257).

Nussbaum holds that each of the above notions is a feature of our treatment of things, even though we do not treat all things in all of these ways. Take a ballpoint pen and a Monet painting, for example. As Nussbaum acknowledges, the way that the ballpoint pen is an object involves all the items on the list, except maybe violability. So, it seems appropriate to treat a pen as a tool for our purposes, to treat it as nonautonomous, as inert, as fungible with other pens or objects, as owned, and as not having subjectivity. Breaking the pen (treating it as violable) does not seem appropriate, according to her, since it can be thought as wasteful, but there is small (if any) moral significance to our breaking it.

Our treatment of the Monet painting, on the other hand, involves fewer of the items on the list. While we can treat it, like the ballpoint pen, as nonautonomous, owned, inert, and lacking in subjectivity, it seems inappropriate to treat the painting as fungible (except in the limited sense of being bought or sold which, Nussbaum holds, does not imply thoroughgoing fungibility), to destroy it, or to treat it as a mere instrument for our purposes (ibid. 257, 259).

Nussbaum avoids giving a straightforward answer to the question whether we can treat each of these seven features as sufficient for the objectification of persons. In some cases, according to her, treating a person in one of the seven ways on her list can be sufficient for objectifying that person, whereas in other cases it cannot. Usually, however, in a case of a person's objectification, more than one of these seven features is in play (ibid. 258).

The objectification of a human being can be, according to Nussbaum, either *negative* or *benign/positive*, depending on how it affects this individual's humanity. In her article, Nussbaum employs the Kantian notion of "humanity". Following Kant, Nussbaum understands humanity as an individual's rational nature and capacity for rational choice. Humanity is what distinguishes human beings from animals and inanimate objects. It gives human beings a "dignity", an absolute value that must always be respected in moral choice and action, or what Nussbaum herself calls the

“status of being ends in themselves” (ibid. 265). As a being with humanity, Kant has famously argued, “every human being has a legitimate claim to respect from his fellow human beings and is *in turn* bound to respect every other” (Kant 1996: 209).

Objectification, then, is of a negative kind, according to Nussbaum, if the objectified individual’s humanity is denied, in the sense of not being properly acknowledged or respected when they are treated as an object. She mentions three main cases of negative objectification in her article: the case of Isabelle, in Hankinson’s novel *Isabelle and Veronique*, a woman who is treated as nothing more than a mere instrument for the satisfaction of Macrae’s sexual desires, and who is furthermore physically abused by him; the case of *Playboy*, a magazine which presents women as mere things for men’s pleasure, as completely fungible objects with severely compromised autonomy and subjectivity; and the case of Charlotte and the Prince, the spouses of two rich art collectors, Adam and Maggie, in James’ novel *The Golden Bowl*. Charlotte and the Prince are treated by their spouses not as beings with humanity but as fine antique furniture.⁵

Benign/positive objectification takes place, on the other hand, if the objectified individual’s humanity is properly acknowledged, respected, and even promoted when they are treated as an object. The paradigmatic case of positive objectification Nussbaum discusses in her article is the case of Connie and Mellor, the two lovers from Lawrence’s *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*. In a context characterised by general respect for each other’s humanity, the lovers occasionally deny each other’s autonomy and subjectivity when having sex by attributing “a certain kind of independent agency to the bodily parts... both parties put aside their individuality and become identified with their bodily organs. They see one another in terms of those organs” (Nussbaum 1995: 274). Yet, Nussbaum holds, “...the suggestion that they are *reducing* one another to their bodily parts seems quite wrong... The intense focusing of attention on the bodily parts seems an addition, rather than a subtraction...” (ibid. 275). In the passage from Lawrence discussed by Nussbaum the two lovers deny each other’s autonomy and subjectivity, and treat each other instrumentally when engaging in the sex act. However, the two lovers overall respect, value and promote each other’s autonomy and subjectivity, and they generally regard each other as more than mere tools for their sexual purposes.

According to Nussbaum, then, the objectification of a human being involves seeing and/or treating them as an object, in one or more of the seven ways she mentions on her list: seeing/and or treating them as an instrument, denying their autonomy, seeing and/or treating them as inert,

⁵ These examples will be examined in more detail in section C.

as fungible, as violable, as owned, denying them subjectivity. Objectification is of a negative kind if the objectified individual's humanity is not fully acknowledged or respected when they are seen and/or treated as an object; and it is of a benign sort if the objectified individual's humanity is properly acknowledged, respected, and even promoted when they are seen and/or treated as an object.

