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DEHUMANIZATION AND HUMAN RIGHTS

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12.1 Introduction

From a common sense perspective, the nexus between dehumanization and human rights is self-explanatory: Where the former occurs, the latter will suffer. There are, however, a number of questions that are worth raising, from a philosophical perspective: What is dehumanization *really* and how *exactly* does it affect human rights? What is the moral wrong in dehumanization? Conceived as its antipode, is the concept of human rights, in itself, immune to the feasting of dehumanizing views and practices on its normative source? And what, after all, is the "human" in "human rights"?

   In the following, I will embed these questions in a conceptual landscape where both dehumanization and human rights will first be analyzed and specified independently. In a next step, I want to look at the heuristic potential that the two concepts might hold for each other, with the main focus being on what the concept of human rights could add to our understanding of dehumanization. I am particularly interested in the moral wrongness of specific types of dehumanization. As for looking at human rights through the lens of dehumanization, I will ask to what extent dangers of dehumanization not only stem from "outside" human rights, but are already invested in the idea of human rights as such. Furthermore, I will look toward examining what the least exclusive notion of the "human" in human rights could look like.

   Human rights, and on an increasing scale, dehumanization, occupy a pivotal place in a global ethos that has gathered strength over the course of the last decades, with it even gaining enough momentum to become hegemonic in particular societies. Consequently, the interrelation of both these concepts is a promising start for deliberating what we owe each other as human beings and on what grounds.

12.2 What is dehumanization? What are human rights?

As I am aware that dehumanization itself is a contested concept and stipulated in different ways, I will first outline my own understanding of dehumanization before turning to human rights. Although I will not seek to dissolve all the controversies present on what dehumanization actually is (supposed to be), I nevertheless hope the following proposal that draws upon already established theoretical approaches will be useful.

As a nominalization of a verb, the term "dehumanization" refers to an activity or practice. If dehumanization is something that humans *do*, the next question would naturally be, what acts or practices constitute dehumanization? To seriously look at the prefix "de," dehumanization can be delineated as an act or practice that takes away the "human" of an individual or a collective. This leads to the question of how could somebody withdraw "the human" in a human being? I will argue that in order to make sense of the concept of dehumanization, we do not need a full-fledged concept of what being human actually denotes, but rather, we should look at the perspectives of those we believe are dehumanizing others. Depending on what these people are lacking in the eyes of their dehumanizer(s), the former will lose their (full) status as a human being in this perspective. This suggestion admittedly prioritizes the perspective of the alleged dehumanizer(s) over those of the alleged victims of dehumanization. The main reason for this definition is to factor out the intricate matter of an unwitting dehumanization. While there is no point in disputing that sometimes a person *feels* dehumanized by another, regardless of the other party's intent or motives, personal standards of vulnerability are potentially prone to turning dehumanization into everything and, ultimately, nothing. That is why, for the sake of definition, we will pay foremost attention to the agent(s) of dehumanization. This should, however, not mislead us into overlooking the inherent antagonistic dimension within the concept of dehumanization ("This person *is not* fully human" vs. "This person *is* fully human") (cf. sec. 3).

Next, to turn to the perspectives of those performing dehumanization, it needs to be asked, what would be the "human" that they are (trying to) take away from others? Drawing to Maria Kronfeldner's distinction between *humankind* and *humanity* (2019), we can distinguish dehumanization as a form of a denial of species membership (denial of humankind) and in the form of a denial of belonging to a social or moral group that would be defined as humans (denial of humanity). In the former case, the question of who belongs is a genealogical one, whereas in the latter it is a social one (ibid.: 216). One could further emphasize this categorical divide by describing dehumanizing in terms of humankind as denying another person is a *real* human. Lacking humanity, by contrast, prevents someone from being a *true* human. However, it is to be noted that in both cases, the content of "humankind" and "humanity," respectively, "is completely exchangeable and perspectival" (ibid.: 28).

Following this, dehumanization is defined as an activity that consists of a denial of status as a true/real human being, and can be subdivided along the lines of different possible actions and practices. The term "activity" here is used in a broad sense in order to span as many phenomena that constitute a denial of belonging to the group that would be considered (fully) "human." A low-key denial of this sort can already occur where someone holds the view that another person or group of others is not (fully) human. The holding of views, particularly when anthropological/biological and evaluative/normative beliefs conjoin, are hardly ever accidental. Denying that someone is (fully) human presupposes a complex set of beliefs as to what a human being is or should be like. Granted that the thought processes in our minds are not entirely passive but are, in fact, (at least in parts) governed by the choices we make in sorting out and combining (sensual and non-sensual) information as well as reviewing and reiterating it, we can speak of *latent dehumanization*. It consists in the holding of views and attitudes according to that another person or group is not ("fully") human. Sometimes, this would also be referred to as "not seeing" others as humans, and it is important to stress that this form of dehumanization is not a mere perceptual error ("The shirt you described as green is actually red") and also not equivalent to an error in judgment ("The food reviewer underrated the quality of this dish"). In addition, it does not simply result from an inadequacy of information ("If I had known it was a white lie, I would not have thought badly about you"). Latent dehumanization—that is, not seeing someone as (fully) human—is better described as not *accepting* someone as (fully) human.[1] This would stem from

the personal view that what is held to be human is incompatible with what is seen: irritating or even disgusting aliens who differ from "us" in relevant ways. Take, for example, the words of Kantano Habimana, who worked at the Rwandan radio station RTLM and fuelled the geno-cide with his rhetoric against the Tutsi: "I do not know," he stated on air in July 1994, "how they are created. I do not know. When you look at them, you wonder what kind of people they are" (Montreal Institute for Genocide and Human Rights Studies 2018: doc 0040 2015e).[2]

