
Article

Failing to see what matters most: Towards a better understanding of dehumanisation

Adrienne de Ruiter

University of Humanistic Studies, 3512 HD Utrecht, The Netherlands.

a.deruiter@uvh.nl

Abstract Dehumanisation is an elusive concept. While the term itself indicates that its meaning relates to a process that negatively affects the human aspect of the object involved, it proves more difficult to pinpoint what the ‘human aspect’ in this formula entails precisely or how dehumanisation can negatively affect it. This article aims to contribute to ongoing academic debates about dehumanisation by presenting a new way to understand this notion, which places the failure to recognise the moral relevance of human subjectivity at its conceptual core. The main argument is that dehumanisation involves a failure to recognise what matters most about human beings in a normative sense, namely the fact that their human subjectivity counts as a moral reason against mistreating them. This line of thought has the potential to bring together various strands in the available literature. The account integrates the insight that dehumanisation entails a denial of humanity, resonates with the idea that dehumanisation involves a particular form of moral exclusion and affirms that dehumanisation constitutes an affront to fundamental human interests, needs and rights.

Contemporary Political Theory (2023) **22**, 165–186. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41296-022-00569-2>; published online 18 August 2022

Keywords: animalisation; brutalisation; dehumanisation; humanity; objectification; subjectivity

Recent years have seen a rise in academic interest for dehumanisation (Bain *et al.*, 2014; de Ruiter, 2021; Epley, 2015; Glick, 2018; Haslam, 2006; Honneth, 2012; Lang, 2010, 2020; Manne, 2019; Mikkola, 2016; Over, 2021; Phillips, 2015; Rai *et al.*, 2017; Smith, 2012, 2020, 2021; Steizinger, 2018; Tileagă, 2007; Tirrell, 2012). While most, if not all, scholars agree that dehumanisation involves a process, practice or act through which something human is denied, undermined or otherwise negatively affected, less agreement exists on what this means precisely. Dehumanisation is characterised, for example, as a denial of humanness, which may take the form of animalisation or objectification (Haslam, 2006), as a morally injurious and indefensible setback to legitimate human interests (Mikkola, 2016) or as a failure of recognition through which perpetrators fail to be emotionally



affected by the expressions of their victims (Honneth, 2012). These varying views raise the question as to whether dehumanisation holds a core meaning or should rather be considered a polysemous concept that has different senses (Stollznow, 2008). If there is a central conceptual core that characterises dehumanisation, is it adequately identified in the available literature, or is there something missing from current accounts that could link these various understandings of dehumanisation?

This article addresses these questions by presenting a novel perspective on dehumanisation, which highlights an aspect that heretofore has not been given careful attention in the literature and that holds the potential to bring together the diverse lines set out in previous research. Dehumanisation, so it will be argued, involves a failure to recognise people's human subjectivity as a moral reason that counts against mistreating them. This account integrates the insight that dehumanisation entails a denial of humanity, affirms that it constitutes an affront to fundamental human interests, needs and rights and resonates with the idea that dehumanisation involves a failure of recognition that impacts our emotional engagement with others. Moreover, it can accommodate critiques by scholars who hold that the concept of dehumanisation is overused to account for abuse, cruelty and other forms of mistreatment (Lang, 2010, 2020; Manne, 2019; Over, 2021; Rai *et al.*, 2017) by clarifying the distinct form of misrecognition that characterises dehumanisation.

The article seeks not only to further the academic debate on the meaning of dehumanisation, but also to develop key insights into its distinct moral wrongness. Through the focus on disregard for the moral relevance of human subjectivity, the account highlights the unique way in which dehumanisation affects people's moral standing. It does not simply lower the position victims hold among fellow human beings, but excludes them from the moral category of humanity altogether. This allows for perpetrators to treat those they consider less than human with perfect indifference or cruelty, as the human subjectivity of victims is not recognised or considered a relevant factor in any positive moral sense.

The first part of the article offers a semantic analysis of the concept of dehumanisation. The second part explains why dehumanisation should be understood as affecting humanity in its moral sense. The third part sets out the main argument, according to which dehumanisation revolves around complete disregard for the moral significance of human subjectivity. The fourth, and final, part brings together the various lines of the argument.

A Semantic Analysis of Dehumanisation

An inquiry into the meaning of dehumanisation could start from many places, but the term itself provides a particularly suitable point of departure. Its three constitutive elements indicate that this notion refers to a process or practice that



negatively affects humanity. To start with the last component, the suffix ‘-isation’ points to a process or practice, or the result of a process of production, as can be seen in ‘colonisation’, ‘civilisation’ or ‘radicalisation’. The term ‘human’ indicates that this process relates to the quality of being human, or ‘humanity’. The prefix ‘de’ refers to the negativity of this process or practice. This prefix can be used to indicate opposition, negation, privation, removal or separation, as is reflected in ‘deconstructive’, ‘deforestation’ and ‘decapitation’. Dehumanisation thus refers to a practice or process, or its result, which negatively affects the human aspect of its object.¹

From this preliminary definition, it is not immediately apparent how dehumanisation can negatively affect humanity. In the academic literature, various answers are given to this question, which tend to cluster around three prevalent frames that link dehumanisation to animalisation, objectification and brutalisation.² Animalisation revolves around identifying people with non-human animals, usually ones that are generally held in low esteem, such as rats or cockroaches. Objectification involves viewing, portraying or treating people as objects, lacking in fundamental human traits or qualities, such as a will of one’s own or (deep-felt) emotions. Brutalisation speaks to a process through which people allegedly become less human(e), in the sense that they become (largely) insensitive to the suffering of fellow (human) beings. The idea behind brutalisation is that people come to possess or display less humanity through the numbing of their compassion and empathy.

These three frames correspond to three senses of humanity, which refer to the collective of human beings, or humankind; the quality or condition of being human, or human nature; and the quality of being humane, or benevolence.³ These three senses of humanity relate to what is denied or negatively affected through animalisation, objectification and brutalisation. That is to say, animalisation, objectification and brutalisation may be said to undermine or deny people’s status as members of the (biological) human collective, their human traits or human nature (in its sociocultural meaning) or their human(e)ness in a normative sense. Dehumanisation can thus be conceptualised as a practice or process (or its result), which negatively affects humanity in a biological, attributional or normative sense, although these different understandings of dehumanisation are not equally compelling, as I will argue later.