B. The special wrongness of instrumentalising human beings.

"Instrumentality" is the first notion on Nussbaum's list. She defines it as the *treatment of a person as a tool for [another's] purposes* (ibid. 257). However, throughout her article Nussbaum uses the terms "instrumentality" and "instrumentalisation" to refer both to the treatment of a person *as a tool* and to the treatment of a person *as a mere tool* for someone else's purposes, even though she seems aware that these two sorts of treatment are distinct.⁶ This often leads to confusion, as the reader is left to guess when "instrumentality" is used to refer to the treatment of a person as an instrument, and when it is used to refer to the treatment of a person as a mere instrument. Sometimes, the overall context in which objectification takes place can help us understand whether the objectified individual is treated as a tool or as a mere tool. Unfortunately, however, the overall context of objectification does not always reveal this.

It is crucial, then, to draw a distinction here between these two sorts of treatment. First of all, a person can be treated as an instrument or a tool for the achievement of some further purpose. From now on, I will be referring to this treatment as "instrumentality" or "instrumentalisation". Secondly, a person can be treated as a mere instrument or a mere tool for the achievement of some purpose. I will be referring to this latter treatment as "extreme instrumentality" or "extreme instrumentalisation".

Treating a person as an instrument to achieve some purpose need not be inconsistent with respecting her humanity, and with treating her as an

⁶To be more precise, Nussbaum uses the terms "instrumentality" and "instrumentalisation" to refer, on the one hand, to the treatment of a person as a tool, and, on the other hand, to the treatment of a person as a mere tool or *primarily as a tool*. However, in her article Nussbaum does not deal further with the distinction between treating a person as a *mere* instrument and treating her *primarily* as an instrument. Even though these two sorts of treatment seem to be distinct (there is an absoluteness to the former that there is not to the latter), what is important, for Nussbaum, is that treating an individual in both these ways, as we will see later on, constitutes the denial of her humanity. For the purposes of this paper, I will not, like Nussbaum, be concerned with this distinction. The cases that I will discuss will mostly be ones in which people are treated as mere instruments. The conclusions that I will draw concerning this kind of treatment and the way it affects humanity, however, can also be extended to the treatment of people primarily as instruments.

end in herself. We do in fact treat others, as well as ourselves, as instruments in various ways in our everyday lives (for instance, we use friends as means for company, teachers as means for learning, and we also use ourselves as means to prepare a meal, to clean the house, to reach a destination). It would be absurd to say that all such instrumentalisation is morally problematic, and inconsistent with respect for humanity. Kant himself writes: “so act that you use humanity, whether in your own person, or in the person of any other, always at the same time as an end, never merely as a means” (Kant 1998: 138). There is no prohibition in Kant’s Categorical Imperative against treating each other as instruments or means. The prohibition is, rather, against treating each other *merely as means*. What should worry us, then, is extreme instrumentalisation: the treatment of people as mere instruments or means. Treating people in this way is, for Kant, inconsistent with respecting their humanity, their rational nature and capacities; it is inconsistent with treating them as ends in themselves.

Nussbaum in fact agrees with the view that what should concern us is extreme instrumentalisation, whereas cases in which people are treated as means (but not as mere means) need not be thought of as problematic from a moral point of view. She makes this clear in the following passage:

Notice, however, that instrumentalisation does not seem to be problematic in all contexts. If I am lying around with my lover on the bed, and use his stomach as a pillow there seems to be nothing at all baneful about this, provided that I do so with his consent (or, if he is asleep, with a reasonable belief that he would not mind), and without causing him pain, provided as well, that I do so in the context of a relationship in which he is generally treated as more than a pillow. This suggests that what is problematic is not instrumentalisation per se, but treating someone primarily or merely as an instrument. (Nussbaum 1995: 265)

The above example shows that there is nothing morally problematic, for Nussbaum, in treating a person as an instrument. It is alright to use my partner instrumentally as a pillow, so long as I generally treat him as more than a thing: as a being with humanity.

Nussbaum, then, proceeds to a strong statement about the special wrongness involved in “instrumentalising human beings” (ibid.). She writes:

...there is something especially problematic about instrumentalising human beings, something that involves denying what is fundamental to them as human beings, namely, the status of being ends in themselves. From this one denial, other forms of objectification that are not logically entailed by the first seem to follow. (ibid.)