In the dehumanizer's eyes, the respective person or group is nothing but a "counterfeit human being" (Livingstone Smith 2011: 101)—a view determined by assumptions and sentiments about unique, typical, or proper features of human beings. When such views are expressed, this can be viewed as *expressive dehumanization*. *Activist dehumanization*—that is, willful dissemination of beliefs according to which some other person or group is not (fully) human—is but an escalation of expressive dehumanization. The phenomena of speech that fit into this subcategory are such that they aim at convincing others that some people are not (fully) human and may also coerce action upon that belief. Activist dehumanization usually consists in frequent and/or repeated acts of expressive dehumanization in front of significant audiences within a given context. Such promotion of dehumanization can, as studying the course of genocides quickly reveals, lead to *actualized* dehumanization—that is, all forms of treatment of others grounded in the belief they are not (fully) human. In addition to holding the view that someone is not (fully) human and expressing it, actualized dehumanization is also imposed upon the dehumanized person or group: They *suffer this very view*, with every beating and every smirk, with every feeling of suffocation, every impassive look.

By acknowledging that the lines between speech and acts can sometimes be blurred, we can also conceive of actualized dehumanization as (sometimes) activist dehumanization. One infamous example of this was how after Austria's annexation to Nazi Germany in 1938, Vienna's Jews were forced to clean the streets amidst the laughter of Nazi officials and co-citizens, some jolly, some bewildered. This was as much an act of actualized dehumanization as it was activist dehumanization. These "scrub parties" (*Reibpartien*) served as symbolic public degradation that prepared the viewers for finally accepting the "truth" that Jews are *not of the same kind* (see also Steizinger, this volume). If a group brazenly performs acts against a certain group in a way that the former would never dare do to a peer, the impression would naturally suggest that these people are not humans *like us*.

If someone is not accepted as human being, what—in the eyes of the dehumanizing person—would he or she be? A standard answer reads as such: Dehumanization equals *subhumanization*. Although violence that is associated with the latter can explain why only few scholars pay attention to its opposite (cf., e.g., Hodson/MacInnis/Costello 2014), *suprahumanization* is the other side of the same coin. If dehumanization is viewed as removal of the "human" from some-body, the question of what remains in the eyes of the dehumanizing person after the fact is still an open one. This would all depend on what is seen as *lower* in worth and status when compared to a "human" or also *higher*. If someone, for instance, is being held at an equal worth to a dog and dogs are deemed *less* than humans, we are dealing with subhumanization. If, by contrast, cats were believed to be sacred, God-embodying animals, and someone was equated or compared to a cat (within the contextualized timeframe), calling it suprahumanization is more apt. Dehumanization can take both forms and it is important to develop a concept that would be broad enough to shine light on potentially relevant phenomena. Promising candidates for the perception of others as *more* than human would be the *deification* of people or their *demonization* (cf. also Livingstone Smith, this volume). Examples for the latter would stem from the beliefs in witchcraft, a universal phenomenon in human history which still exists in many parts of the world (cf. Behringer 2004; cf. sec. 2).

When it comes to subhumanization, what is actually considered to be of a lower worth than humans can, as indicated above, vary. However, there is a consistent pattern in the ways which subhumanized people are equated with *objects* and *animals*—the traditional entities humans onto-logically and axiologically distance them from in bottom-up hierarchical terms (cf. Kasperbauer 2018; see also Crary, this volume, and Sebastiani, this volume). Indeed, it is commonplace know-ledge that putting people on a level with animals that are usually considered dirty or dangerous ("rats,""cockroaches," or "dogs") are related to the most serious crimes since it increases the readi-ness to inflict otherwise indefensible violence. You would not be killing someone alike, you are killing a "black monkey"—an expression used by the Janjaweed in South-Sudan (cf. Livingstone Smith 2011: 154)—or "human fleas," as Buddhist nationalists in Myanmar refer(ed) to Rohingya Muslims whom they regard as "illegal immigrants" from Bangladesh (cf. Oo 2016).