It is not only important to consider how dehumanisation may negatively affect humanity but also when practices or processes that do so amount to dehumanisation. A broad understanding can be adopted here, which includes also practices and processes that relate to people as less human, or a more narrow perspective, which limits our understanding to practices and processes that cast people as less than human. Jacques-Phillipe Leyens and his colleagues argue that considering others less human is not the same as conceiving of them as less *than* human:



[P]eople are inclined to perceive members of outgroups as somewhat less human, or more animal-like, than themselves; such a view corresponds to the word *infra-humanization* (although we could also have used ‘*subhumanization*’). By contrast, *dehumanization* of an outgroup implies that its members are no longer humans at all (Leyens *et al.*, 2007, p. 143).

The conceptual distinction between *dehumanisation* and *infra-humanisation* highlights that the difference between regarding people as less human or as less than human is not just a matter of degree, but marks a qualitative difference. If we consider people lesser human beings, we do still consider them human, whereas if we regard them as less than human this entails that they are excluded from the category of humanity, at least in our eyes and for the aspect in which we consider them not to be human at all. While it has been rightly noted that it is difficult to draw a sharp line between *dehumanisation* and *infra-humanisation* (Haslam, 2014), I contend that this conceptual distinction should be maintained, because considering people less than human significantly differs from regarding them as less human.

Dehumanisation does not simply lower the position victims hold among fellow human beings, but excludes them from this moral category. This distinction matters not only theoretically, but also practically. It is relevant to tell the difference between cases where people are treated in cruel and degrading ways because they are perceived as inferior human beings and cases where this treatment results from a perception of the victims as less than human. This difference is important, not only for understanding the precise wrong that is done to people, beyond the cruelty and degrading inherent in the treatment itself, but also for deciding how to dissuade perpetrators from continuing inflicting this type of treatment. A focus on human equality and human rights may be helpful, for example, in cases where victims are viewed as inferior human beings, but not in cases where they are regarded as less than human, given that the victims are excluded from the moral category of humanity.⁴ To maintain this conceptual distinction, *dehumanisation* should therefore be defined as a practice or process, or its result, which involves relating to people as less than human, and not just less human.

Through what (kind of) processes or practices can such a denial of humanity be brought about? Three central manifestations of *dehumanisation* can be distinguished: the humanity of people can be denied because they fail to be perceived as human beings, because they are represented in ways that fail to recognise their humanity or because they are treated as if they were not human or in a way that takes away their humanity, if this is indeed practically possible. *Dehumanised* perception refers to viewpoints that fail to recognise people as human and regard them as less than human. *Dehumanised* or *dehumanising* representation entails that people are portrayed in ways that do not acknowledge their humanity and cast them as less than human. *Dehumanising* treatment involves acting towards people in



ways that fail to recognise their humanity or that severely undermine their humanity.⁵ The conclusion of this semantic analysis is, then, that different understandings of dehumanisation are conceivable, which conceptualise it as a process or practice through which people are perceived, portrayed or treated as less than human in a biological, attributional or normative sense, or as the outcome of this process or practice.

The Moral Understanding of Humanity

A necessary step before we can turn to unpacking the account of dehumanisation that this article develops is to explain why dehumanisation should be understood as a process or practice that affects humanity in its normative, rather than its biological or attributional sense. The normative sense of humanity is central to understanding dehumanisation, I argue, because a moral conception of humanity is needed to highlight what renders processes or practices that negatively affect people's biological or attributional sense of humanity dehumanising.

Consider, for example, situations where people are likened to animals.⁶ This is not always an issue. For instance, when a couple is called 'love birds' or 'turtle doves', this clearly does not constitute a case of dehumanisation, even if people are identified with animals. Nor does it seem correct to assume that all pejorative uses of animalistic comparisons are dehumanising. Here we can think of the difference between cases where people are likened to animals to curse or ridicule them and dehumanising war propaganda that equates enemies with animals. When a person calls someone an 'ass', for example, the point usually is to insult them by calling them stupid or obstinate, not to deny their moral status as human beings. When enemies in war are identified with cockroaches, bugs or rodents, however, this serves as a psychological mechanism for moral disengagement that reduces restraints that people normally feel in committing grave violence against fellow human beings.⁷

This comparison suggests that what renders acts of likening people to animals dehumanising is not the denial of biological humanity, but the denial of normative human status that this denial of biological human status in some cases entails. I contend that the representation of people as something less than human serves in cases of dehumanisation that take the form of a denial of biological humanity as an analogy that seeks to undermine the victim's moral status as a human being. By likening people to creatures that are considered vile, filthy or dangerous, practices of dehumanisation negatively impact on the perceptions that people have of others, thus weakening the moral restraints that people generally experience in severely mistreating fellow human beings. It is thus this denial of human normative status that allows dehumanisers to engage in transgressive forms of behaviour that do not



correspond to general moral standards that prescribe how humans ought to treat one another.⁸

Animalisation is morally problematic not only for the effects it has on human victims, but also because it reinforces a view of animals as deserving of brutal and inconsiderate treatment. Will Kymlicka insightfully points out that calls not to handle humans as animals in cases of mistreatment and abuse condone animal oppression (2018, p. 764). The logic of animalisation presupposes a radical separation and moral hierarchy between humans and other animals, which can lead to indifference towards the well-being of non-human animals. In a similar vein, Alice Crary highlights that ‘animal-indexed forms of dehumanization depend for their power to degrade on representations of animals as morally insignificant beings who invite the callous and even lethal treatment that is urged upon members of specific human groups’ (2021, p. 159). It is therefore pivotal in accounting for dehumanisation to clarify how the moral status of human beings may be undermined without assuming a view of human superiority in relation to animals.

A denial of moral human status can also be observed in cases that involve a denial of the attributional sense of humanity. This sense of humanity is at stake when people are denied particular human traits. In an important early analysis, Albert Bandura argues that dehumanisation consists in the act of ‘divesting people of human qualities’ (1990, p. 38). Bandura explains that this denial of humanness can take the form of a denial that people have human feelings – viewing them as objects – or ascribing animal-like qualities to them:

Once dehumanized, they are not longer viewed as persons with feelings, hopes, and concerns, but as subhuman objects. They are portrayed as mindless ‘savages,’ ‘gooks,’ ‘satanic fiends,’ or other despicable wretches. If dispossessing antagonists of humanness does not sufficiently blunt self-reproof, it can be eliminated by attributing bestial qualities to them. They become ‘degenerates,’ ‘pigs’ and other bestial creatures (1990, p. 38).

