

Higgins' Philosophy

Professor Higgins is seen throughout *Pygmalion* as a very rude man. While one may expect a well educated man, such as Higgins, to be a gentleman, he is far from it. Higgins believes that how you treated someone is not important, as long as you treat everyone equally.

The great secret, Eliza, is not having bad manners or good manners or any other particular sort of manners, but having the same manner for all human souls: in short, behaving as if you were in Heaven, where there are no third-class carriages, and one soul is as good as another.
-Higgins, Act V *Pygmalion*.

Higgins presents this theory to Eliza, in hope of justifying his treatment of her. This theory would be fine IF Higgins himself lived by it. Henry Higgins, however, lives by a variety of variations of this philosophy.

It is easily seen how Higgins follows this theory. He is consistently rude towards Eliza, Mrs. Pearce, and his mother. His manner is the same to each of them, in accordance to his philosophy. However the Higgins we see at the parties and in good times with Pickering is well mannered. This apparent discrepancy between Higgins' actions and his word, may not exist, depending on the interpretation of this theory.

There are two possible translations of Higgins' philosophy. It can be viewed as treating everyone the same all of the time or treating everyone equally at a particular time.

It is obvious that Higgins does not treat everyone equally all of the time, as witnessed by his actions when he is in "one of his states" (as Mrs. Higgins' parlor maid calls it). The Higgins that we see in Mrs. Higgins' parlor is not the same Higgins we see at the parties. When in "the state" Henry Higgins wanders aimlessly around the parlor, irrationally moving from chair to chair, highly unlike the calm Professor Higgins we see at the ball. Higgins does not believe that a person should have the same manner towards everyone all of the time, but that a person should treat everyone equally at a given time (or in a certain situation). When he is in "one of those states" his manner is the same towards everyone; he is equally rude and disrespectful to all. Yet when minding his manners, as he does at the parties, he can be a gentleman.

If the second meaning of Higgins' theory, that he treats everyone equally at a particular time, is taken as his philosophy, there is one major flaw. Higgins never respects Eliza, no matter who is around. In Act V of *Pygmalion*, Eliza confronts him about his manner towards her. "He (Pickering) treats a flower girl as duchess." Higgins, replying to Eliza, "And I treat a duchess as a flower girl." In an attempt to justify this Higgins replies "The question is not whether I treat you rudely, but whether you ever heard me treat anyone else better." Eliza does not answer this question but the reader knows that Higgins has treated others better than Eliza. At the parties, for example, Higgins is a gentleman to the hosts and other guest, but still treats Eliza as his "experiment."

Higgins could never see the "new" Eliza. Higgins only saw the dirty flower girl that had become his "experiment." Much like an author never sees a work as finished, Higgins could not view Eliza lady or duchess. Since Higgins knew where Eliza came from it was difficult for him to make her parts fit together as a masterpiece that he respected.

Part of Higgins' problem in recognizing the "new" Eliza is his immaturity. He does not see her as what she is, he only sees her as

what she was. This immaturity is representative of Higgins' childish tendencies that the reader can see throughout the play. Higgins' child-like actions can partially explain the variations in his philosophy. Try to imagine Higgins as a young teenager. A young Higgins, or any teenage boy for that matter, has a very limited outlook. They treat everyone the same; depending on the situation they may be little gentlemen or rude dudes. When around parents the teenager is rude and inconsiderate yet when among his friends he a complete gentleman.

The adult Higgins' actions are the same as the child.