Whereas some (cf. Haslam 2006; 2014) define animalistic dehumanization—in contrast to objectivist dehumanization—as the denial of supposedly *unique* human features, I will not follow this path since it is simply not beyond imagination that supposedly lacking a unique human property can make you *something* instead of *someone*. If, for example, in a dehumanizer's perspec-tive supreme faculties of the mind are what make us human, then he or she might place someone with a certain cognitive impairment on the same level as an ape. Yet, it is equally likely that the same person may compare a person in a vegetative state with an object ("vegetable"). By contrast, Nick Haslam assumes that objectivist ("mechanistic") subhumanization is characterized by the exclusion from a shared *human nature* in terms of typical human needs and behavior or essentially human properties.[3] Given that Haslam has particular methodological reasons for differentiating dehumanization based on denying human uniqueness or human nature—to give empirical evi-dence of these forms of behaviours and attitudes (cf. also Haslam, this volume)—whereas I am interested in clarifying what dehumanization is from a phenomenological or philosophical point of view, I will not resort to such theoretical presuppositions in the following.

In summation, dehumanization, as understood in this contribution, stands for acts or practices that deny someone the status of a (real/true)human being. This can be a partial or full denial and it can be principally done in two modes: subhumanization and suprahumanization. Dehumanization can assume the form of latent dehumanization (the manner in which I think of someone), expressive dehumanization (the manner in which I talk about someone) including activist dehumanization (the manner in which I talk about someone to others that matter), and actualized dehumanization (the manner in which I treat someone). If dehumanization applies to an individual who is dehumanized, we can call it individual dehumanization, and if a group is dehumanized, we can speak of collective dehumanization, a term that shares a family resem-blance with (cultural) pseudospeciation (cf. Eriksen 1966).[4]

I now turn to clarifying the notion of human rights. When thinking of human rights, treaty documents and declarations are often the first markers that come to mind. Spanning from the bills of rights that the British colonies in North America had established in the course of their struggle for and upon their independence (1776-1788), the French *Declaration of The Rights of Man and of the Citizen* (1789), and the United Nations (UN) *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (1948) to the two major UN Covenants (1966), it can be stated that human rights are predominantly perceived as catalogues of claims that people are said to possess simply because they are human. However, careful observers of these documents soon, and rightly so, would be able to spot the discrepancies in the stipulations of these rights. That people can disagree about the priority, scope, and content of human rights is further evidenced by the numerous human rights charters that today accompany or rival the UN human rights catalogues. They include, for instance, the *European Convention on Human Rights* (1950), issued by the Council of Europe; the *African* "Banjul" *Charta of Human and Peoples' Rights*, issued by the African Union in 1981;

or the "Cairo" *Declaration of Human Rights in Islam*, adopted by the Organization of Islamic Cooperation in 1990.

One particular way to not get carried away by such dissonances and lose sight of the bigger picture has already been discussed in a previous work that I have authored (cf. 2019), and this looks toward complementing an understanding of human rights in terms of catalogues by the *idea* of human rights. What all these cited documents (maintain to) share is the position that every human being has a right to have human rights. Where people usually differ, then as now, is in deciding what rights humans should have and how these rights relate to each other, to larger collective objectives, and of course, what duties they imply and for whom. The *idea* or concept of human rights enables us to put aside such differences for a moment and define a common ground from which arguments as to why humans need or deserve a particular right and the subsequent distribution of duties that stem from them can be brought into deliberation. The boundaries for such reasoning can be drawn from the idea of human rights itself—that is, its *equality dimension* and its *liberty dimension*. The equality dimension of human rights, its universalistic pillar, consists in the belief that human rights are claims of each and every one whereas the liberty dimension of human rights, its individualistic pillar, stipulates these rights as rights of individuals that principally can, and often will, compromise larger communal goals (of the family, the religious community, the nation, etc.).

What is particularly relevant for the question of dehumanization is that human rights rely on a notion of "human" that generally remains unspecified. Despite the fact that, or maybe precisely because historically the question of what counts as a (full) human being has produced a variety of exclusions from the full enjoyment of rights for different groups of people, human rights documents usually do not expend effort in defining the subject of the rights that are established. However, in light of the presumed moral wrong in (different types of) dehumanization, can we really do without a substantive notion of what the "human" is referring to in human rights? I will return to this question after a further examination of dehumanization through a human rights lens in the following section.

12.3 Dehumanization through the lens of human rights

Dehumanization is usually conducted by people who—and this would remain a paradox until a second perspective is added to the conceptual scheme—hardly ever describe their practices as dehumanizing. From the point of view of the enactor of dehumanization, nothing is actually taken away from others. Their full humankind or humanity, respectively, was never acknowledged in the first place. What is "taken away" from the dehumanized person or group is done so only in the eyes of the "victim" or a third party who disagrees with the dehumanizer. Without such a counter-perspective, dehumanization would not exist in a strict sense. Let us imagine, for instance, that the Democratic Republic of Kambuchea had never been overcome and the ontologized distinction between the "new" and the "old" people had survived until every single person under the control of the Maoist regime was fully brought into line ("new people") or extinguished ("old people"). Furthermore, let us include within this scenario school books that praise the heroic—unfortunately dirty, yet necessary—elimination of the enemies of the people. These books would even be explicit about practices such as breaking people mentally by forcing them to eat human excrements (cf. Hinton 2013). Who, in this experiment of thought, would—without being granted the freedom to come to the conclusion by their own reasoning that being a human is a morally relevant category that expands even to one's adversaries—be able to feel *moral* disgust?