... the instrumental treatment of human beings... is always morally problematic. ... It is closely bound up with other forms of objectification... On

the other hand, there seems to be no other item on the list that is always morally objectionable. Denial of autonomy and denial of subjectivity are objectionable if they persist throughout an adult relationship, but as phases in a relationship... they can be all right, or even quite wonderful... (ibid. 289–90)

Nussbaum wants to draw our attention, here, to the instrumental treatment of human beings. The terms “instrumentalising” and “instrumental treatment” are used by her in these passages to refer to *extreme instrumentalisation*. As the above example of the person who is treated as a pillow suggests, instrumentalisation, for Nussbaum, is not *per se* problematic, and so not all kinds of treating a person as an instrument are taken by her to be morally worrisome. We have reason, then, to read her claim about the special wrongness of instrumentalising human beings as specifically referring to extreme instrumentalisation: not to the treatment of people as means but, rather, to their treatment merely as means.

There is something especially worrisome, then, with extreme instrumentalisation, according to Nussbaum, as compared to the other six notions on her list. She seems to locate two ways in which extreme instrumentalisation is especially problematic. First of all, she offers what I will call a “Kantian critique” of extreme instrumentalisation: when a person is treated as a mere instrument for another’s purposes, her status of being an end in herself, her humanity, is denied or disrespected. Secondly, Nussbaum offers a “pragmatic critique” of extreme instrumentalisation: it is especially problematic, she suggests, because it can lead to other forms of objectification. Extreme instrumentalisation, then, according to this second critique, has especially bad consequences.

Nussbaum’s two critiques, the Kantian and the pragmatic, are to the point. Extreme instrumentalisation does involve the denial of an individual’s humanity: when an individual is treated as a nothing more than a tool, his humanity is certainly not properly acknowledged and respected. Furthermore, extreme instrumentalisation can indeed lead to other forms of objectification, as we will see later on.

Nussbaum’s comparison, however, is an unfair one. She compares extreme instrumentalisation, the treatment of a person as nothing more than an instrument, with the other notions on her list occurring only *in moderation* (or as Nussbaum puts it “*as phases*”) in a relationship (ibid. 290). That is, she compares cases such as the one of Macrae who treats Isabelle as nothing more than a tool for the satisfaction of his sadistic desires, or the case of *Playboy* consumers who see and treat women as mere sexual instruments, with cases where there is only occasional and non-persistent denial of people’s autonomy and subjectivity. One such case is, for instance, the case of the two lovers in Lawrence’s *Lady Chatterley*: Con-

nie and Mellor occasionally deny each other's autonomy and subjectivity when having sex, while generally respecting and valuing each other's autonomy and subjectivity.

Not surprisingly, Nussbaum concludes that what the Lawrentian lovers do is "alright, or even quite wonderful", while what Macrae and the pornography consumers do is morally problematic (ibid.). Certainly, treating a person as nothing more than an instrument is worse than, say, denying this person's autonomy and subjectivity a few times, within the context of a relationship where their autonomy and subjectivity are overall respected. However, it does not seem right to compare extreme instrumentalisation (the treatment of a person as nothing more than an instrument) with the treatment of a person in the other ways on Nussbaum's list in moderation.

What conclusions can we draw attempting a fairer comparison? The question we need to answer is the following: Is extreme instrumentalisation worse – in constituting the denial of an individual's humanity, her status of being an end in herself, and, furthermore, in its capacity to lead to other forms of objectification – as compared to the other notions on Nussbaum's list when present, not in moderation, but in more extreme forms?

C. Is extreme instrumentalisation special in Kantian terms?

Let us, first of all, see if Nussbaum is right to think that extreme instrumentalisation is more problematic in *Kantian terms*, that is, in constituting the denial of people's humanity, disrespecting their status as agents with dignity (the status of being ends in themselves). In what follows, I will focus on Nussbaum's examples of negative objectification, in order to show that the occurrence of extreme instrumentalisation within a context is no more problematic in Kantian terms than the occurrence of the other six notions in their extreme forms.