According to Bandura, this act of divesting people of human qualities leads to moral disengagement. On my reading, this denial of moral status is not a result of dehumanisation, however, but a central aspect of the denial of humanity that dehumanisation entails. It is not that people are divested of arbitrary human qualities and therefore no longer considered as moral counterparts; it is through the denial of morally relevant qualities, such as rationality, civilisation or empathy, that their humanity is denied. After all, when people are portrayed as mindless ‘savages,’ ‘gooks,’ ‘satanic fiends,’ ‘degenerates’ or ‘pigs,’ human qualities that are important for the attribution of the moral standing of human beings are denied. Divesting people of human qualities, in the case of dehumanisation, thus always already entails divesting people of qualities that are considered morally relevant and it is this underlying denial of moral human status that grounds the act of dehumanisation.



The moral sense of humanity is also central to dehumanising treatment, I argue. This can be concluded through a reflection on animalising treatment. Avishai Margalit (1996) notes that in many cases in which people feel treated like animals victims undergo treatments that do not correspond to how people actually treat animals. About the treatment of the inmates of the Nazi work and death camps, Margalit observes that '[a]nimals would not have been abused in the same way' (1996, p. 112). While human beings also abuse and treat animals in cruel and inhumane ways, the logic of humiliation is reserved for beings who share similar semiotic and moral sensibilities. The notion of animalisation, at least in some cases, thus does not entail that people are literally treated like animals, but that they are handled in a way that does not demonstrate proper respect for their moral human status.⁹

A different understanding of animalising treatment revolves around the idea that its central aim is not to treat people like animals, but to turn them into animals, or, less drastically, to make them resemble animals. In his memoirs, Robert Antelme, a survivor of the Dachau concentration camp, comments on the efforts of the Nazis to force Jewish people to live like the non-human life forms with which they identified them:

We have come to resemble whatever fights simply to eat, and dies from not eating; come to where we exist on the level of some other species ... Yet there is no ambiguity: we're still men, and we shall not end otherwise than as men. The distance separating us from different species is still intact. It is not historical ... there are not several human races, there is one human race. (Antelme, 1998, p. 218)

As Antelme notes, biological humanity cannot be changed by the conditions under which persons are placed. Therefore, it is impossible to take away people's humanity in its biological sense. It should be noted, however, that, while Antelme was right in contending that the Nazis were incapable of changing the inmates into something biologically less than human, the treatment that they were given nevertheless did turn them into something less than human in a moral sense, at least in the eyes of the perpetrators.

This point also shines through in Primo Levi's memoirs of Auschwitz, in which he observes how imposed nudity visually distinguished the inmates of the camps from fellow human beings:

One entered the Lager naked: indeed more than naked, deprived not only of clothing and shoes (which were confiscated) but of the hair of one's head and all other hairs. Now a naked and barefoot man feels that all his nerves and tendons are severed: he is a helpless prey. Clothes, even the foul clothes which were distributed, even the crude clogs with their wooden soles, are a tenuous but indispensable defence. Anyone who does not have them no



longer perceives himself as a human being, but rather as a worm: naked, slow, ignoble, prone on the ground. He knows that he can be crushed at any moment (1989, p. 90).

Levi notes that the stripping of their clothes and shoes and the shaving of their hair made it difficult for the inmates to perceive of themselves as human. Although the physical appearance of the prisoners was still that of a naked man or woman, and not of a worm, this humiliating physical aspect reduced the status of the victim from that of a person to that of a worm, that is to say, to the status of a creature that can 'be crushed at any moment'.

This treatment also served to set the inmates apart from human beings in the eyes of those who were to murder them. Franz Stangl, one of the commanders of Treblinka and Sobibor, confirmed that the prisoners had to undergo the degrading treatment in the camps to disinhibit moral strain on the side of the persons who were in charge of the executions. He claimed that the inmates were subjected to this treatment 'to condition those who were to be the material executors of the operations. To make it possible for them to do what they were doing' (Sereny, 1974, p. 101). This argument provides support for the idea that moral status is at stake, not only in cases of dehumanisation where people are portrayed as animals, but also when they are allegedly treated as such.

In an analogous way to animalising forms of treatment that attempt to make people resemble non-human life forms, it is possible for attributional dehumanisation to make people appear as less than human by impeding them from manifesting qualities that are considered central to their humanity. Levi recalls, for instance, how during the transports to the concentration camps not even a bucket was provided for the people, forcing them to either defecate in the wagon or wait for the scarce stops the trains made. He recounts the humiliating scenes that occurred during these moments:

The doors were opened another time, but during a stop in an Austrian railroad station. The SS escort did not hide their amusement at the sight of men and women squatting wherever they could, on the platforms and in the middle of the tracks, and the German passengers openly expressed their disgust: people like this deserve their fate, just look how they behave. These are not *Menschen*, human beings, but animals, it's clear as the light of day (Levi, 1989, pp. 88–89).

Impeding people from demonstrating a certain level of refinement and civilisation thus functions as a marker of difference that negatively impacts on the perceived human status of the persons affected, as it elicits disgust. Paul Bloom comments on the relation between these two notions in observing how 'disgust leads you to construe the other as diminished and revolting, lacking humanity' (2013, p. 140). People come to be perceived as more akin to animals than human beings, which in



turn psychologically opens the way for treatments that are deemed inadmissible forms of treating fellow humans. This example also shows that while biological and attributional forms of dehumanisation at times go hand in hand, a denial of moral human status appears to be central to both.

The analysis above also makes it doubtful that dehumanisation would frequently take the form of a genuine perception of people as non-human, at least in a biological or attributional sense. After all, many cases of dehumanising treatments and representations allegedly seek to humiliate the victim by degrading the status they hold. This attempt to humiliate requires a certain recognition of the other as a human being who shares particular sensibilities that make it possible to bring about a sense of humiliation. Margalit argues that this points to a tension between the fact that dehumanisation seeks to expressively deny the humanity of the other, but at the same time confirms this humanity in the attempt to humiliate the other by denying their humanity (1996, p. 109).

Furthermore, it seems doubtful that perpetrators would genuinely believe that their victims are what they make them out to be, such as cockroaches, rats or bugs. This idea is presented by Martha Nussbaum, who contends that dehumanisation revolves more often than not around normative, rather than biological, status. She claims that '[w]hatever the differences we encounter, we are rarely in doubt as to when we are dealing with a human being and when we are not' (Nussbaum, 1992, p. 215). Anne Phillips draws from this insight, arguing that in historical cases of dehumanisation, '[i]t was the normative significance of being human that was mostly at stake' (2015, p. 26).

Moral human status thus appears fundamental to dehumanisation. When persons are likened to animals that are considered vile, filthy or dangerous, this undermines the moral status they hold as people. Similarly, when persons are treated as if they were rats, the point is to deny their moral standing as people. Concerning the attributional sense of humanity, the denial that certain persons are rational, civilised or empathic equally serves to lower a person's moral status since people often consider these traits fundamental to ascribing others human standing. Acts that seek to undermine uniquely human qualities, furthermore, can be considered dehumanising in so far as these traits are important for ascribing people moral human status.

