

DEHUMANIZATION, ESSENTIALISM, AND MORAL PSYCHOLOGY¹

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ABSTRACT

Despite its importance, the phenomenon of dehumanization has been neglected by philosophers. Since its introduction, the term “dehumanization” has come to be used in a variety of ways. In this paper, I use it to denote the psychological stance of conceiving of other human beings as subhuman creatures. Next, I draw on an historical example—Morgan Godwyn’s description of 17th century English colonists’ dehumanization of African slaves, and use this to identify three explanatory desiderata that any satisfactory theory of dehumanization needs to address. I then summarize and criticize the theories of dehumanization developed by Jacques-Philippe Leyens and Nicholas Haslam, focusing on what I take to be their misappropriation of the theory of psychological essentialism, and show that both of them suffer from major difficulties. I conclude with an assessment of the degree to which Leyens’ and Haslam’s theories satisfy the three desiderata mentioned earlier, and conclude that they fail to address them, and offer a brief sketch of a more satisfactory approach to understanding dehumanization.

Introduction

Dehumanization is a topic with extensive ramifications for both moral psychology and public policy. The study of dehumanization has implications for areas as diverse as conceptions of what it is to be human, notions of race and racism, war and genocide,

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the ethics of our relations to non-human animals, implicit bias, and the psychological dispositions that underpin philosophical intuitions about natural kinds and essences. In light of this, it is surprising to discover that there has been very little attention paid to dehumanization by philosophers (notable exceptions include LeMoncheck 1985, Rorty 1998, Mills 2005, French and Jack 2014). In fact, systematic research into dehumanization is almost entirely confined to work by social psychologists.

My aims in this paper are threefold. First, I will clarify what the phenomenon of dehumanization is. Second, I will survey recent psychological research into dehumanization. This will not be exhaustive, but it will set out the two most important strands on dehumanization research to have emerged in the last fifteen years in psychology, and will also present what I consider to be their explanatory. Third, I will briefly sketch what I believe to be a better strategy for understanding dehumanization.

What is dehumanization?

Since its introduction in the early 19th century, the term “dehumanization” has accumulated a variety of meanings. It is used to refer to:

1. Actions that subject others to indignities or, in a more Kantian vein, involve treating others merely as means (e.g., MacKinnon 1987).
2. Rhetorical practices that metaphorically liken human beings to non-human animals or inanimate objects (e.g., Bar-Tal 1989).
3. Denial of the subjectivity, individuality, agency, or distinctively human attributes of others (e.g., Lemoncheck 1985).

4. Treating others in such a way as to erode, obstruct, or extinguish some of their distinctively human attributes (e.g., Mikola 2011).

In the present paper, I will confine myself to a notion of dehumanization as:

5. Conceiving of others as subhuman creatures.

My decision to focus on dehumanization in this sense is primarily motivated by the fact that has played (and continues to play) a significant role in facilitating and motivating episodes of genocide, war, slavery, and other forms of mass violence (Smith 2011), and it is therefore reasonable to suppose that a sound understanding of this phenomenon may contribute to strategies for curbing or preventing future episodes of this kind. The sense of “dehumanization” specified in (5) is not unrelated to the other ones. Conceiving of other people as subhuman creatures may underwrite verbally characterizing them as subhuman entities, to result in treating them in morally injurious ways, will result in the denial of their personhood, and may inspire behavior that diminishes their human attributes. But it is possible to dehumanize others in any or all of the first four senses without also dehumanizing them in the fifth sense (for a different, more theoretically-driven taxonomy, see Haslam 1913 and 2014).

To get an impression of what dehumanization looks like, consider beliefs about Africans that were entertained by English colonists in the Americas during the late 17th century. The writings of Morgan Godwyn, an Anglican clergyman and civil rights activist of the period, make it clear that many (perhaps most) colonists in both the Caribbean and North America regarded African slaves as subhuman creatures. Godwyn remarked, for example, that he had been told “privately (*and as it were in the dark*)

...That the Negro's, though in their Figure they carry some resemblances of Manhood, yet are indeed *no Men*" (Godwyn 1680, p 3). They are "Unman'd and Unsoul'd; accounted and even ranked with *Brutes*" (24)—"Creatures destitute of Souls, to be ranked among Brute Beasts, and treated accordingly" (Godwyn 1708, p 3).

Godwyn's observations point to three core components of dehumanization. The first concerns the relation between the appearance of members of the dehumanized population and their real nature; the colonists believed that although Africans *resemble* human beings, they are not human beings. The second concerns a purported metaphysical fact that accounts for their non-human status. They lack a human essence (they are "destitute of Souls"). The third concerns the demotion of the dehumanized population on the moral hierarchy. These ersatz human beings are not considered as merely non-human. They are considered as *less than human* (they were "ranked with *Brutes*"). These three components are very commonly found in episodes of dehumanization occurring in a wide range of cultural and historical circumstances (Smith 2011), and appear to be defining characteristics of the phenomenon. If this is the case, then any satisfactory account of dehumanization should (1) explain how it is possible to conceive of other human beings as *nonhuman* in spite of their appearing human, (2) explain what it is that dehumanized people are supposed to lack that accounts for their not being human (and, by implication, what it is that human beings possess that distinguishes them from other animals), and (3) explain what it is to regard a being as subhuman. I will return to these three desiderata in the concluding segment of this paper.