1. *Isabelle and Veronique* (Hankinson 1989: 2–4): The first example of negative objectification Nussbaum discusses in her article is Hankinson's passage, in which the heroine, Isabelle, is raped and physically hurt by a man (Macrae), and she is furthermore presented as enjoying this sort of treatment. Violability is present in its extreme within this example: Macrae treats Isabelle as something that is permissible to violate and abuse in any way he wishes. Moreover, as Nussbaum also notes, in this passage Isabelle is treated as a mere instrument for the gratification of male desire. She is there just to be used as a sex object (Nussbaum 1995: 281).

Furthermore, Isabelle's autonomy is completely denied: Macrae treats Isabelle as completely lacking in autonomy and self-determination.

He controls Isabelle's conduct in every way and dictates how she will behave. Moreover, Macrae completely denies Isabelle's subjectivity: he treats Isabelle as something whose experiences (feelings and thoughts) need not be taken into consideration at all. Macrae is completely indifferent about how Isabelle is feeling or thinking. Also, in Hankinson's novel Isabelle is presented as completely inert: as lacking in agency and activity. She is a passive creature used for the satisfaction of Macrae's desires (ibid. 279–83).

2. *Playboy*:⁷ The second case of negative objectification Nussbaum discusses in her article is taken from *Playboy*.

Three pictures of actress Nicollette Sheridan playing at the Chris Evert Pro-Celebrity Tennis Classic, her skirt hiked up to reveal her black underpants. Caption: "Why We Love Tennis." (ibid. 253)

According to Nussbaum, the message given by the picture and caption is "whatever else this woman is and does, for us she is an object of sexual enjoyment" (ibid. 283). In this example of negative objectification extreme instrumentalisation is again present. Sheridan is treated by the male readers of the magazine as a mere means for the satisfaction of their desires; for them, she is a mere sexual tool. But Sheridan and the rest of the women in pornographic magazines are not the only objectified victims, Nussbaum notes. *Playboy* encourages its readers to objectify real-life women. So, the male consumers of *Playboy*, according to Nussbaum, can come to regard women in general as mere sexual instruments.⁸

Furthermore, Nussbaum holds, *Playboy* can make its consumers regard women (again, both the women in the magazine and real-life women) as completely fungible. *Playboy*, however, does not, Nussbaum thinks, pass the message to its readers that women should be treated as violable. She writes: "... as part of the *Playboy* 'philosophy', women are depicted as beings made for sexual pleasure, rather than for the infliction of pain..." (ibid. 283).

Moreover, Nussbaum believes that the consumers of *Playboy* learn to recognise minimally women's autonomy and subjectivity, but for the wrong reasons: the possession and consumption of women who are au-

⁷ A series of pictures from *Playboy*, April 1995.

⁸ Ibid. 284. In this article, I take Nussbaum's position that men's use of pornography constitutes a negative form of objectification, and encourages them to objectify real-life women for granted. This, however, is a view that can and has been challenged by many thinkers. Not all consumers of pornography will necessarily objectify real women. It is possible, one might think, that (at least some) men can consume pornography, but refrain from regarding women as objects in real life. I would like to thank the anonymous referees of *Prolegomena* for urging me to highlight this point.

onomous subjects (rather than things) makes men feel more powerful and adds to their status in the male world. Nussbaum explains: “it is sexier to use a human being as a thing than simply to have a thing, since it manifests greater control, it shows that one can control what is of such a nature as to elude control” (ibid. 285).

3. *The Golden Bowl* (James 1985: 574): The last case of negative objectification discussed by Nussbaum, and the one she characterises as the “most sinister” of all, is objectification in the passage of James’ *The Golden Bowl* (Nussbaum 1995: 288). Adam and Maggie, two art collectors, treat their respective spouses, Charlotte and the Prince, as fine antique furniture. This example of objectification involves all notions on Nussbaum’s list in their extreme forms, except physical violability. First of all, according to Nussbaum, this case “clearly depicts a morally blameworthy instrumentalisation of persons... a way of denying their human status and asserting the right to the permanent use of those splendidly elegant bodies” (ibid.). Nussbaum holds that Charlotte and the Prince are treated as mere means for their spouses’ ends.

Furthermore, their subjectivity is completely denied: as antique furniture, the spouses are regarded as not having any thoughts or feelings at all. The spouses are also completely denied autonomy: they are regarded as not having any autonomy whatsoever. Also, they are treated as inert: Maggie and Adam regard them as completely lacking in agency and activity. Moreover, Maggie and Adam regard their spouses as fungible with other art objects. Finally, as antique furniture, Charlotte and the Prince are treated as owned by their spouses. Nussbaum points out that there is no physical violability in this case: as fine aesthetic objects, the objectified spouses’ physical integrity is of great importance to Maggie and Adam, and so the latter certainly do not treat them as things to break and destroy.