Dehumanization is not a problem of any sort unless we presuppose that every human being deserves a basic form of respect that stems from acknowledging our shared identity as human

beings (cf. also Stuurman). The antagonism ingrained in the concept of dehumanization becomes apparent in the ways that charges of dehumanization are used in social–political discourse—that is, to blame someone for doing injustice to others. Those who claim to identify dehumanizing acts and distribute charges of dehumanization generally do so because they are aiming at its prevention or demise. As such, dehumanization lies at the heart of modern humanism, yet it is a concept that would not be able to keep its place if it was not for the idea of human rights—the indispensable background concept without which dehumanization would be largely unintelligible. As trivial as this truth may seem, it is not always related to the challenge that presents itself should we take this conceptual nexus between dehumanization and human rights seriously. If counter-perspectives to dehumanizing ones refer to and rely on rivaling notions of what makes a human being and what we owe such a being, our own (normative) anthropologies would need further attention (see sec. 3).

Yet, if dehumanization is a moral problem once we take human rights as basis of evaluation, where exactly does its injustice reside? Let us begin with the most extreme one, that is, actualized dehumanization, defined as the treatment of others which is grounded in the belief that they are not (fully) "human." In the case of actualized dehumanization, these beliefs serve as justification for behaviour that under different circumstances would be unacceptable—that is, where one assumes that they are dealing with others that are more or less sharing the same status as human beings. This can be seen through an example: Charged for selling beef in the Indian State of Assam in spring 2019, Shaukat Ali had fallen victim to an angry mob who encircled and lashed out on him (cf. Bhattacharjee 2019). A video circulating on social media showed the 68-year-old on his knees and being forced to eat pork. As Manash Firaq Bhattacharjee, who denounced this as an incident of dehumanization (ibid.), notes, "The mob that surrounds Ali, isn't talking to a man with whom it feels it shares an equal status, moral, or political. They are talking to an insect. Ali is robbed of his speech because speech is human. In the preying eyes of the gang, Ali is not human" (ibid.).

If we look at this incident merely from a perspective where human rights are, first and foremost, a list of rights, the moral wrongness of the vigilantes' treatment of Shaukat Ali would most likely consist in denying him a fair trial (since he was accused of violating the Assam Cattle Preservation Act 1950 that restricts the slaughter of cattle). Apparently, he was not attacked physically and while it might have caused him great harm to eat pork as a Muslim, it is not clear which—if any—legal human rights obligations were violated in his case not least because no State actors were involved.[5] However, few would be prepared to say that what is wrong with treating Shaukat Ali in such ways is that his (moral) right to a fair trial is disregarded. Indeed, the idea of human rights sets an axiological path to a different assessment. From this perspective, we not only have this or that right as human beings but we also have the *right to have rights* in the first place.[6] Treating someone as a holder of rights is the principal moral right that will be used to condition all the other specific entitlements we might want to assign to others. In this light, *human dignity* is the normative bedrock for *any* human right (cf. also Frick 2019). In assigning a special worth to human beings as such and without exception, the idea of human rights can thus shed further light on what was *really* wrong with the Assam incident: A human being was treated as if *anything* could be done to him without moral concerns and what was done to him was utterly at the discretion of his masters. He can be forced to his knees and be made to eat what "true humans" see fit for him. While he yells, no one listens to him, just like other *animals* under their control. As David Livingstone Smith notes, "When a group of people is dehumanized, they become mere creatures to be managed, exploited, or disposed of, as the occasion demands" (2011: 130).

Again, the moral wrongness present in actualized dehumanization is reflected only through the mirror of the idea of human rights. More precisely, it is in its basic premise that humans should not be treated without *any* constraints, and that regardless of what we think of them in a

given situation or how much we despise them, we do owe them *something*. When referring back to the plight of Shaukat Ali, the people harassing him do not seem to exhibit a commitment to that crucial acknowledgment and that is what makes their actions morally wrong in the eyes of those who take the idea of human rights to be a minimal, yet universal, standard for determining that we owe each other.

An assault on someone's dignity—that is, their status as a human being—amounts to, as George Kateb puts it, an "existential loss" (2011: 36f.). Just like animalistic subhumanization, objectivist subhumanization is morally wrong for the exact same reason. When Stanford student athlete Brock Allen Turner sexually assaulted an intoxicated and unconscious young woman in 2015 outside a fraternity facility (cf. Carroll 2016), he—in many observers' eyes—not only committed a felony (for which he later was convicted).[7] The 20-year-old, who was also drunk, had crossed a decisive moral line by not treating the incapacitated person in front of him as a human being (deserving aid), but rather as a mere thing—to be played around with.

