

Conference

Dehumanization: New approaches to understanding the
politics of human nature

Central European University (CEU), Budapest
6-8 April 2016

Abstracts

Guido Abbattista (University of Trieste)

Human aliens on display: 1850-1940

During nearly a century, between the 1851 London Great Exhibition and (at least) the eve of WWII a very ancient practice of putting on display human beings of exotic origins established itself in Europe and, in general, in the Western world, modifying their previous significance and scope and assuming the aspect of a highly organized commercial activity and a regular spectacular happening within the great expositions of different size and extent – national, international, colonial, imperial, universal – which became a frequently recurring international rendezvous.

On such occasions, groups of human beings were systematically brought from every part of the non-European world toward the Western capitals and other cities seats of the expositions to be variously put on display as actors of what has also been termed 'human zoo', but we can better call an 'exhibitionary complex', whose script in fact was the result of different and often competing agencies engaged in defining how those ethnic types were placed in the great map of mankind, civilization and societies. What was at stake in a more or less explicit way was their possessing all the requisites of a fully developed human nature and their rightful or conditional or limited belonging to a proper human condition. The interplay between the several actors involved in the living ethno-exhibitions determined the degree of de-humanization or animalization or commodification, or else of positive appreciation, to which those peoples were exposed.

This paper intends – by reference to a series of historical examples and by discussing the 'human zoos' paradigm – to offer a summary interpretation of a phenomenon through which the nature of the displayed individuals as human beings and as members of cultural groups was questioned and interpreted according to the different paradigms concurring to define roles and meanings of the participants to the exhibitionary devices.

Eyja M. Brynjarsdóttir and Gunnar Sigvaldason (University of Iceland)
Appraisal of people and dehumanization

When ideas about human rights began to form, it no longer became acceptable to consider humans as such as tradable products for sale. Thus, dehumanizing slaves with ideological means, such as through racism, became a way to justify something that seemed economically feasible for those holding the power. It seems clear that the removal of individual freedom as takes place in slavery is dehumanizing, but being sold on a market "like cattle" seems to be so as well. However, humans do sell their labor, we speak of marketable skills, the labor market, etc., without thinking of that as dehumanizing. So looking into what it is about this particular kind of sale is important in order to understand dehumanization.

We consider various ways in which human beings are appraised and whether and to what extent they are dehumanizing. For instance, on the website celebritynetworth.com, one can find out that the net worth of Bill Gates is 79.5 billion dollars whereas the net worth of Donald Trump is "only" 4.5 billion dollars. It is very unlikely that anyone will worry about this kind of appraisal having a dehumanizing effect on Gates or Trump. On the other hand, if the worth of two women were being appraised on the basis of their sex appeal, it would be dehumanizing.

We look at what is considered important about being human, both by looking at some historical and recent example and through an analysis of conceptions of human nature but we maintain that, although conceptions of human nature seem to have gone out fashion in mainstream contemporary philosophy, they still influence us more than we would like to believe. Is there an important difference between commodification of those in the position of being sold or used as currency, commodification of women's bodies and such on the one hand, and the marketization of human labor skills on the other hand, making the former dehumanizing and the latter not? Does it matter whether the individuals in question belong to a group that has historically been subordinated and been the subject of group-based inequality, as Debra Satz has suggested, or should we specially focus on the individuals themselves, and not the group to which they belong?

Commodification has been a widely discussed topic within philosophy, and the various views help us get a better picture of the issue at hand, views ranging from Immanuel Kant and Karl Marx who criticize commodification vehemently to the Chicago economist Gary Becker who seems to want to utilize market thinking for almost every aspect of human life. We support a view that focuses on the social context of the commodification at hand.

Another element to consider is the quantifiability of value, which takes place through commodification and appraisal. A price can only be expressed quantitatively, whereas a human life is much more varied and qualitative in its nature. The problem of quantifying the qualitative is common to any kind of pricing, also when it comes to selling labor that we would not consider dehumanizing. However, we might consider that under certain circumstances, or in certain contexts, expressing the value of human labor quantitatively can be dehumanizing and harmful to human flourishing, such as when the context is such that it gets presumed that the value in question is all that matters about the given person. We argue that this runs parallel to arguments that have been made about objectification, e.g. by Martha Nussbaum and Margaret Jane Radin, about the harm of objectification being dependent on circumstances.