In the example from *Isabelle and Veronique* five out of the seven notions on Nussbaum’s list are present in their extremes: instrumentalisation, autonomy-denial, subjectivity-denial, violability, and inertness. The case of *Playboy* involves two of the notions in their extremes: instrumentalisation and fungibility. And, finally, the passage from *The Golden Bowl* involves all items on the list in their extreme forms, except physical violability.

Do we have any reasons for thinking that the presence of extreme instrumentalisation in the above examples is more problematic than the presence of the other notions in their extremes in constituting the denial of the objectified individual’s humanity? As I will suggest, when in their extremes, all seven notions should be regarded as problematic in Kantian terms.

In the example from Hankinson, the treatment of Isabelle as a mere means for Macrae's purposes does involve the denial of her humanity. That is, in treating her as nothing more than an instrument, Macrae does not respect Isabelle's humanity; he does not respect her status of being an end in herself. However, Isabelle's treatment as utterly violable also involves the denial of her humanity. Treating her as something that can be hurt and violated is inconsistent with respecting Isabelle's dignity as a human being. So, both the fact that Isabelle is treated as something that is permissible to violate and the fact that she is treated as a mere tool involve denying her humanity, her status of being an end in herself. Furthermore, the treatment of Isabelle as completely inert involves denying her humanity. A person's humanity, her rational nature, cannot be fully acknowledged, unless she is recognised as an agent capable of acting. In the passage in question, Isabelle is seen and treated as completely lacking in agency and activity. As a result, her humanity is completely ignored. Macrae, then, in treating Isabelle as inert, denies her humanity.

Moving on to the *Playboy* example, unquestionably, the treatment of women in pornography (and women more generally) as mere tools for men's sexual pleasure involves the denial of their humanity. The men who regard women as mere sexual instruments do not see and treat women as beings with rational nature and capacities; they merely see and treat them as instruments to satisfy their sexual desires. In this sense, men completely disrespect women's humanity. However, the treatment of a woman as completely interchangeable with other women or objects does not appear to be better in Kantian terms: treating an individual as something that can easily be replaced by something or someone else is inconsistent with respecting their humanity. A being with humanity has an absolute value (a dignity), which means that it should not be treated as substitutable with other people or, even worse, with other things. Treating an individual as something that can be replaced by someone or something else is treating her as something that only has relative value.⁹

⁹ Kant's point here is that treating human beings as interchangeable involves disrespecting their absolute value, their dignity, and regarding them as beings with only contingent value. In the case of pornography a porn model can be substituted by another porn model, or some other object that can satisfy a man's sexual desire. This is taken to constitute an insult on the woman's absolute value as a human being. The man does not care about the woman as a person, but only as thing for his pleasure which can, if need be, easily be substituted by someone or something else. There are cases, however, where substitutability strikes us as morally benign. When I go to the post office, I see the employees there as completely substitutable. Either one of them can help me accomplish my job, and this is all I care about. There seems to be nothing morally problematic with my regarding them as substitutable in this way. That the pornography case has been taken by a number of thinkers to be morally worrisome, as opposed to the post office case, has to do with the

The treatment of a person as something that can easily be substituted by another person or thing, then, involves denying her humanity. So, extreme instrumentality appears to be no worse than fungibility in its extreme with respect to constituting the denial of a person's humanity. There is no reason, again, in this case to think that extreme instrumentalisation is worse in Kantian terms than fungibility in its extreme form.

In the case from *The Golden Bowl*, extreme instrumentalisation appears to be no worse in Kantian terms than autonomy-denial and subjectivity-denial in their extreme forms. The treatment of the two spouses as completely nonautonomous seems to be just as problematic with respect to denying their status of being ends in themselves as their treatment as mere means for their partners' purposes. When a person is treated as not having any autonomy whatsoever (as it is the case with Charlotte and the Prince, in *The Golden Bowl*), his or her humanity is clearly denied. It is not possible to properly acknowledge a person's humanity, a person's rational nature and capacities, while not treating them as autonomous beings. The same holds for subjectivity-denial in its extreme form. The treatment of Charlotte and the Prince as completely lacking in subjectivity (as having no feelings or thoughts whatsoever) is no better in Kantian terms than their treatment as mere tools. A person's humanity cannot be properly acknowledged, when they are treated as nothing more than beautiful objects, as beings which have no thoughts or feelings at all.