The wrongness of objectifying others is a tradition-steeped question in moral philosophy. A standard answer would state that treating another person as an object is wrong because this person gets instrumentalized and his or her autonomy is violated (cf. also Kaufmann 2011). Others maintain that only with a view to the ends of objectification can we assess its moral wrongness (cf. Mikkola 2012; 2016; in this volume) or that objectification is a complex cluster term that comprises different types of actions that have different qualities of moral wrongness attached to them (cf. Nussbaum 1999: 218ff.), while others focus on the domination aspect in objectification (cf. Tarasenko-Struc 2020). The concept of human rights offers a lens to cut through this normative woodland (without, of course, voiding the respective approaches which are normative spotlights in their own right). Taking it on a *prima facie* level, treating another human being as an object raises the question as to the extent in which an objectified person is still regarded as a human being—that is, a member of a social/moral community that determines what we are not allowed to do to him or her. Thus, from the perspective of human rights, the question is not so much whether someone is instrumentalized or objectified but whether this objectification *reduces someone to something less than a human*. This approach would not only correspond to common sense intuitions, according to which we cannot help but use others as instruments for our means from time to time (e.g., the bus driver, the museum guide, etc.) or at some point even treat them as objects (e.g., our lover, a surgeon's patient, etc.). It also resonates with the origins of problematizing objectifications within moral philosophy; that is, with Immanuel Kant's dictum that we should treat others "always at the same time as an end, never merely as a means" (1796/2012: 41). It is often overlooked that Kant actually does not regard every form of objectifying treatment as a violation of his categorical imperative. Rather, he particularly stresses the moral wrongness of *reductionist instrumentalization* (being taken "*merely* as a means").

Taking the concept of human rights as a starting point for deliberation, objectification is morally wrong insofar as it reduces another person to the moral status of a subhuman object—an item we can deal with exactly in the manner that we see fit, without any moral considerations in terms of duties toward others.[8] This denial of (human rights) subjectivity also features in Nussbaum's cluster concept of objectification and is described by her as treating someone "as something whose experience and feelings (if any) need not be taken into account" (1999: 218). In this light, nuances matter as much as phenomenological precision. The institution of slavery, for example, is rightly considered a paragon of dehumanization. Yet, some historical forms of slavery, as well as those in present times, can differ in their reductionist violence and, hence, in their moral wrongness. Reports of slave owners granting their "property" (limited) time and means to the care for their own life (study, marry, travel, etc.) are in stark contrast with examples from the opposite spectrum, like the case of the recent slave masters in Mesopotamia (*Daesh*)

who have abducted thousands of girl children and women from "kuffar" populations, trading them amongst each other as sex and household slaves and holding many in captivity until the present day. Or—as taken from Hinton's research—the masters of Tuol Sleng prison in Cambodia (2013: 161): There is no possibility to imagine that killing enslaved others by draining the blood out of their bodies—blood used for your "own" fighters—is not an ultimate reductionist object-ification and thus unambiguous subhumanization.

If actualized subhumanization is morally wrong because it disregards the basic respect that we owe human beings (human dignity) and wrong independently of possible ramifications, that is, violations of specific human rights, this finding—if accepted—holds implications for assessing moral wrongness in other types of subhumanization. Latent subhumanization, then, does not differ in the *quality* of moral wrongness as compared to actualized dehumanization but it does in the *gravity* of this wrongness. One could say that views and beliefs that are unspoken and unshared are less problematic since—unlike expressive or activist subhumanization—it does not carry the potential of undermining the commitment to respecting the human dignity of some person or group in the view of others. In short, it is not *infectious*. Still, I would argue that adherents to the idea of human rights cannot be unruffled by even the latent forms of dehumanization—not least because they could, at any random time, motivate or sanction actualized dehumanization.

As far as expressivist dehumanization is concerned, the gravity of its moral wrongness relates to its mimetic dynamics, which is particularly true for activist dehumanization. Expressive subhumanization, even in subtle forms or codes, can effectively lower inhibition thresholds for treating others as less than human—not in everyone exposed to it, but in some and that is enough to lead to worries about its manifestations. When the global public sought explanations as why (even female) US-American soldiers were capable of doing what they did to prisoners in Abu Ghraib in 2004, Susan Sontag rightly put part of the blame on "the demonization and dehumanization of anyone declared […] to be a possible terrorist" (2004). Such rhetoric resonates in "the evolved design of the human psyche," as Livingstone Smith explains (2011: 101), and it is harder for many to resist it than to bend accordingly when subhumanization, as "a joint creation of biology, culture, and the architecture of the human mind" (ibid.: 4), rears its head.

Thus, antagonizing ideologies that disseminate the archetypes of the subhuman (via equating humans' worth either with that of animals or objects) is therefore a key objective on the road to a universal human rights ethos (cf. also Sikkink 2017, pp. 200ff.). However, this objective is jeopardized if we apply an under-differentiated notion of dehumanization and take our own hermeneutical position to be exclusively authoritative. That is the case, for example, if certain words—without paying heed to the context or the perspective of the person that we are charging with dehu-manization—are considered to be *essentially* dehumanizing. Based on the notion that "[a]ny time someone reduces a human being to a single characteristic, especially a negative one, they are dehu-manizing," psychologist Sherry Hamby maintains that labels such as "alcoholic," "schizophrenic," or "illegal" are already dehumanizing (2018). In such an approach, dehumanization gets merged with deindividuation, which is, I believe, phenomenologically inaccurate. The important nexus between deindividuation and dehumanization evades us once we simply equate the two. Deindividuation can be a (by-) product of dehumanization—if someone is not (morally) relevant to us, we are less likely to care about their personal traits (cf. also Swencionis, J. K. Fiske, S. T. 2014: 278; see also Fiske, this volume)—or maybe sometimes invite to dehumanization. It might, for example, be easier to see soldier Brian as a human being than an anonymous mass of men in uniforms who might resemble fighting machines (friendly soldiers) or even swarms of insects (enemy soldiers).