Lukas Einsele (Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts)
Attempts to make dehumanization visible

In this talk I will present material from my two long-term art projects: "One Step Beyond – The Mine Revisited" (2001 – 2007) and "The Many Moments of an M85 – Zenon's Arrow Retraced" (2009 ff.). Both projects examine and visualize the relation between weapons and people but from very different point of views: "One Step Beyond" focuses on the survivors of landmines and rehumanizes them: from being numbers and charts in a humanitarian or military game to persons with a face and memory, with their own story to tell. The project "The Many Moments of an M85" reconstructs the relations between the diversity of people, events, places and objects on the vast map of the construction, production, trading, and use of this (in-)famous example of a cluster bomb. M85 are ground-launched bomblets, which can be dispensed from a variety of cluster munitions, including artillery cargo projectiles, mortars and rockets. The two functions of M85 are: to penetrate armour and to create fragmentation for an anti-personnel/anti-materiel effect. M85 are small and of cylindrical shape. M85 are the only bomblet containing a self destruct (SD) mechanism that have been used in combat; in 2003 by the United Kingdom in Iraq, in 2006 by Israel in Lebanon, and in 2008 by Georgia against Russia. The project documents the trajectory of M85s: from a spot where one explodes (or not) back to its origins. Who are the individuals behind, besides, and in front of it, and what is their relation to M85 and to each other? None of them seems to have the intention to kill people. There is the farmer, the surgeon, the deminer, as well as the engineer, the factory worker, the politician, and the soldier. They all do their best, from their perspective and role. But roles are not persons, is it? Is the splitting up of the roles causing dehumanization?

My photographs and research is committed to the following: war is not the result of obvious evil, but of personal, commercial, political, and societal interests, not only interests in general, but of individuals, and yet they do not combine to a coherent story. The trajectory of M85 consists of so many small segments... The resulting material of the project shall help to change our conception, our actions, and, at least symbolically: the (seemingly) inevitability detonation of M85. By zooming into the parts and dimensions of the trajectory, by looking at it, in every detail, we might find - and see, and feel - the moments when Zenon's arrow stands still on it's long way, when it becomes visible as that what it is: another cruel and futile product of man. We might learn to see dehumanization happening.

My lecture might lead to the question whether it is possible to create a valid connection from the distance between "us" and the "others", no matter if they are victims/survivors or offenders or just actors in a conditionally dehumanized situation.

Victoria Esses (University of Western Ontario)
The Automatic Dehumanization of Refugees: Causes and Consequences

Victoria M. Esses, Alina Sutter and Stelian Medianu

We are currently witnessing the largest refugee movement since the end of the Second World War, with more than sixty million refugees worldwide. This corresponds to close to one percent of the world's population. While many Western countries have committed to accepting large numbers of refugees in the near future, the public in Western countries do not always regard asylum seekers and refugees with sympathy or respect. Instead, they often greet these individuals with intolerance, distrust and contempt. A significant amount of research on attitudes toward asylum seekers and refugees has documented the inconsistency between the public's motivation to appear tolerant and accepting on the one hand, and the on-going negative attitudes toward and treatment of asylum seekers and refugees on the other.

Recently, researchers have argued that people's negative responses to refugees can be explained by a tendency to dehumanize refugees. Dehumanization refers to the tendency to regard members of some groups as less human, and thus, as less worthy of humane treatment, than members of other groups. One factor that may promote the dehumanization of refugees is the portrayal of refugees by popular media. There is considerable evidence, including from our own laboratory, that refugee claimants who arrive on our shores are often portrayed by the media as potential terrorists, criminals, and bogus queue jumpers. Our previous research has demonstrated that these portrayals can influence explicit attitudes toward refugees and toward refugee policies. More recently, we have been examining the automatic dehumanization of refugees, and the effect of media portrayals on this dehumanization. In particular, we have been examining whether media portrayals of refugees influence the extent to which they are automatically associated with animals in people's minds. To do so, we experimentally manipulate the portrayal of refugees in fictitious news articles that we present to individuals, and then examine the effects of these different portrayals on implicit dehumanization. Our measure of implicit dehumanization assesses the strength of the association of refugees with animals versus humans. Results show that labelling refugee claimants as potential terrorists, criminals, and bogus claimants leads to their automatic dehumanization – increasing the extent to which people automatically associate them with animals rather than humans.