Finally, do we have any reason for thinking that extreme instrumentalisation is worse in terms of denying a person's humanity than the treatment of a person as a mere property, as owned by someone else? The answer seems to be negative. Treating a person as one's property (as something that can be bought or sold), like treating him as a mere tool for one's purposes, is inconsistent with respecting this person's dignity as a human being, and so it constitutes the denial of his humanity. Charlotte and the Prince are treated as things that are owned by Maggie and Adam. There seems to be no reason to think that their being treated as their partners' property is less problematic in terms of denying their humanity than their being treated as mere instruments for their partners' purposes.

view, stemming from Kant, that there is something special when it comes to sexuality and its exercise that rules interchangeability out. Kant himself thought that sexuality should be limited only within the context of monogamous marriage in order for it to be morally unproblematic (Kant 1963: 162–71; Kant 1996: 61–64). Of course, one might argue against such a view, we have no reason to regard the sexual case and the post office case as different. That is, treating human beings as interchangeable in both these cases is to be considered as a morally benign attitude. I would like to thank the anonymous referee of *Prolegomena* for raising this important point.

Extreme instrumentalisation, then, does not appear to be especially problematic in Kantian terms: it is not special, as compared to the other six notions in their extremes in constituting the denial of an individual's status of being an end in herself. Treating people as completely nonautonomous involves an incorrect attitude towards their humanity. Furthermore, the humanity of an individual who is treated as completely fungible is denied. Completely denying a person's subjectivity also does not leave any room for respecting their status as Kantian agents. Moreover, treating a person as violable also constitutes the denial of their humanity. And so is treating them as completely lacking in agency and activity (as inert), or as a mere property of another person (as owned by another). It can be concluded, then, that treating people in any of the seven ways on Nussbaum's list in its extreme form constitutes the denial of their humanity; it is inconsistent with respecting their dignity, their status of being ends in themselves. Nussbaum is certainly right to believe that treating a person as a mere instrument is inconsistent with respecting their humanity. There seems to be no reason, however, to single out extreme instrumentalisation for being *especially* problematic in Kantian terms.

D. Is extreme instrumentalisation special in pragmatic terms?

In the previous section I argued that all seven notions in their extreme forms are problematic in Kantian terms. Treating people in any of these seven ways constitutes the denial of their status of being ends in themselves: the denial of their humanity. At this point, we need to examine whether Nussbaum is right to believe that extreme instrumentalisation is especially problematic *in pragmatic terms*, that is, in its capacity to lead to other forms of objectification. In this section I explain that Nussbaum is right to believe that extreme instrumentalisation can lead to other forms of objectification. However, I argue that this is not a special characteristic of extreme instrumentalisation. Focusing specifically on autonomy-denial in its extreme form, I show that this notion, like extreme instrumentality, can also lead to other forms of objectification.¹⁰

1. Let us start with *extreme instrumentalisation*, the treatment of a person as a mere means for the achievement of some further end, and examine some of the connections that exist between this notion and the other notions on Nussbaum's list.

¹⁰ My examination of the connections that exist between the notions involved in objectification is done through focusing specifically on the treatment of *adult human beings* in the seven ways Nussbaum mentions. As Nussbaum also acknowledges (1995: 261–2), denial of autonomy in the case of children is not something that we consider problematic from a moral point of view, and there does not seem to exist any obvious link between denying a child's autonomy and treating her in more object-like ways.

First of all, there seems to be a connection between extreme instrumentalisation and autonomy-denial. Treating a person as a mere tool for one's purposes might lead one to deny this person's autonomy. Mere tools are not standardly regarded as having any autonomy or self-determination whatsoever. For example, a slave master, who treats his slave as a mere tool for his purposes, can also be led to deny the slave's autonomy; to treat the slave as lacking in self-determination, as someone to only take orders from him.