Thus far, I have been concerned with assessing the moral wrongness in subhumanization. Yet the other side of the coin, suprahumanization, has yet to be discussed. Could seeing or treating

others as more than human be problematic at all? If so, why has suprahumanization not received a fraction of the attention paid to subhumanization? Just like with subhumanization, the perspective of the dehumanizing person matters in order to understand what is "added" to the humanness of a particular person or group. In the case of *deification*—for example, someone being hailed as a demigod—this person's elevated status could, through the suprahumanizing eyes of other(s), make her or him less blameworthy for harm done to others. The sexual abuse of their followers by religious dignitaries that are tolerated and belittled in obscure cults, as well as in major religions for instance, can partly be explained by the higher status of the "more than human" perpetrators. In that sense, suprahumanization can contribute to human rights violations even if the moral status of the (indirect) victims of such dehumanization as full human beings remains intact.

In a more severe form, suprahumanization can take the form of *demonization*. This can be the case with witchcraft beliefs, where someone is perceived as holding suprahuman faculties. Depending on whether these faculties are described as evil or beneficial, and whether they are believed to be deployed for good or bad purposes, respectively, the suprahumanized person may face different social consequences. The persecution of "witches" is prevalent in many regions in the global South, with often disastrous consequences for the victims. This is as they are thought to bring harm to others. Ironically, the suprahuman status assigned to them by others cannot protect these women—often aged or widowed—from being driven away from their communities or being the victim of violent and often deadly attacks or lynching (cf., e.g., Unicef/Cimpric 2010; Behringer 2004; 196ff.). Even in cases where their suprahuman faculties are seen as not merely harmful or neutral, these groups of people are still at risk of mutilation and violent deaths. Instances of this can be seen with albino children in parts of Africa whose body parts, often commercially traded, are believed to have healing or protective powers (Unicef/Cimpric 2010: 27ff.; Kiunguyu 2019).

Another example of suprahumanization through demonization can be found in the story of creation, as propagated by the Nation of Islam. The teachings of this African American political-religious organization include the narrative which states that black people are the only true people whereas white people are the creation of a scientist on the island of Patmos in Greece ("white devils" or "Yacob's crafted devil") (cf. Southern Poverty Law Center 2019). In all these cases where "more than human" means "more dangerous than humans," the suprahumanized/demonized people, just like the victims of subhumanization, lack the protective status of equal human beings compelling other's basic moral consideration. Like the subhuman animals or objects, suprahumanized individuals or groups who are demonized can be treated without scruple—if fears of their higher powers do not set certain boundaries. The moral wrong in such demonization is no different from the one found in subhumanization: the disregard of the human dignity and, hence, human rights subjectivity, of these people that from a position committed to the idea of human rights represents the central point of any acceptable social intercourse.

12.4 Human rights through a dehumanization lens

Since the main focus of this contribution was to see dehumanization through the lens of human rights, the remarks in this last section cannot be more than mere hints. Indeed, the preliminary findings from interrelating the two concepts have important implications and suggest avenues for future research. One benefit garnered from looking at human rights through the lens of dehumanization is that grave human rights violations can be methodologically contrasted with other acts. Grave, or more aptly, *radical* human rights violations are such that they represent a denial of a universal human rights subjectivity or human dignity, respectively. Where people are denied the moral status of a human being, their rights to have rights—the precondition of all other rights possibly granted—are violated. For the protection of human rights, the sensibility to respective

phenomenological variations, as well as the conceptualization of different sorts of obstacles that hinder the enjoyment of human rights, are vital tasks that need to be addressed. Applying the concept of dehumanization, we can try to distinguish between fundamental exclusions (from a right to rights) and discrimination among people that are already granted such a radical right ("unequal rights"). This holds a lesson human rights campaigners should bear in mind if they want to test common ground even with those whom they sometimes disagree with: That human rights do not exhaust the whole moral cosmos and only set minimal standards for all humanity to respect everywhere. Furthermore, these minimal standards—that is, regarding others as *humans with rights*—would be non-negotiable (whereas what sort of rights humans should have in any given context could be discussed in earnest) (cf. also Frick 2019).

A second important aspect pertains to the inherent antagonist dimension in dehumanization, as aforementioned. What is a human being after all? What am I *not* allowed to do to such beings and why so? Either through a surrendering to fear or perhaps holding contempt for their metaphysical weight, many in the human rights camp shy away from addressing such tough questions. Following Richard Rorty's rejection of shielding human rights from their enemies via final vocabularies—urging the cultivation of inclusivist-altruistic sentiments, instead (1989: 196)—questions like these have to appear anachronistic at the minimum and are meaningless in the worst case. While it is true that constantly enlarging the "we" in "we, humans" is a pivotal effort, thinking deeply about foundational questions is not a waste of time. If dehumanization is the taking away of the "human" from some individual or group, how can we counter, or at least resist (not least within ourselves), the dehumanizing perspective, if the "human" in human rights is left blank? In fact, I would argue that the "human" in human rights remains vulnerable unless we also subject the reasons that people offer as to why some are less human than others to critical scrutiny and, consequently, interrogate our own assumptions on the matter, should we find ourselves arguing against it.