Such dehumanization may allow people to turn away from the suffering of refugees and choose inaction over action, or even worse. After all, if refugee claimants are not quite human, it is not clear what obligations we have to them, whether they deserve our protection, and whether principles of justice and humane treatment should be followed. To begin to examine these behavioural consequences of automatic dehumanization, we have developed a new laboratory paradigm. After assessing people's tendency to automatically dehumanize refugees, we ask them to have a conversation with another person whom they are told is either a refugee or a Canadian. We then analyse the videos of these interactions for behavioural differences. To date our results have shown that participants who automatically dehumanize refugees are more negative in their behaviour, particularly nonverbal behaviour, toward the person described as a refugee as compared to the person described as a Canadian.

Research of this sort is important if we are to understand and try to reduce the dehumanizing treatment of refugees. There is no end in sight for the current refugee crisis and the fate of millions of men, women, and children hangs in the balance. It is essential that we see these people as humans deserving of our help, rather than as animals whom we can ignore.

Friederike Eyssel (Bielefeld University)

Objectification: Determinants and measurements

Friederike Eyssel, Fabio Fasoli, Dominik Bentler and Steve Loughnan (Bielefeld University; University of Milano-Bicocca; Bielefeld University; University of Edinburgh)

Objectification implies treating people, and particularly women, as objects, denying them morality, competence, and even humanity. In that sense, objectification qualifies as a form of more or less subtle dehumanization. In our talk, we will address determinants of objectifying behavior and how these play out on different levels, ranging from attitudes to behavior. With regard to determinants of objectifying behavior, we will present findings from experiments that have investigated not only the perceiver, but have also focused on the target. On the one hand, we will report findings that have investigated the role of ingroup identification or identity threat (e.g., femininity and masculinity threat) in predicting objectification behavior. On the other hand, we will also explore the role of target characteristics (e.g., gender, ethnicity).

Importantly, at the level of outcomes, we take into account not only judgments and behavioral *intentions* (e.g., rape proclivity, sexual harassment) but also *actual* behavior towards male and female targets that are either depicted in an objectified or non-objectified way. In the context of our research, actual behavior is studied using different reaction time-based measures, for instance, mouse-tracking and eyetracking.

To illustrate, we will present a series of experiments that propose eyetracking as a valid method to study 'visual objectification'. Many women have experienced the wandering eyes of another person on their body. Typically, this gazing behavior is not directed at the target's ankles or elbows, but rather at her sexualized body. That is, the woman is – instead of being treated as a person – perceived in terms of a sexualized object. This '*visual objectification*' involves reducing another person to a set of sexualized body parts by paying undue attention to their body at the expense of other aspects of their physical person (e.g., their face). Sexualized gaze can be a powerful form of sexual objectification because it is easy to enact, deniable, and costly for its target (Calogero, 2004; Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Gervais, Vescio & Allen, 2011). Although visual objectification is common and costly for perceivers and the perceived, relatively little is known about its psychological determinants. Previous work has shown that the tendency to objectify women is associated with a strong orientation towards sex (Vaes, Paladino, & Puvia, 2011) – particularly violent or non-consensual sex (Rudman & Mescher, 2012) – and negative attitudes towards women (Cikara, Eberhardt, & Fiske, 2011; Rudman & Mescher, 2012). This work has examined objectifying *beliefs* – for example, that sexualized women are relatively mindless (Gray, Knobe, Seshkin, Bloom, & Barrett, 2011; Loughnan, Haslam, Murnane, Vaes, & Suitner, 2010) or less than fully human (Heflick & Goldenberg, 2009). However, objectifying *behaviors*, like *visual objectification* are still under-researched.

Therefore, we propose to complement standard dependent measures used in the field and shed light on the social-cognitive processes associated with objectification. Taken together, the presentation will discuss a variety of behavioral measures related to sexual objectification and will discuss their value for prospective experimental psychological research in the field that goes beyond the use of mere self-reports.

Nick Haslam (University of Melbourne)

Varieties of dehumanization: A psychological overview

In the last 15 years the psychology of dehumanization has exploded. Theoretical approaches and empirical findings have proliferated and the concept of 'dehumanization' itself has expanded. Whereas once the concept was understood to refer exclusively to extreme phenomena, increasingly it stretches to capture everyday forms of social perception and behavior. This talk will map the concept and situate current psychological theories and research findings into a wider context. Particular emphasis will be placed on the diversity of phenomena now collected under the rubric of dehumanization, and on the providing a systematic overview of psychological research on the topic for scholars from other disciplines.