Dehumanisation may thus take the form of portraying, conceiving or treating people as if they were animals or objects or lack particular fundamental human attributes, but what these acts have in common is that they fail to acknowledge the moral status that people hold as human beings. What these instances of dehumanisation share is that they inspire an attitude of indifference or hostility towards the well-being of the other. When the moral standing of humans is reduced to that of waste, it becomes unobjectionable to get rid of them. When people are represented as parasites or diseases, it becomes imperative to exterminate them before they can do any harm. Negations of normative humanity thus lead to a denial



that we need to care for the other as our moral counterpart. The suffering of the other then becomes, at best, something we do not need to be concerned about, and, at worst, something that we must inflict.

Towards a Better Understanding of Dehumanisation

So far, I have argued that dehumanisation should be seen as a practice or process that involves regarding, portraying or treating people as less than human and that humanity in this formula should be understood in its moral sense. While these steps are important to bring me to the core of my argument, they are not new insights in their own right. Several authors have argued that dehumanisation should be seen as a process that negatively impacts on people's moral status (e.g. Kelman, 1973; Margalit, 1996; Opatow, 1990; Tileagă, 2007; Zimbardo, 2008). In this section, I will depart from their views and develop an original perspective on dehumanisation as a denial of moral status, which highlights the central importance of attributing moral relevance to people's human subjectivity.¹⁰

My account draws from the idea that dehumanisation consists in a particular form of moral exclusion. Most influential here is the perspective proposed by Herbert Kelman, who holds that dehumanisation involves the failure to regard and treat people as 'being included in the moral compact that governs human relationships' (1973, p. 48). This view offers the conceptual means to make sense of the psychological and normative processes through which people become capable of treating others in ways they do not deem acceptable forms of conduct towards fellow human beings. Kelman comments on this mechanism in noting how '[t]o the extent that the victims are dehumanized, principles of morality no longer apply to them and moral restraints against killing are more readily overcome' (1973, p. 48).

While Kelman insightfully points out that dehumanisation involves a particular form of moral exclusion and disengagement, his characterisation of moral exclusion is too broad. He sets overly high standards for considering someone human, most notably by claiming that any time we are not profoundly saddened by the death of a fellow human being, we dehumanise them (1973, p. 49). It seems improbable that anyone can avoid dehumanising others when the criteria for recognising someone's humanity are set so high. Indeed, as Norman Geras has pointed out, most relations between people are characterised by 'a social contract of mutual indifference' (1999). Most people in the world are strangers to us. People therefore often do not care for each other, or at least not in the sense where the death of a person to whom we are unrelated moves us strongly emotionally. Consequently, the ensuing perspective on dehumanisation becomes too broad since it draws on an idealised image of what it means to be human, which does not reflect the lack of deep emotional engagement that generally characterises relations



between strangers. The disengagement that characterises dehumanisation, I argue, should thus be defined in a more narrow sense. In my view, dehumanisation does not involve failing to experience the death of a fellow human being as a ‘personal loss’, but rather failing to consider this death as relevant at all in a moral sense.¹¹

My perspective of dehumanisation also draws from Axel Honneth’s view of dehumanisation as a failure of recognition (2012). According to Honneth, dehumanisation involves a form of reification that consists in a forgetting of an original form of recognition of the humanity of persons that characterises unaffected interpersonal relations. Although this initially sounds abstract, the idea here is that people naturally recognise each other’s humanity and that it is only when social interactions become distorted that persons cease to acknowledge one another as fellow human beings. Honneth thus explains that when we reify other human beings, ‘[w]e may indeed be capable in a cognitive sense of perceiving the full spectrum of human expressions, but we lack, so to speak, the feeling of connection that would be necessary for us to be affected by the expressions we perceive’ (2012, pp. 57–58).

The difference between relating to people as human beings and relating to them as objects, according to Honneth, lies in the fact that when people recognise others as fellow human beings they automatically connect with and respond to their emotions and expressions. When we dehumanise others, on the other hand, our attitude towards them becomes similar to that of a psychopath: while we may register their emotions, we fail to be affected by them.¹² This view resonates with certain witness accounts of the way in which the inmates of the Nazi concentration and extermination camps were treated. Levi recalls, for example, the reifying language that marked the roll calls: ‘At the end the officer asked “Wieviel Stück?” The corporal saluted smartly and replied there were six hundred and fifty “pieces” and that all was in order’ (1991, p. 22). In the same passage, Levi comments on the lack of emotion that characterised the use of violence: ‘Here we received the first blows: and it was so new and senseless that we felt no pain, neither in body nor in spirit. Only a profound amazement: how can one hit a man without anger?’ (1991, p. 22).

Honneth offers an insightful account of what it means to fail to recognise the moral human status of people by focusing on the failure to respond adequately to the expressions of the other due to an absence of a minimal emotional involvement. While this account is conducive in indicating how relating to people as fellow human beings requires a basic level of affective engagement, it overlooks the fact that we are emotionally engaged with others not only when we care and are concerned for them, but also when we fear or hate them (Butler, 2012; Geuss, 2012). Although Honneth’s theory captures the idea of dehumanisation as indifference, it does not account as well for forms of dehumanisation fuelled by hate, enmity or fear. Yet these elements appear to be at least as central to dehumanisation as indifference is (Smith, 2012). From Honneth’s work, I thus draw



the lesson that an effective account of dehumanisation should be able to make sense of a range of dehumanising practices, which include a lack of emotional responses to the expressions of victims and a strong emotional engagement with these expressions.

This last point relates to critiques that the notion of dehumanisation is overused to account for abuse, cruelty and other forms of mistreatment (Lang, 2010, 2020; Manne, 2019; Over, 2021; Rai *et al.*, 2017). These authors warn against resorting to dehumanisation to make sense of allegedly inhumane forms of violence that actually can better be explained, not by claiming that perpetrators become blind for the human aspect of their victims, but by unravelling how the human aspect of their victims inspires and fuels the mistreatment. Kate Manne notes, for example, that the actions of people participating in mass atrocities ‘often betray the fact that their victims must seem human, all too human, to the perpetrators. We notice this when we remember to pay attention to man’s inhumanity to *women*, in particular – who are often brutally raped en masse during genocide’ (2019, p. 135). While I believe that Manne’s critique of a particular view of humanism that presupposes that recognising people’s humanity entails a certain sympathy for others is well-founded, I do not concur that dehumanisation rules out all forms of engagement with the subjectivity of victims, as I will explain in more detail below.