The feat we are asked to accomplish is to identify a concept of "the human" maximally inclusive and sufficiently meaningful. The notion of species membership, for example, is—recent questions to the logics of taxonomy that arise from new insights into human phylogenesis aside (cf. also Frick 2019; Kronfeldner 2019: 96ff.)—a potentially all-inclusive one. Yet, from a philosophical perspective, biological facts—or constructs, if you will—do not carry normative weight. Why should members of the human species enjoy certain rights? Pointing to them needing such rights and protections would be again begging the question. Why would their needs matter? Grounding human rights, ultimately, is a question of *deserving* such rights. Thus, biology needs normative anthropologies to be meaningful. Without reflecting and explicating the *reasons* in that regard, the human rights project risks charges of speciesism. Indeed, even if our reasons turn out to be human prejudices (cf. Williams 2006), justifying commitment to human rights eventually relies on them. Blinding ourselves from facing such fundamentals—regardless of the theoretical leanings used—is not advisable when others confront us with (robust) reasons suggesting the inferiority and superiority of certain people.

What then makes humankind important enough to grant every of its members rights subjectivity? Here, different axiological paths unfold, religious as well as non-religious ones, providing possible answers to the question wherein the dignity of the human person lies. The most promising approach, in my opinion, would be the blending of negative anthropology and political theory (cf. 2019). In a nutshell, one way of perceiving the human race is to set it apart from most, if not all, other living creatures past and present by emphasizing the non-ascertained nature of humans and the flexibility or openness of their being casting doubt on a human essence beyond such negative anthropology. Indeed, the claim that these typical human characteristics are a blessing, not a curse, has been argued ever since the Renaissance movement, challenging religious litanies of (wo)man's misery and helping to replace them by positive and even

euphoric views on human nature. The praises of humankind by Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (2014/1486), Giannozzo Manetti (2014/1452-53), or also Shakespeare (2008/1601-2: 2.2.295-302), for instance, have laid the foundations for the type of modern humanism the idea of human rights is anchored in. It would thus be wise for us to mind this particular axiological depth of the "human" in human rights—in other words, the "sacredness of the human person" (cf. Joas 2013)—even when we are aware that such normative anthropologies will produce their very own rationales for excluding certain individuals from belonging to the "true" humans (in particular all those who appear to lack agency, autonomy, self-rule) (cf. also Crary, this volume).

There is, I believe, not one notion of "the human" that is not in some way or another exclusive at some point (unless, of course, it is utterly empty). We can only aim at diminishing such exclusive potential. Thus, the negative anthropological approach suggested here is best accompanied with a deep pluralism and the insight offered by Hannah Arendt, which states that the human individuals are never fully sovereign—that is, their individual wills are always barred from absolute power by the mere existence of other such wills (cf. 1974/1985: 234). As humans exist in an inextricable plurality, we are, in fact, *equally non-sovereign*. That also holds true, I argue, when attempting to conclusively define what a human being is. Adding this political viewpoint, the best strategy for the purpose of human rights is to open the doors for diverse approaches as to what humans are so that these doors never completely and permanently close. No one, in this light, can arrogate to themselves the right to define "the human" (in human rights) for an eternity—not least because human beings are mortal beings.

Some maintain that "(over)valuing humanness" itself increases intergroup prejudice (cf. Hodson/MacInnis/Costello 2014).[9] The fact that there is some truth to this is another important lesson that can be drawn from interrelating human rights and dehumanization. Contemplating the cases of dehumanizing others, as cited earlier, one cannot help but come across the infamous questions raised in the context of severe violent crimes in general: Are perpetrators of such crimes still "human"? "Humans" here refers to the moral category "humanity" that insinuates some people are less than human because of their very own actions toward others. In the eyes of many, these people do not deserve the same kind of respect as "true" humans or even other, "ordinary" criminals. "Self-dehumanized," their exclusion from various human rights (as in the criminal law system) or even the right to have rights as such would be justified.

In the "war on terror," manifestations of such beliefs are not difficult to spot (cf. also Bittner 2005) and human rights advocates in particular should take them seriously. In the end, the idea of human rights itself offers rationale for the exclusion of people categorized as "criminals against humanity" (e.g., perpetrator of genocides, mass enslavement, and torture). Such moral-based moral disengagement (cf. also Opotow 1990) can be seen as a consistent and appropriate reaction precisely because the concept of human rights is taken as a premise (cf. esp. Luban 2018a). When looking at human rights through the lens of dehumanization, these almost inevitable potential mechanisms for exclusion become apparent and lead to the question of how to respond to that uncomfortable truth? A simple rejection in the form of "they are still human beings, no matter what their deeds are" will not suffice as it only affirms but does not tackle the antagonism that needs to be dissolved in this case. As I have suggested elsewhere (2019: 207ff.), the argument of reciprocity ("Why grant human rights to those who violate them in the most shocking ways?"), is not easily refuted. Fortunately, it does not have to be refuted altogether. Rather, it should be tamed and incorporated in a solid human rights framework as a *restricted reciprocity*: Who violates the human rights of others has to expect that their own rights get curtailed as far as it is necessary to safeguard the rights of others but still deserves to be regarded as a person with a right to rights. As David Luban puts it, even the "enemy of humanity" remains a "member of humanity and accountable to humanity" (2018b: 136).