My overview will highlight two fundamental distinctions in the psychological study of dehumanization. First, I will examine variations in the degree of blatancy versus subtlety of dehumanizing perceptions. One growing edge of dehumanization research within psychology has been an expansion into subtle, banal, implicit or unconscious phenomena, first examined by researchers in the European 'infracommunication' tradition. That development has arguably led to a withdrawal of attention from more blatant and overt forms of dehumanization, although the study of these forms is making a return. I will review the diverse conceptualizations of dehumanization along this axis of blatancy and discuss its implications for the place of humanness in everyday social perception.

The second distinction that I will address concerns the meaning of 'humanness' that is operating in dehumanization research within psychology. One tradition of work implicates a contrast between humans and nonhuman animals, according to which humanness refers to the distinctive properties of *Homo sapiens* and dehumanization amounts to an implicit or explicit likening of people to animals. However another line of research conceptualizes humanness with reference to a contrast between humans and inanimate objects, such as machines. On this understanding, dehumanization involves a process that is more akin to objectification. This basic distinction has implications for understandings of human nature and for the forms that dehumanization can take, and it also bears on the role that essentialist thinking plays in the phenomenon.

After clarifying these two conceptual distinctions in the psychology of dehumanization I will illustrate how they play out in dehumanization research and theory. In the process I will attempt to show the richness of recent psychological research on the many forms of dehumanization -- for example, the diversity of contexts in which it has been studied and the range of its effects and functions -- and demonstrate that the broadening of the concept has been highly productive.

Carla Lessing (National University of Ireland)

'A Creature of a human Kind and Species'. The de/(re-)humanisation of Peter the Wild Boy (1726-1785)

The story of *Peter the Wild Boy* is a story of many great names of the eighteenth century: King George I, Comte de Buffon, Carl Linnaeus, Jonathan Swift, Daniel Defoe and not least Jean-Jacques Rousseau. But, in the first instance, it is just the story of Peter von Hameln. An orphan boy who was picked up in the woods close to the German city of Hameln in the summer of 1724. After spending some time in the *Hamelner Hospital* he had been moved to the tollhouse in Celle and was eventually brought before the British King George I in Hannover in 1725, whom he then accompanied as a guest to the London court in 1726. This is where the story of *Peter the Wild Boy* begins.

Peter's aversion to wearing clothes, his strong desire for freedom, his besmirching himself with his own faeces as well as Peter's inability to speak brought his observers to the conclusion that he must be a relative of the mythical wild man of the woods. He was said to have walked on all fours and showed many cognitive shortcomings. In this way Peter was dehumanized and re-imagined as a human-animal hybrid. Science even tried to consider him as the missing link in the Great Chain of Beings. It was this exoticism that enticed King George to bring Peter to the London court – essentially as a curiosity rather than a guest. Peter's presence in London caused a lot of commotion and he quickly found his way into the publications of the time. It was especially his animalistic behaviour that gave plenty of opportunity to question his humanity. Early on Peter was given into the care of Dr John Arbuthnot who was instructed to teach him to talk – and essentially (re-)humanize him. These efforts proved futile rather quickly. This was according to modern day research due to the fact that Peter might have suffered from the Pitt-Hopkins Syndrom, a form of Autism that made it almost impossible for him to be educated in this manner and achieve recognition as *normal human being* by eighteenth-century standards. On the grounds of his inability to learn, Peter was sent away from London to outlive his days in the countryside and eventually become a footnote in numerous scientific and philosophical publications of the eighteenth century.

The example of *Peter the Wild Boy* shows how a human being was de-humanised in order to test the efficacy of (re-)humanising efforts. It is the objective of this paper to examine the rationale and rhetoric behind the de- as well as (re-)humanisation efforts. This paper investigates what was generally perceived as external and internal markers of wildness and goes on to examine Peter's assumed position on the scale between human and animal. In order to explain the British concept of wildness, this paper will draw and compare Peter's experience to earlier instances of British encounters with what was perceived as "wild people".