What is needed then is an account of dehumanisation that can spell out what kind of moral exclusion is involved in dehumanisation and how this form of moral exclusion can express itself in a reified attitude where the victim is approached as a mere object or in a tense interpersonal relation where the victim is the object of hate and enmity. In my view, the central notion that can help connect these ideas is that of human subjectivity. Human subjectivity is denied when the victim is reified and the personal experiences of the person are lost from sight or become irrelevant in the eyes of the perpetrator. Human subjectivity is also involved in cases where perpetrators want to make victims suffer. What is special about these cases, in comparison to ordinary human interactions, is that the suffering of the victim counts as a reason for their mistreatment, rather than against it. Whereas we usually would try to avoid making people suffer, we either become indifferent to their suffering or come to see it as something that is good to inflict when we dehumanise them.¹³

On my account, dehumanisation consists in complete disregard for the moral significance of people’s human subjectivity.¹⁴ People are denied moral human status when no positive value is attributed to their subjective experiences. This entails that dehumanisation occurs when perpetrators become blind to the fact that their victims have human subjectivity or fail to attribute this subjectivity any positive moral weight as a factor in determining their actions towards them.

Human subjectivity I understand here as the distinct ways in which people experience the world, as mediated through their bodily, emotional, symbolic and moral sensibilities. Since people are self-interpreting, social and embodied beings



(Taylor, 1985), their well-being depends on the extent to which their physical, psychological and symbolic needs are met. These facts about the human condition also entail that people are vulnerable to suffer from physical, psychological and symbolic harms. Although people partake in human experiences in various ways and are vulnerable in different modes and to varying degrees to transgressions of their bodily, psychological, symbolic and moral sensibilities, humans are all vulnerable to not having the moral relevance of their subjective experiences acknowledged.¹⁵ This is a fundamental vulnerability, which deepens other vulnerabilities, given that individuals whose human subjectivity is not considered morally relevant as a factor, which holds moral force in people's deliberations on how to treat them, fail to be protected by moral norms that restrict what are considered permissible forms of treating fellow human beings.¹⁶

The workings of this account can be illustrated by cases where perpetrators do not regard the suffering of their victims a relevant moral factor that counts against their mistreatment. Consider, for example, two individuals who engage in genocidal violence. The first is persuaded by dehumanising propaganda and believes that the persons he or she kills hold no moral human status – for example, this perpetrator regards their moral status as akin to that of insects, which in their view can be exterminated without remorse or consideration. In killing, this perpetrator has no sense of loss that is caused and does not experience the moral burden of the act of taking a human life. The second perpetrator is not convinced by dehumanising propaganda, which claims that the enemy is less than human. He or she is concerned, however, about the consequences that refusing to participate will have on his or her life. Imagine, for example, that this perpetrator comes from an impoverished background in a low-income country with high unemployment rates and sees no alternatives to finding an occupation outside the army. The loss of income would have a severe impact, not only on the perpetrator but also on his or her family. This perpetrator kills victims – like the first perpetrator – but feels burdened by this act and is concerned about the suffering caused to the victims and their relatives, even if this does not outweigh his or her reasons for engaging in the killings.

On my view, the first perpetrator engages in dehumanisation as the suffering and death of the victims holds no moral weight. The second perpetrator does not, however, since the human subjectivity of the victims counts as a moral reason against killing them, even if this is outweighed by the fear the perpetrator has of the consequences of refusing to participate in the violence. Evidently both perpetrators commit grave wrongs and should be held accountable for the murders. Yet in terms of dehumanisation, I argue that a distinction should be made between the two cases.

In my discussion of this example, perception is central, as it is in the way my account of dehumanisation is formulated. It would also be possible to contend, however, that dehumanisation occurs in both cases because genocidal violence, as such, constitutes a form of dehumanising treatment. As a collective crime, I



maintain that genocide indeed amounts to dehumanisation. The intentional act of destroying a people entails complete disregard for the moral relevance of the human subjectivity of the victims. However, as explained above, participation in genocide, as an individual act, does not necessarily exclude recognition of the moral significance of the victim's human subjectivity. From the perspective of the perpetrator, after all, there may not exist a difference between killing in war and genocidal killing. That is to say, an individual who kills in a genocide may not be aware of participating in a genocide, as the violence may not be distinguishable from the general violence of war. Therefore, he or she could balance the moral appeal of the victim to live against his or her own moral appeal to live, even though the collective crime of genocide, as characterised by the intent to eliminate a particular group, excludes recognition of the moral relevance of the human subjectivity of the members of this group.

In terms of representation, portrayals of people are dehumanising when they seek to convince the audience that the depicted persons do not have any human subjectivity or that it holds no positive moral weight. Dehumanising depictions of the first type include portrayals that liken people to objects. Dehumanising depictions of the second type can take the form of representations that deny that the subjectivity of people matters – for instance, through radical othering that makes victims appear so different that their human subjectivity is framed as something we need not be concerned about – or of depictions that express the idea that the human subjectivity of the portrayed persons should be negatively valued – as when enemies in war are presented as evil fiends who should be banished.

It can be difficult to decide whether a depiction is dehumanising or not. First, it is not self-evident whether the meaning of a portrayal is determined by the person(s) who produce(s) the representation, the audience(s) that interpret(s) it or some aspect of the representation itself. Using the perceptions of the audience to determine whether a depiction is dehumanising seems problematic because it is often difficult to decide who the audience is and because the audience may misinterpret the message. The audience could include the persons who are portrayed or the people to whom the depiction is directed, or more generally everyone who witnesses the representation. These audiences are not the same. War propaganda, for example, portrays enemies who may well have an opinion about the way in which they are depicted, but the intended audience consists of the national troops or population. Such propaganda may also be studied in a later period by historians. Whose views should we consider leading in determining whether the propaganda is dehumanising?

The interpretation of audiences gives rise to further issues. If I call someone a 'chicken' to indicate cowardice and the addressed person believes I dehumanise him or her by denying their human subjectivity, it seems controversial to conclude that I indeed did so. The fact that I did not intend to deny their moral human status matters. Furthermore, there seem to be few reasonable grounds in this case for



considering this depiction a form of dehumanisation. In this situation, the fact that ‘chicken’ insults are commonly used in English to call a person a coward, rather than to deny their human subjectivity, speaks against the interpretation of the person against whom the insult was directed. If I had called them a ‘cockroach’, for example, the odds would be staked more heavily against me.¹⁷ This indicates that there are some aspects of the representation itself that may influence whether a depiction is dehumanising or not.