The reason, however, why we should be alert to any attempts to subhumanize the "moral monster" and to dispute their human rights subjectivity, is that the treatment of criminals against humanity as part of humanity is not a duty we have toward *them*. Rather, it is a duty that people committed to human rights have, first and foremost, to themselves. In becoming subhumanizers, we annihilate the moral and, ultimately, existential difference between humanity and barbarity, between "us" and "them." This is the challenge we ultimately face, then: In order to minimize the exclusionary potential of the moral category of humanity, we have to mind this frontier constantly and be faithful to it by attempting to never switch sides.

12.5 Summary

In this contribution, I have sought to bring the concepts of dehumanization and human rights into dialogue after laying them out in a philosophical perspective keen on doing justice to phenomena in the first place. Human rights were then identified as a background concept for dehumanization, allowing us to understand why manifestations of dehumanization are a problem, along with enabling us to highlight the particular moral wrongness of dehumanization in terms of the denial of the right to have rights or universal human rights subjectivity. This moral wrong is principally the same in various forms of dehumanization, yet can vary in its gravity.

Implications that the concept of dehumanization holds for human rights have been addressed, too. In particular, the possibility of distinguishing human rights violations along the line of radical denial of moral status has been pointed out, as well as the necessity for human rights advocates to engage in conceptional efforts as to what defines the "human" in human rights. Finally, I have explored the dehumanization risks that are buried in the idea of human rights and proposed how to tackle this challenge.

Notes

1 Also for the neighboring concept of infrahumanization, introduced by Jacques-Philippe Leyens, in-group favoritism can stem from "seeing" others as less human for they supposedly lack typical human (secondary) emotions (cf. Leyens, J.-P./Paladino, P. M./Rodriguez-Torres, R. 2000).
2 He completed this line of thought with the following confession: "In any case, let us simply stand firm and exterminate them, so that our children and grandchildren do not hear that word *Inkotanyi* [i.e., the Rwandan Patriotic Front] ever again" (ibid.).
3 For Haslam, characteristics that are held to be uniquely human [UH], "primarily reflect socialization and culture whereas HN [human nature] characteristics would be expected to link humans to the natural world" (2006: 256). Such concept of human nature ignores non-naturalist (aspects of) anthropologies and at the same time the concept of human uniqueness misses that anthropic traits can as well pertain to "natural" properties (e.g., distinctive human precision grips).
4 "Man has evolved […] in pseudospecies, i.e., tribes, clans, etc., which behave as if they were separate species created at the beginning of time by supernatural will […]. Thus each develops a distinct sense of identity, held to be the human identity and fortified against other pseudo-species […]" (1966: 340).
5 In such a different setting, his abuse would amount to a violation of his right to freedom from torture, cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment (e.g., Art. 7 of the International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights).
6 The term "right to have rights" was originally coined by Hannah Arendt in referring to (the loss of) political subjectivity/citizenship but it can also be understood in terms of moral status. For a discussion and various interpretations of the right to have rights, see also DeGooyer et al. 2018.
7 Needless to say, cases of the sexual objectification of incapacitated persons can take extreme forms. While I am writing this, eleven men—ten migrants and a German citizen—are on trial in the German city of Freiburg for an incident last year where they raped an intoxicated, unconscious woman for over 2 hours after they were told by the one who first assaulted her outside a club that there lied "a woman one could fuck" (cf. Merkur 2019). Needless to say, but important for our purpose, such violent crimes regularly give rise to derogatory public reactions, as for instance on social media, which often demonstrate considerable dehumanizing desire.

8 In this sense, Mari Mikkola is right in her critique of tying the moral wrongness of objectification to the aspect of instrumentalizing another person. The example she referred to in that regard was sadistic rape (in war times). For the sadistic rapist to bring the desired satisfaction depends on seeing the other not as object but exactly as a human being who is able to suffer and who will continue to suffer beyond the act (2012: 98ff.). In such a case, the perpetrator sees his victim as *subhuman* but still draws pleasure from this "object" having genuine human traits—like sensations of dread, escape reflex and vulnerability. However, Mikkola´s proposal to evaluate the *aims* of the objectifying person is not the only way for assessing the ethical gravity of certain forms of such dehumanization. We could also scan objectifications for reductionist dimensions on the basis of the idea of human rights.

9 "We may collectively face an inconvenient truth: The premium placed on humans over animals […] fuels some forms of dehumanization, especially the animalistic forms characterizing our ethnic outgroups" (ibid., 106). For the claim that efforts to combat dehumanization need to challenge species hierarchies, see also Crary, in this volume.

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