However, it is possible to imagine a case in which one's using a person as a mere instrument does not lead one to deny their autonomy, at least not completely. Imagine a "kind" slave master. The kind master, even though he treats his slave as a mere tool for his purposes, might nonetheless not wish to completely deny the slave's autonomy. That is, the master might not end up treating his slave as someone who completely lacks autonomy and self-determination. He might allow the slave to act autonomously, at least in some cases. Extreme instrumentalisation, then, can lead to autonomy-denial, even though there is not a necessary connection between these two notions.

Can extreme instrumentalisation lead to inertness? Treating a person as a mere instrument for one's purposes will not necessarily lead to the treatment of this person as inert, as lacking in agency and activity. For example, even though a slave is treated as a mere means for someone else's purposes, he is nonetheless not treated as inert: quite the opposite, he is required to be an active agent in order to perform certain tasks.¹¹ However, treating someone as a mere instrument can possibly lead to the treatment of this individual as inert. It all depends on how one wishes to use the other instrumentally. As a mere instrument for somebody else's purposes, an individual may be required by its user to be inert. An artist using a person merely as a model for drawing a painting might treat the person in question as inert: as lacking in agency and activity. For instance, Yves Klein used the models for some of his anthropometries as completely inert "living paint brushes", bathing them in paint and dragging them across the canvases.¹² We can conclude from the above that extreme instrumentalisation can in some cases lead to inertness.

Can extreme instrumentalisation lead to fungibility? Treating a person as a mere means will not necessarily lead to the treatment of this person as

¹¹ Although, as the referee of *Prolegomena* rightly points out, energy and active agency is limited to the tasks that we want the slave to perform and, therefore, in some deeper sense, it seems that we want the slave to be inert.

¹² Retrieved August 2011 from: http://www.yveskleinarchives.org/works/works1_fr.html

interchangeable with other people or things. A person can be treated as a mere tool, yet he might be irreplaceable. One can use a cook as a mere instrument, but find his cooking so unique that she has no desire whatsoever to substitute him with another.¹³ In some cases, however, treating a person as a mere instrument can lead to his treatment as fungible. One may well treat the person who mows her lawn as substitutable with another person who can perform the same task. Extreme instrumentalisation, then, can lead to fungibility, even though there is not a necessary connection between the two notions.

Extreme instrumentalisation can, furthermore, lead to violability, even though the two notions are, again, not necessarily linked. A man using a woman as a mere means to satisfy his sexual desire will not necessarily treat her as violable. In other words, the man in question may regard the woman as nothing more than a sexual tool for his purposes, yet not as something that is permissible to violate and abuse in any way. Catharine MacKinnon, however, is worried that the treatment of women as mere sexual tools can open the path for violability and abuse. MacKinnon has illustrated this worry by drawing an analogy between women and cups. Pornography, according to her, makes it the case that women become like cups (mere objects for use, mere tools). Once women have acquired the status of objects for men's use, then violence and abuse can easily follow (MacKinnon 1987: 138).

Can extreme instrumentalisation lead to subjectivity-denial? There seems to be a close connection between these two notions, yet not a necessary one. Usually, it is the case that treating a person as a mere tool for another's purposes will lead to her denial of subjectivity. Mere tools are not usually regarded as having any feelings or thoughts, so the person who is treated as a mere instrument by someone else might be denied subjectivity. That is, one who regards a person as a mere tool for his purposes is likely to also regard her as not having any feelings or thoughts at all or, at least, as someone whose feelings and thoughts need not be taken into consideration.

However, as Nussbaum also acknowledges, extreme instrumentality does not necessarily lead to subjectivity-denial, since someone's purpose of using an adult human being as a mere tool may in fact require some concern for their experiences. For example, male consumers of pornography, Nussbaum says, even though they might be led to use women as mere sexual tools, do in fact attribute a limited amount of subjectivity to those

¹³ The person in question could, of course, substitute the cook were she to find another whose cooking she considered superior, as the reviewer of *Prolegomena* rightly pointed out. My point, however, is to show that this is not necessary.

women. Their purpose of using them as mere tools does require those women having *some* feelings and thoughts: they want the women in question to like or dislike certain treatments, rather than having no subjectivity whatsoever (Nussbaum 1995: 260, 283–6). So, it can be concluded that extreme instrumentalisation can in some cases lead to subjectivity-denial, although there is not a necessary connection between these two notions.

To summarise, the treatment of a person as a mere instrument *can lead* to the treatment of this person in more object-like ways. Extreme instrumentalisation, however, does not *necessarily* lead to other forms of objectification.