The intention of the creator should be the key determining factor for deciding whether a representation is dehumanising, however, because dehumanising representation is an extreme act in which people are unlikely to engage accidentally. If people portray others in ways that deny their human subjectivity or express the idea that their human subjectivity counts for nothing, it may be assumed that they generally intended to do so.

Certain treatments may also amount to a form of dehumanising representation, for example, when abuses turn the victims into beings that appear to lack human subjectivity or whose subjectivity seemingly does not matter in a positive sense. If representations amount to dehumanisation when the creator intends to deny the human subjectivity of the victim or its moral relevance, treatments that seek to bring about this same effect should also be considered dehumanising. The mistreatment of the inmates of the Nazi camps, as described by Antelme, can then be considered dehumanising, not because it makes people resemble animals, but because it expressively denies that their human subjectivity holds any relevance as a moral factor that counts against their abuse. The fact that many mistreatments in the Nazi camps involved gratuitous violence forcefully illustrates that the suffering of the victims was not considered a reason to avoid such misdeeds.

Treatment is dehumanising, then, if it denies a person’s human subjectivity, expresses the idea that this subjectivity counts for nothing or serves as a form of dehumanising representation. People’s human subjectivity can be denied through treatments that completely overlook their subjective experiences. Treatments are also dehumanising when the human subjectivity of victims is recognised, but not attributed any positive moral value. My account of dehumanisation can thus accommodate for critiques that the concept of dehumanisation is overused to account for abuse, cruelty and other forms of mistreatment (Lang, 2010, 2020; Manne, 2019; Over, 2021; Rai *et al.*, 2017). By specifying that one form of dehumanisation consists in the failure to recognise the moral relevance of people’s human subjectivity, my perspective acknowledges that perpetrators can recognise that their victims have human subjective experiences, which shape their interactions with others. The kind of cruelty and abuse as described in the work of Margalit (1996) can then be explained as a consequence of the fact that perpetrators recognise that their victims have human subjectivity, but fail to regard this as a factor that counts against their mistreatment.



My account offers a response to the critiques by Over (2021) and Rai *et al.* (2017). Harriet Over considers theories of dehumanisation, which maintain that denials of the human status of victims undermine ordinary inhibitions against harming them and can thereby lead to genocide and torture. She indicates that this view needs to account for cases ‘in which target groups are described in terms of uniquely human attributes, mental states, and emotions’ (2021, p. 11). Tage Rai *et al.* (2017) claim that ‘morally’ motivated violence is not accomplished by weakening moral inhibitions against harming others, but by strengthening moral justifications for doing so. Their conclusion hinges on a narrow definition of dehumanisation as ‘the failure to engage in social cognition of other minds’ (2017, p. 8512). Both accounts fail to consider the view of dehumanisation as a denial not of human subjectivity itself, but of the moral relevance attached to this subjectivity. My perspective can account for cases where dehumanisation occurs, despite the seeming ascription of uniquely human attributes, mental states and emotions, by clarifying how recognition of the human subjectivity of victims does not automatically entail that this subjectivity is morally valued.

The ultimate outcome of these processes of dehumanisation is a cognitive state of complete disregard for the moral relevance of people’s human subjectivity. This state can be brought about through portrayals, treatments or cognitive processes that tend to persuade people that certain individuals have no human subjectivity or that their human subjectivity does not matter morally in a positive sense. Dehumanisation thus constitutes a failure of recognition that itself can be expressed in representations and treatments, which may lead to further dehumanisation through a cycle in which bystanders (and potentially even victims) come to see the victims as holding no human subjectivity or at least none that holds any positive moral value.

Final Reflections

This article has highlighted the central importance of attributing moral relevance to people’s human subjectivity. The main insight that has been developed is that dehumanisation consists in a process or practice through which people are perceived, portrayed or treated as less than human in a normative sense, which expresses itself in complete disregard for the moral relevance of their human subjectivity. This disregard can either take the form of blindness for the fact that victims of dehumanisation have human subjectivity or present itself as a failure to recognise that their human subjectivity holds any positive moral weight in deliberations on how to treat them.

This account brings together insights from various scholars in a way that ties together different strands in the literature. My view fits in the tradition that conceptualises dehumanisation as a form of moral exclusion (see e.g. Kelman,



1973; Margalit, 1996; Opatow, 1990; Zimbardo, 2008). An important difference, however, lies in the fact that I limit my account to cases where people are regarded, portrayed or treated as less than human – as this captures the distinctiveness of the moral exclusion that characterises dehumanisation more effectively – and fill in the notion of moral exclusion through the concept of a denial of the moral relevance of human subjectivity.

The perspective presented also relates to Honneth's view of dehumanisation as a failure of recognition (2012), as disregard constitutes a particular form of misrecognition. Contrary to Honneth, I argue that this failure does not necessarily consist in 'reification' – through which people fail to respond emotionally to the expressions of others – but is more accurately described through the failure to ascribe positive moral value to people's human subjectivity. This account allows for cases of dehumanisation where typically human aspects of interactions play a role, such as reactive attitudes (Strawson, 1962). This also explains why it is important to focus on a denial of the *moral relevance* attached to human subjectivity, rather than a denial of human subjectivity itself.

My perspective, furthermore, integrates the insight that dehumanisation entails a denial of humanity, as defended in the work of Haslam (2006), although I conceive of this act in a different way. My view subsumes animalisation and objectification as potential ways in which people's moral subjectivity may be denied, but adds to this the idea that human subjectivity may be recognised in a cognitive sense, while not acknowledged in a moral sense.

Lastly, my account affirms that dehumanisation constitutes an affront to fundamental human interests, needs and rights, which resonates with literature that approaches dehumanisation through the harm that is done to people, as presented by Mikkola (2016). Differently to Mikkola, I place an emphasis on the relational aspects that allow for violations of people's interests, needs and rights to occur. In my view, dehumanisation is foremost a matter of the distinct way in which the moral relation between the perpetrator and victim is fundamentally undermined through the failure of the perpetrator to attribute moral significance to the human subjectivity of the victim. Legitimate human interests can be set back in an indefensible and morally injurious way while the perpetrator attributes some moral relevance to the victim's human subjectivity. It is also possible for people not to consider the human subjectivity of people morally relevant without translating this into a particular form of (active) mistreatment. While it is important to acknowledge these differences, my account affirms that dehumanisation constitutes an affront to fundamental human interests, needs and rights. After all, the failure to acknowledge the moral relevance of people's human subjectivity violates their (moral) right to be included in the moral category of humanity, heightens their vulnerability to having their needs and interests ignored and thereby exposes them to mistreatment and abuse.



