

Distinguishing between People and Things.

Now you might think this is a stupid title for a serious essay, you might think the difference between people and things is obvious, but I have been watching the world for some time and I find that people know that people are not things yet they still treat them as if they are.

When you buy a thing you no longer need, maybe it has gone off, or maybe it's out of fashion and you have stumbled across something better, then you bin the old thing. You just chuck it away.

I have been watching people doing this with people! They discard a person as mindlessly as they would discard a thing. Of course they have justifications. Well nobody throws something out for nothing do they? They throw it out because it no longer serves its purpose. But is this the right way to treat a person? Should a person be treated like a thing? Do you want to be treated like a thing?

So you meet this person and you fall in love and maybe produce an offspring together and then that person 'goes off' (there are so many ways to 'go off') or you come across a better version, so, you think, it's OK to discard this person. But a person is not a thing is it? We covered that point at the beginning of this essay and I thought we decided that we all knew that a person was not the same as a thing.

Clearly we know that a person is not a thing but when it comes to living our lives we are really bad at distinguishing the all-important difference. This is a consumer society and we consumed that person and he/she didn't taste so good so now we are going to try another person – until that one also gets stale or disgusting or just boring in some way. And having done that we are really seriously disgusting ourselves aren't we? Oh no! Now our behaviour might have put our OWN selves in line for justifiable disposal?

I think there is something seriously wrong with a society that treats people like things because, unlike things, people have feelings, and hopes, and fears and insecurities, and they might have some pretty spectacular flaws too, but even with flaws they are not things are they?

So what has gone wrong? How can we get over this embarrassing blip in our collective perception?

I think it might really help if we could find a way of handling the problems that come up in relation to people and their relationships with a bit of extra insight and sensitivity. Perhaps all it needs is that we are taught to really understand, from childhood, how to distinguish – properly distinguish – a person from a thing, and starting from that position decide what is due to that person in respect of their person-ness and maybe this won't be so difficult when we realise we have the perfect example of person-ness in the person of our own selves.

So this is a paper bag that was useful yesterday because it carried home some buns and this is the mother or father of my child who was also useful yesterday. So we put the bag in the bin because it's got a rip in it and is all crumpled and anyway there are lots of new bags in the store. But this is a person even if it is crumpled and full of rips. What do we do with this person now it has passed the sell-by date? Do we just chuck it away like the bag? Do you like the idea of being chucked away like the bag? No, it hurts, really, really badly.

Persons are persons not bags because they have feelings and imaginations. Imaginations are brilliant things – you can use them to imagine what it would feel like to be someone else and ask yourself how you would like to be treated in the difficult scenario in which we appear to be disposable and whether there is a clever way (persons are clever too) we can act that will get the best out of things for everyone. Surely that's the whole point of things for humans – to get the best out of things for everyone.

So that's something I think we should all think about because if we fail to distinguish the difference and we treat people like things then surely we are not worthy of being treated like a person ourselves, are we?