Edouard Machery (University of Pittsburgh)

Dehumanization and moral standing

Experimental research in experimental philosophy and moral psychology has begun examining our commonsense understanding of moral standing. This talk will review this research, and will show how it casts light on the manifold manifestation of dehumanization. An entity has moral standing if and only if it can be morally wronged. Thus, it is when, and only when, an entity has moral standing that the effects of a moral agents' actions on the entity directly, that is, independently of the effects these actions have on other entities, matter for the moral assessment of the actions. Entities that have moral standing deserve moral consideration, or concern, from moral agents.

Early research suggested that moral standing was a matter of the capacity to feel pain (Knobe and Prinz; Gray et al.) – an entity can be morally wronged if and only if it feels pain – but recent research has identified one (Sytsma and Machery) or two (Goodwin) additional components. Sytsma and Machery have highlighted rationality, while Goodwin and colleagues have highlighted the capacity to cause harm. Controversies around the topic will be examined, and recent results reported. This suggests that dehumanization may not be a single phenomenon, but that it can take different shapes, depending on which of the components of the psychology of moral standing is at stake. Historical evidence consistent with this hypothesis will be reviewed in the talk.

Mari Mikkola (Humboldt University)

Dehumanisation as the Wrong of Social Injustice

This paper aims (1) to develop an account of dehumanisation that (2) elucidates the wrongfulness of social injustice from a specifically feminist perspective. First, I put forward the following view: an act or a treatment is dehumanising if and only if it is an indefensible setback to some of our legitimate human interests, where this setback constitutes a moral injury.

My understanding differs from more traditionally Kantian accounts. To begin with, dehumanisation for me is not about an assault on 'our' human dignity or value as Kantian ends-in-ourselves. Moreover, on my account, dehumanisation is a characteristic of *acts* and *ways of treating* others; it is not about objectification or treating someone as a mere means in a Kantian sense that renders the individual *dehumanised*. I may be treated in dehumanising ways, which underpins the oppression that I face; but (as I see it) this does not turn on others taking me as a something as opposed to a someone. This is because instances of contemporary social injustice (I suggest) work via setbacks to *human* agency. Hence, in order for legitimate human interests to be violable, it is a necessary precondition to acknowledge these interests as being those of *someone* (not of something). Thus, I hold that we should not understand dehumanisation as being about reducing person into things. Second, I hold that dehumanisation so understood can explicate what is wrongful about social injustice. As I see it, dehumanisation undergirds the wrongfulness of different forms of injustice (oppression, discrimination, domination) in their various contours (sexist, racist, heteronormative, trans*phobic, ableist and classist injustices).

Dehumanisation is not another form of injustice – rather, it is that which makes forms of social injustice *unjust*. This way of thinking (I submit) improves extant feminist and non-feminist elucidations of social injustice and its wrongfulness.

Erika Milam (Princeton University)

The Human Beast: the American Search for Human Nature during the Cold War

After the Second World War, liberal American biologists and anthropologists struggled to make sense of its eugenic horrors predicated on the assumption that some human lives were less valuable, less human, than others. They believed they had a moral responsibility to use their professional standing to correct popular misunderstandings about evolution and build a more equitable world for all cultures. Establishing a universal nature that clearly separated humans from mere animals thus became an intellectual project underpinned with political and moral valence.

Perhaps counter-intuitively, three popular books published in the 1960s posited that comparisons with non-human animals could help scientists identify those qualities that make humans unique: Konrad Lorenz's *On Aggression* (1963, English trans. 1966), Robert Ardrey's *Territorial Imperative* (1966), and Desmond Morris's *The Naked Ape* (1967). Rather than framing human nature as inherently cooperative and trying to explain human violence as exceptional deviance from normal life, as had earlier books seeking to establish a universal human nature, these books instead suggested that humans possessed an innate capacity for violence. Although each advanced a distinct version of human evolution, taken together these books convinced many readers that humans – far more so than any other species – were instinctively brutal and uninhibitedly aggressive. Only humans, they suggested, possessed the capacity to kill each other, especially in such large numbers. Other readers instead contended that by reducing humans to mere animals, these books left out almost everything that distinguished humans from primates, worms, or even (according to one reviewer) asparagus. Yet despite their immense initial popularity of these books, by the mid-1970s humans' unique status as "killer apes" was already breaking down. Primatologists learned that chimpanzees, too, killed their own kind, and evolutionary theorists concerned themselves with the seeming conundrum of how altruistic behavior in any species might evolve. Although the idea that humans, especially males, are innately aggressive has not gone away, what began to fade was the belief that this aggression provided the secret ingredient to the unique natural history of humanity.