The account presented here thus integrates the insight that dehumanisation entails a denial of humanity, resonates with the idea that dehumanisation involves a failure of recognition, and affirms that it constitutes an affront to fundamental human interests, needs and rights. By focusing on the failure to acknowledge the moral relevance of human subjectivity, this article set out why dehumanisation contains a distinct moral wrong. Dehumanisation is unique as a form of moral exclusion because it does not simply attribute people a lower status within the moral category of humanity; it excludes them from this moral sphere altogether. As a consequence, people who are dehumanised lack significant moral protections against forms of mistreatment that are not deemed admissible forms of treatment for fellow human beings. Dehumanisation thus breaks the bonds of humanity, as the suffering of the dehumanised becomes a matter of no concern to the perpetrators.

Acknowledgements

This article is based on research I did for my doctoral thesis, entitled *Dehumanisation and Moral Silencing: A normative account with illustrations from the refugee crisis* (European University Institute, 2019). I would like to thank Jennifer Welsh, Andrea Sangiovanni, Nick Vaughan-Williams and Bert van den Brink for insightful feedback on earlier versions of (the arguments presented in) this article. Comments received from my colleagues at the University of Humanistic Studies helped me refine my arguments. I also benefitted greatly from the detailed suggestions and advice given by the anonymous reviewers and the CPT editors.

Open Access This article is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License, which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons licence, and indicate if changes were made. The images or other third party material in this article are included in the article's Creative Commons licence, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the article's Creative Commons licence and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder. To view a copy of this licence, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.

About the Author

Adrienne de Ruiter is a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Humanistic Studies in Utrecht, The Netherlands. Her research focuses on issues in ethics and political theory pertaining to humanity, human rights and human vulnerability.



Notes

1. I refer here to dehumanisation as a practice or process, or its result, which negatively affects the human aspect of its object because dehumanisation does not necessarily involve people but can also apply to processes, for example, when human workers in factories are replaced by mechanic solutions [see: Stollznow (2008), p. 180]. The focus in this article lies with the dehumanisation of people.
2. Animalisation, objectification and brutalisation are discussed, for example, in the work of Bain *et al.* (2014), Glick (2018), Haslam (2006), Honneth (2012), Kelman (1973), Lang (2010), Manne (2019), Margalit (1996), Smith (2012), Stollznow (2008) and Tirrell (2012).
3. Merriam-Webster adds a fourth sense of 'humanities' as a branch of learning. Since this applies to a field of study, I exclude this definition from my analysis.
4. This argument corresponds to Judith Butler's claim that judgements about who is considered human are fundamental to settling the question of who is entitled to human rights (2010, p. 75).
5. Margalit notes that dehumanisation can also take the form of perceiving, portraying or treating people as supra-human, as in the case of the Egyptian pharaohs who were seen as deities (1996, p. 90). In such exceptional cases, people are not perceived as less than human but as more deserving and worthy than human beings. Dehumanisation as supra-humanisation can be accounted for by the account presented in this article given that the human subjectivity of the pharaohs was not acknowledged in being attributed a divine subjectivity. This article will not consider this form of dehumanisation further, as cases where people are cast as less than human are more relevant for my argument.
6. In this article, the term 'animals' is used to refer to non-human animals. This is not to deny that human beings are also a particular type of animal. It is also important to note that the term 'animals' is a broad category that groups together very dissimilar beings, such as chimpanzees, mice and flies, and can be used, as Jacques Derrida has noted, as a vague concept that obscures the great similarities that exist between human beings and those animals most similar to us (2006, p. 400). This is not my intention here and I will refer to specific animal species when relevant in the course of the argument.
7. Experiments by Bandura *et al.* (1975) show that dehumanisation can lead to desensitisation and render violent conduct permissible in the eyes of perpetrators. More recent research also demonstrates that dehumanisation can lead to a reduction of felt empathy for victims (Čehajić *et al.*, 2009).
8. The idea that there are general moral standards that prescribe how humans ought to treat one another may be considered controversial. My argument does not presuppose that there are universal standards that count at all times but can be read in a more limited sense as entailing that all human beings (or at least those without severe psychological disorders) have certain norms for what they consider permissible forms of conduct towards fellow human beings.
9. It is important to stress that the focus on moral human status does not entail that animals have no moral status of their own that requires recognition. Human beings, on my view, also have moral responsibilities towards other animals as beings that can experience physical pain, emotional distress and other forms of suffering. Specifying the precise nature of these responsibilities lies beyond the scope of this paper.
10. This article considers the moral relevance of human subjectivity as central to dehumanisation. Human subjectivity is not the only morally relevant form of subjectivity that exists, however. Considering the moral implications of various forms of subjectivity is an important task for further research.
11. Similar characterisations of dehumanisation can be found in the work of Opatow (1990), Margalit (1996), Tileagă (2007) and Zimbardo (2008). Like Kelman, these authors consider moral exclusion a



central aspect of dehumanisation, yet describe it in ways that do not clearly distinguish the form of moral exclusion that characterises dehumanisation from related practices of (moral) exclusion and rejection, such as marginalisation, stigmatisation and infra-humanisation.

12. Jonathan Haidt (2013, p. 72) observes that psychopaths 'feel no compassion, guilt, shame, or even embarrassment' and 'seem to live in a world of objects, some of which happen to walk around on two legs.'
13. This account draws from the insights developed by Eve Garrard on the distinction between wrongdoing and evildoing (1998). According to Garrard, 'the wrongdoer sees that, say, the suffering of his victim tells against his killing her. But for him, the attractions of the wrongful act – the increase of power, the material gain, the removal of a threat to him, outweigh (wrongly, of course) the importance of her suffering. So he goes ahead and, a little reluctantly, kills her anyway' (1998, p. 53). For evil-doing, on the other hand, '[the victim's] suffering counts for nothing. It isn't outweighed by the advantages to [the evildoer] of killing her – for him there is nothing to be outweighed' (1998, p. 53).
14. I have introduced this account on an earlier occasion as a solution to the so-called 'paradox of dehumanisation' (De Ruiter, 2021). The current article develops my account in greater detail.
15. It is important to stress the variety of human forms of subjectivity in light of the fact that dehumanisation has often arisen from a narrow focus on a standard view of what it means to be human, which excludes the experiences of marginalised social groups and individuals on the basis of factors such as gender, race, class, sexual orientation or intellectual (dis)ability. This historical record illustrates the central importance of guarding against disregard for the moral relevance of human subjectivity. This disregard is a shared human vulnerability, even if people are in varying degrees susceptible to it.
16. Evidently not all forms of mistreatment necessarily entail dehumanisation. Perpetrators can also consider the suffering of victims a reason that counts against their mistreatment, but that does not outweigh the gains to be had from the mistreatment (or the costs from failing to engage in it).
17. This does not entail that one could not dehumanise someone by calling them a 'chicken'. The circumstantial evidence would need to be stronger, however, to suggest that dehumanisation is occurring.