2. Let us now proceed to *autonomy-denial* in its extreme form, completely denying a person's autonomy within a certain context, and examine some of the connections between this notion and other notions on Nussbaum's list.

Can autonomy-denial in its extreme form lead to the treatment of a person as an instrument? It seems that autonomy-denial in its extreme can lead to instrumentality. If one completely denies another's autonomy, directing their conduct and behaviour in every respect, one might come to treat the other person as tool (or even as a mere tool) for their purposes. If one regards another as a nonautonomous being, a being that completely lacks self-determination, there is not much that can stop them from treating the person in question instrumentally to achieve their purposes, if they so desire.

However, there does not seem to exist a necessary connection between autonomy-denial in its extreme and instrumentalisation: there can be a case in which a person is completely denied autonomy and yet they are not treated instrumentally for another's purposes. An overprotective person, for example, may completely deny her friend's autonomy, without any intention of using the friend instrumentally, but simply because she is concerned about his safety. So, it can be concluded that, even though in some cases denying a person's autonomy can lead to this person's instrumentalisation, the connection between autonomy-denial in its extreme and instrumentality is not a necessary one.

Furthermore, there seems to be a close connection between extreme autonomy-denial and subjectivity-denial when it comes to adult human beings, even though it would be safer again to say that the connection between the two is not a necessary one. In some cases, when a person is completely denied autonomy, she is treated either as not having any feelings and thoughts at all, or as if her feelings and thoughts should not be taken into consideration. A man who treats his female partner as lacking in autonomy and self-determination is very likely to also ignore her feelings and thoughts (her subjectivity).

However, we can imagine a case in which there is complete autonomy-denial without subjectivity-denial. Many feminists have talked, for example, about women's internalisation of their own submissive status: some women have come to believe that this is the way things should be, and have accepted their submissiveness as something inevitable, even natural. So, we can imagine a woman who is treated as completely non-autonomous by a man and yet, since her feelings and thoughts about her submissive situation coincide with the man's, they are in a sense not ignored. In this case, denial of autonomy does not lead to denial of subjectivity, so we can conclude that the former does not necessarily lead to the latter.

I have explained in this section that autonomy-denial in its extreme form can, like extreme instrumentalisation, lead to other forms of objectification. Both these notions can lead, even though not necessarily, to the treatment of people in more object-like ways.¹⁴ Nussbaum, then, is wrong to believe that extreme instrumentalisation is *special* in leading to other forms of objectification. That is, extreme instrumentalisation, unlike what Nussbaum thinks, is not special in pragmatic terms.

Conclusion

In this article, I have examined the seven notions involved in objectification and argued against the view that there is special wrongness involved in instrumentalising human beings, treating human beings as mere means for the achievement of further ends. All seven features involved in objectification, when present in their extremes, are problematic in Kantian terms: they are inconsistent with proper regard for humanity. Treating people in one or more of these seven ways constitutes a negative form of objectification, since it fails to respect their dignity as human beings. Furthermore, since all seven notions in their extremes constitute the denial of people's humanity, they can potentially open the path for treating people in more object-like ways. This means that extreme instrumentality is not special

¹⁴ In this paper, I have specifically focused on autonomy-denial in its extreme form and how it can lead to other forms of objectification, in order to show that Nussbaum is wrong to claim that extreme instrumentality is special in pragmatic terms. This is not to say, however, that the rest of the notions on Nussbaum's list cannot similarly lead to other forms of objectification. Take ownership, for example: for women in many parts of the world, and for modern day slaves in Mauritania the fundamental problem would seem to be that they, by law and custom, actually are property of another and can be treated instrumentally and denied autonomy as a result. In this case, ownership leads to the instrumental treatment of the people in question. This example too shows that Nussbaum is wrong to think that instrumentality is special in its capacity to lead to other forms of objectification.

in its capacity to lead to other forms of objectification: it is not special in pragmatic terms. Treating people merely as means for our purposes is undoubtedly problematic from a moral point of view. There is no obvious reason, however, to think that it is more problematic than, for example, completely denying people's autonomy or subjectivity, treating them as completely inert, fungible, or violable beings. Singling out extreme instrumentality for being *especially* problematic might lead us to underestimate the wrongness involved in the other ways of treating human beings as objects, and can therefore potentially distort our understanding of what, more generally, is wrong with objectifying human beings.

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