Given new voice by E. O. Wilson's *Sociobiology* (1975) and Richard Dawkin's *The Selfish Gene* (1976), sociobiologists' conviction that human behaviors had a genetic basis proved to be both a resource and a problem. By claiming that natural selection acted at the level of the individual, or even the gene, they gained a rhetorical advantage in distancing their theories from evolutionary accounts in previous decades like those of Ardrey, Lorenz, and Morris. Yet critics of sociobiology also turned this apparent advantage into a key piece of their attacks, equating sociobiological theories of human behavior with claims that racial differences in IQ and differences in the behavior of sexes were innate. All such arguments, critics insisted, fell under the larger conceptual umbrella "genetic determinism" and undervalued the importance of human culture in determining our idiosyncratic behavior. In turn, this unified vision of biological determinism contributed to the polarization of debates over nature and nurture that characterized the last quarter of the twentieth century.

By examining the rise and fall of the "killer ape" theory, this paper thus examines the fraught traffic between the natural and social sciences over human nature during the Cold War.

Gerald Posselt (University of Vienna)

Hate Crime and Hate Speech as Forms of Dehumanization

Although it seems to be obvious that hate crime and hate speech constitute particular forms of physical and symbolic violence, it is not clear whether they also necessarily dehumanize their addressees. In order to address this question I will pursue both a human rights and linguistic-philosophical approach taking the report of the European Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) "Making hate crime visible in the European Union: acknowledging victim's rights" (2012) as my starting point. This report defines "hate crimes" as "violence and crimes motivated by racism, xenophobia, religious intolerance or by a person's disability, sexual orientation or gender identity". Thereby, the FRA report follows the assumption that hate crimes or so-called bias motivated crimes do not only violate the physical integrity of their victims, but also violate fundamental rights, namely human dignity and non-discrimination. Accordingly, hate crimes are conceived as a matter of human rights that require particular attention and sanctions by state authorities: For what is attacked, is not just the individual, but also the social group to which he/she belongs as well as society at large, including its fundamental democratic values.

If one accepts this argumentation, the dehumanizing force of hate crime and hate speech can be attributed to their inherent discrimination and bias motivation. However, the question remains as to how this de- or infra-humanization exactly works as well as in which way hate crime and hate speech differ from "ordinary" forms of physical or linguistic violence, the latter including common phenomena such as verbal aggression, defamation, offense, threat or slander? This also raises the question of the relationship between hate crime and hate speech: Can hate speech simply be conceived as a subspecies of hate crime, as it is commonly assumed, or is hate speech an additional feature that regularly accompanies hate crime?

In my paper, I will argue that both accounts fall short of the mark. For it is not so much the bias motivation, but rather the fundamentally linguistic character of both hate crime and hate speech that is responsible for their dehumanizing force. This also means that it is, paradoxically, less the brutality of the deed itself but rather its symbolic-linguistic dimension that is behind its particular injurious and traumatizing force in the first place. For this end, I will follow the line of argumentation of the FRA report and analyze its underlying assumptions and presuppositions. Remarkably, the FRA report claims that hate crimes "cannot be understood unless one *listens to what they say*, with all forms of hate crimes essentially *conveying a common message*" (my emphasis), namely, that "the victim's rights matter less", because certain features can be attributed to him or her. In other words, precisely by reconstructing hate crime and hate speech as a specific kind of speech and address their dehumanizing function comes into sight. Moreover, as I will argue, hate crime and hate speech do not only constitutively involve a fundamentally linguistic aspect, rather they are directed against the possibility of language and speech itself, insofar as they aim at making us speechless, depriving us of the possibility of speaking out and being heard. Only if we take this double perspective seriously, we are able to account for dehumanizing force of hate crime and speech in a systematic and comprehensive way.

Magdalena Smieszek (Central European University)

De Jure Dignity and De Facto Dehumanization of Asylum Seekers

Universal human rights emerged as a response to Nazism that tainted the first half of the twentieth century, a time in history when dehumanization did its worst. The notion of human dignity and a shared humanity became the overlaying precept in international human rights laws. Yet, laws are also fraught with limitations, categorizations, inclusions and exclusions that undermine the values of equality and dignity on which they are based. The result is that conflicted legal mechanisms can have the effect of perpetuating dehumanization.