References

- Antelme, R. (1998) *The Human Race* (translated by Jeffrey Haight and Annie Mahler). Marlboro: Marlboro Press.
- Bain, P., Vaes, J. and Leyens, J.P. (eds.) (2014) *Humanness and Dehumanization*. New York and London: Routledge.
- Bandura, A., Underwood, B. and Fromson, M. (1975) Disinhibition of aggression through diffusion of responsibility and dehumanization of victims. *Journal of Research in Personality* 9(4): 253–269.
- Bandura, A. (1990) Selective activation and disengagement of moral control. *Journal of Social Issues* 46(1): 27–46.
- Bloom, P. (2013) *Just Babies: The Origins of Good and Evil*. New York: Broadway Books.
- Butler, J. (2010) *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?*. London and New York: Verso.
- Butler, J. (2012) Taking another's view: ambivalent implications. In A. Honneth (ed.) *Reification: A New Look at an Old Idea (Berkeley Tanner Lectures)*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 97–119.
- Čehajić, S., Brown, R. and Gonzalez, R. (2009) What do I care? Perceived ingroup responsibility and dehumanization as predictors of empathy felt for the victim group. *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations* 12(6): 715–729.



- Crary, A. (2021) Dehumanization and the question of animals. In M. Kronfelder (ed.) *The Routledge Handbook of Dehumanization*. New York: Routledge, pp. 159–172.
- de Ruiter, A. (2021) To be or not to be human: Resolving the paradox of dehumanisation. *European Journal of Political Theory*.
- Derrida, J. (2006) The animal that therefore I am (more to follow) (translation by David Wills). In M. Calarco and P. Atterton (eds.) *Animal Philosophy: Essential Readings in Continental Philosophy*. London: Continuum.
- Epley, N. (2015) *Mindwise: Why we Misunderstand What Others Think, Believe, Feel, and Want*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Garrard, E. (1998) The nature of evil. *Philosophical Explorations* 1(1): 43–60.
- Geuss, R. (2012) Philosophical anthropology and social criticism. In A. Honneth (ed.) *Reification: A New Look at an Old Idea (Berkeley Tanner Lectures)*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 120–130.
- Geras, N. (1999) *The Contract of Mutual Indifference: Political Philosophy After the Holocaust*. London: Verso.
- Glick, M.H. (2018) *Infrahumanisms: Science, Culture, and the Making of Modern Non/personhood*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- Haidt, J. (2013) *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People are Divided by Politics and Religion*. London: Penguin.
- Haslam, N. (2006) Dehumanization: An integrative approach. *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 10(3): 252–264.
- Haslam, N. (2014) What is dehumanization? In P. Bain, J. Vaes and J.P. Leyens (eds.) *Humanness and Dehumanization*. New York and London: Routledge, pp. 34–48.
- Honneth, A. (2012) *Reification: A New Look at an Old Idea (Berkeley Tanner Lectures)*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Kelman, H. (1973) Violence without moral restraint: Reflections on the dehumanization of victims and victimizers. *Journal of Social Issues* 29(4): 25–61.
- Kymlicka, W. (2018) Human rights without human supremacism. *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 48(6): 763–792.
- Lang, J. (2010) Questioning dehumanization: Intersubjective dimensions of violence in the Nazi concentration and death camps. *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 24(2): 225–246.
- Lang, J. (2020) The limited importance of dehumanization in collective violence. *Current Opinion in Psychology* 35: 17–20.
- Levi, P. (1989) *The Drowned and the Saved (translated by Raymond Rosenthal)*. London: Abacus.
- Levi, P. (1991) *If This is a Man/The Truce (translated by Stuart Woolf)*. London: Abacus.
- Leyens, J.-P., Demoulin, S., Vaes, J., Gaunt, R. and Paladino, M.P. (2007) Infra-humanization: The wall of group differences. *Social Issues and Policy Review* 1(1): 139–172.
- Manne, K. (2019) *Down Girl: The Logic of Misogyny*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Margalit, A. (1996) *The Decent Society (translated by Naomi Goldblum)*. Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press.
- Mikkola, M. (2016) *The Wrong of Injustice: Dehumanization and its Role in Feminist Philosophy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Nussbaum, M.C. (1992) Human functioning and social justice: In defence of Aristotelian essentialism. *Political Theory* 20(2): 202–246.
- Opatow, S. (1990) Moral exclusion and injustice: An introduction. *Journal of Social Issues* 46(1): 1–20.
- Over, H. (2021) Seven challenges for the dehumanization hypothesis. *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 16(1): 3–13.
- Phillips, A. (2015) *The Politics of the Human*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Rai, T.S., Valdesolo, P. and Graham, J. (2017) Dehumanization increases instrumental violence, but not moral violence. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 114(32): 8511–8516.
- Sereny, G. (1974) *Into that Darkness: An Examination of Conscience*. New York: Vintage Books.



- Smith, D.L. (2012) *Less than Human: Why we Demean, Enslave and Exterminate Others*. New York: St. Martin's.
- Smith, D.L. (2020) *On Inhumanity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Smith, D.L. (2021) *Making Monsters: The Uncanny Power of Dehumanization*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Steizinger, J. (2018) The significance of dehumanization: Nazi ideology and its psychological consequences. *Politics, Religion & Ideology* 19(2): 139–157.
- Stollznow, K. (2008) Dehumanization in language and thought. *Journal of Language and Politics* 7(2): 177–200.
- Strawson, P.F. (1962) Freedom and Resentment. *Proceedings of the British Academy* 48: 1–25.
- Taylor, C. (1985) Self-interpreting animals. *Human Agency and Language: Philosophical Papers*. Vol. 1. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 45–76.
- Tileagă, C. (2007) Ideologies of moral exclusion: A critical discursive reframing of depersonalization, delegitimization and dehumanization. *The British Psychological Society* 46(4): 717–737.
- Tirrell, L. (2012) Genocidal language games. In I. Maitra and M.K. McGowan (eds.) *Speech and Harm: Controversies Over Free Speech*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 174–221.
- Zimbardo, P. (2008) *The Lucifer Effect: How good people turn evil*. London: Rider.

Publisher's Note Springer Nature remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.