Legal norms are intertwined with public sentiments that are informed by the visual mediums, historical and philosophical accounts, as well as continual insights from the life sciences. The recent and unprecedented media focus on refugees in Europe puts the link between dehumanization and human rights to the forefront of necessary consideration. Photographs of dead bodies along the Mediterranean coastline, video clips of detained asylum seekers, public references to the 'swarms' of migrants likened to insects, and images of desperation have been particularly jarring. As feelings of abhorrence heightened, compassion towards asylum seekers also spread, including portrayals of their life stories through various visual arts. These scenarios are not new by any means, but what's relatively new is the magnitude of representations that has the effect of pulling at some vital human cords.

The paper will consider how laws are part of the feedback loop of either humanizing or dehumanizing perceptions. The paper will reflect on the historical and philosophical foundations of international human rights and refugee law, responses to dehumanization, as well as progression of personhood in the sense of a rights-holder protected by law. An examination of how current categorization of human rights, especially socio-economic rights, has the effect of omitting asylum seekers as rights holders. Categorizations, especially ones which involve asylum determination processes, establish access to or denial of a particular set of rights. This legal process especially affects access to socio-economic rights – including basic necessities for survival and human dignity, such as shelter and livelihood. Denial of socio-economic rights can lead to socio-economic deprivation and social exclusion that further compounds dehumanization. A reflection on the notions of legal personhood and human dignity within human rights law will provide examples of how courts have deliberated these matters when faced with cases of asylum seekers' socio-economic rights denial.

David Livingstone Smith (University of New England)
*Putting Them In Their (Proper) Place: Dehumanization As
Metaphysical Boundary Policing*

In this paper I present the view that many of the distinctive characteristics of dehumanization are actually symptoms of the *failure* of dehumanization.

When we dehumanize others we classify them as subhuman – typically as vermin, parasites, or predators – but (for reasons that I will make clear) we cannot obliterate the awareness that they are human beings. Consequently, we assign dehumanized people to two incompatible folk-metaphysical categories at once, and this produces certain distinctive and highly disturbing psychological effects. These effects, and the steps taken to ameliorate them, are responsible for many of the characteristic features of the dehumanizing process.

I begin the paper with a discussion of what I call *dehumanization proper*. The term “dehumanization” is used in at least eight distinct senses in the scholarly literature. I use it in only one of these senses, roughly corresponding to what social psychologists call “animalistic dehumanization.” When we dehumanize others, we conceive of them as possessing a subhuman essence. Dehumanization proper is therefore dependent on two features of our moral psychology. One, which has been studied extensively by psychologists, is our disposition to carve the world up into natural kinds, each of which is individuated by an unobservable causal essence. This is known as psychological essentialism. The second, which has received hardly any attention from psychologists, is to conceive of these essentialized natural kinds as arranged hierarchically in accord with their supposed intrinsic value (the Great Chain of Being). When we dehumanize others we think of them as possessing the essence of creatures of a kind ranked lower on the hierarchy than humans are.

I go on to argue that dehumanization proper has a function. Because we are hypersocial primates, violence against conspecifics does not come easily to us. But because we are highly intelligent primates, we are able to recognize that violence against conspecifics can be highly advantageous. The function of dehumanization is to disable inhibitions that stand in the way of doing harm – especially lethal harm – to others, because it allows us to think of them as “only animals.”

Next, I propose that dehumanization proper always, or almost always, fails. It fails for the precisely the same reason that it is needed. As highly intelligent, hypersocial primates we are exquisitely attuned to recognizing other members of our own kind, and find it difficult to unrecognize them as such. Typically, those who dehumanize others implicitly acknowledge those others’ humanity. During the 1994 genocide thousands of Tutsi women were raped by Hutu militiamen. This behavior was motivated, in part, by the desire to *humiliate* these women before killing them. But one does not seek to humiliate cockroaches. The humanity of the dehumanized is also often acknowledged more explicitly. Hutu *genocidaires* notoriously characterized their Tutsi quarry as cockroaches and snakes, they more often used terms like “enemy” and “accomplices of the enemy” to describe them – terms that only make sense when applied to human beings.

I then argue that, in consequence of this, when people dehumanize others they end up categorizing them as simultaneously wholly human and wholly subhuman. This state of cognitive dissonance has important psychological consequences. I draw on the work of Ernst Jentsch (psychology), Mary Douglas (anthropology), and Noel Carroll (philosophy) to trace

these out. Seeing a being as simultaneously human and subhuman causes one to think of that being as uncanny, or, more precisely, *Unheimlich* (Jentsch), unclean (Douglas), and monstrous (Carroll). Consequently, the failure of dehumanization renders the objects of dehumanization far more loathsome and threatening than would otherwise be the case. Such beings are experienced as *metaphysically threatening* in virtue of their having violated culturally entrenched conceptions of the natural order.

Finally, I suggest that conceptions of dehumanized people as uncanny, unclean, and monstrous shape the behavior of their tormentors, and that dehumanizers make use of a range of behaviors that are intelligible only if one realizes that they have the function of putting dehumanized people in their (metaphysical) place by affirming their complete and utter subhumanity.

Johannes Steizinger (University of Vienna)

Animalistic Dehumanization and Philosophical Anthropology: The Case of National Socialism

My paper examines an actual historical case in which the phenomenon of dehumanization is closely connected with a philosophical debate about human nature. Dehumanization was at the core of Nazi racism. Here, the categorical divide between animal and human was used in different ways to radically dehumanize certain groups of people. The devaluation of other 'races' was for example often expressed by identifying them with animal life forms. In particular, the characterization of Jews as parasites led to their complete dehumanization, not least because it was not meant metaphorically, but literally.

This dehumanization of certain groups of people was accompanied by a move to redefine human nature. National Socialism regarded itself as a political revolution, which broke with the humanist tradition and realized a new image of the human being. This idea was taken up by several philosophers who wanted to develop a national socialist concept of the human being. Philosophers like Erich Rothacker, Alfred Baeumler or Ernst Krieck welcomed National Socialism either as a confirmation of their redefinition of human nature or as an opportunity to face the challenge. Briefly speaking, anthropology was a paradigmatic way of philosophically interpreting National Socialism.

In my paper I want to bring these two discourses together and examine the relation between the actual dehumanization of certain groups of people in Nazi racism and the contemporaneous anthropology, which regarded itself as a philosophical interpretation of National Socialism. In doing this, I will focus on the use of the animal/human distinction in both discourses.

My paper is organized into three parts: The first part examines the mechanisms of dehumanization in the ideological foundations of National Socialism by looking at an exemplary case. I investigate the racist world view which is elaborated in Alfred Rosenberg's *Der Mythos des 20. Jahrhunderts* (1930) [The Myth of the 20th Century] and concentrate on his descriptions of Jews as parasites. The aim of this part is to analyse the ideological prerequisites, the argumentative functions and the ethical consequences of this motif.

The second part turns to the philosophical interpretation of National Socialism. I examine Erich Rothacker's cultural anthropology, which is elaborated in two of his main works, namely *Geschichtsphilosophie* (1934) [Philosophy of History] and *Probleme der Kulturanthropologie* (1942) [Problems of Cultural Anthropology]. Rothacker's attempt to redefine human nature is characterized by his emphasis on the similarities between the human and the animal relation to the world. He even defines the human being as an only slightly domesticated animal. The use of the term "domesticated" is striking since biological concepts like breeding or the struggle for existence play a crucial role even in the characterization of the exclusively human sphere of culture. The examination of Rothacker's cultural anthropology focuses on his use of the animal/human distinction. In particular, it looks at the way in which he first dissolves the distinction and then puts forward a new concept of human nature by redefining the animal/human distinction. Moreover, I will raise the question whether Rothacker's anthropology is in itself characterized by certain forms of dehumanization which is, e.g., indicated by his use of the term "Menschenmaterial" [human material].

The third part investigates the relation between the animalistic dehumanization in Nazi racism and the anthropology of the then contemporary philosophy. This concluding comparison is guided by the following questions: Do the approaches of Rosenberg and Rothacker support each other? Do they have a common ground or are there significant tensions especially regarding their use of the categorical animal/human divide? Is the animalistic dehumanization of Nazi racism a prerequisite or a consequence of the new philosophical concept of human nature? Is it possible to draw systematic conclusions from this historical case?

Impressum

The conference is organized by Maria Kronfeldner (Philosophy, Central European University), part of the project ToPHSS (Topics in the Philosophy of the Human and Social Sciences), financed by the CEU Humanities Initiative, by the CEU Conference and Academic Event Fund and hosted and also financed by the Open Society Archives (OSA)

Event page: <http://philosophy.ceu.edu/dehumanization>