Psychological Essentialism

Most contemporary work on dehumanization in psychology draws accord psychological essentialism a central explanatory role (Haslam and Loughnan, 2014). “Psychological essentialism” refers to our pervasive, pre-theoretical disposition to think of the world as divided into natural kinds, each of which is individuated by a unique causal essence—a “deep,” non-obvious or unobservable property (or small set of properties) possessed by only and all members of the kind (Gelman 2003).¹ We suppose that such essences causally account for the attributes that are typically displayed by members of natural kinds, even though we generally do not have a definite conception of what it is that fills the essence role (Medin 1989). Locke’s (1689) description of real essences nicely captures the intuitive notion of causal essences. “*Essence* may be taken for the very being of any thing, whereby it is, what it is,” he wrote, “And thus the real internal, but generally in Substances, unknown Constitution of Things, whereon their discoverable Qualities depend, may be called their *Essence*...” (185). But “if you demand what those real essences are, it is plain that men are ignorant and know them not...and yet, though we know nothing of these real essences, *there is nothing more ordinary than that men should attribute the sorts of things to such essences*” (162, emphasis added).

There is a substantial empirical literature on psychological essentialism. Most of these studies concern folk-theoretical conceptions of biological kinds (e.g. Keil 1989, Springer and Keil 1989, Gelman and Wellman 1991, Solomon and Johnson 2000, Newman et. al. 2008) and social kinds (e.g., Rothbart and Taylor 1992, Hirschfeld 1996, Gelman 2003, Prentice and Miller 2007, Rhodes and Gelman 2009, Meyer et al. 2013). These studies have underscored various aspects of essentialist thinking, among which

the following are especially salient:

- (1) Essences are transmitted by descent, from parents to offspring.
- (2) They are simple and unalterable.
- (3) They demarcate *sharp* boundaries between natural kinds, and
- (4) They provide grounds for making inductive inferences about members of natural kinds.

Consider porcupines. From an essentialist perspective, porcupines are regarded as a natural kind the members of which are united by their possession of a porcupine essence. The porcupine essence is supposed to account for attributes that are typically displayed by porcupines—attributes such as being quadrupedal, being colored grayish-brown, and being covered with sharp quills. This essence is believed to be transmitted by descent (mother porcupines produce baby porcupines), to sharply distinguish porcupines from other, superficially similar animals (for example, hedgehogs), and to underwrite inductive inferences (for example, the inference that if something is a porcupine then it is likely to have sharp quills).

It is an important feature of psychological essentialism that a thing's possessing the essence of a certain kind does not *necessitate* its displaying the attributes that are typical of that kind (Rips 2001, Leslie 2013). An animal might possess the porcupine essence and yet be three-legged, pink, and quill-less. A malformed porcupine might resemble a typical hedgehog more than it does a typical porcupine, but it would nevertheless be classified as a porcupine in virtue of possessing the porcupine essence.

We think of such individuals as not being *true to their kind*. In short, although the possession of kind-typical attributes is taken as evidence that an individual is a member of the relevant biological kind (in virtue of possessing the essence of that kind), this evidence is defeasible. Consequently, folk essentialists cannot infer the absence of an essence from the absence of traits.

Essentialistic generalizations are characteristically expressed by means of *generics*: non-quantified statements about the members of a kind—statements like, “ducks lay eggs,” “lions have manes” “and so on (Leslie 2013, Rhodes et al. 2013, Meyer et. al 2013). We are inclined to take such statements to be true even though they may not apply to all or even most members of the kind (male ducks don’t lay eggs, female lions don’t have manes). The underlying presumption seems to be that although it may not be true that every member of the kind manifests the specified property, they all *have it in them* in virtue of being members of the kind. Sperber (1996, p 157) aptly captures the idea as follows: “If an animal does not actually possess a feature ascribed to it by its definition, then it possesses it virtually: not in its appearance but in its nature.”

Although the logic of causal essences has it that they are categorical, some psychologists (for example, Gelman and Hirschfield 1999) hold that the manner in which we are disposed to think of essences allows that an item can have the essence of a kind to a greater or lesser degree. This way of looking at the matter stems from the observation that there are gradations in the degree to which individuals are judged to exemplify the attributes that are typical of their kind (for example, Bain 2013). However, the degree to which an individual *manifests* traits that are thought to be

caused by an essence of a certain sort should not be conflated with the degree to which that individual is thought to *possess* that essence. A quill-less porcupine is no less a porcupine than a quilly one: its deviant appearance is consistent with its being regarded as *wholly* a porcupine in essence. When the psychologist Frank Keil (1989) asked five-year-olds whether a porcupine transformed in such a way as to be outwardly indistinguishable from a cactus, his young interlocutors insisted that, despite appearances, it remained a porcupine.²

Although some (perhaps most) of those who investigate psychological essentialism take it to be an innate feature of our cognitive architecture (e.g. Atran 1998, Hirshfield 1996, Gil-White 2001) this need not be the case. In fact, the very notion of innateness may derive from essentialist proclivities (Griffiths 2002, Lindquist et al 2011), and it may be that psychological essentialism is a consequence of a suite of other cognitive processes (Gelman 2003) or that essentialist dispositions are more culturally dependent, demographically variable, and malleable than has hitherto been assumed (Hampton et al. 2007, Machery et al. forthcoming). Whatever the correct account turns out to be, it is clear that causal essentialist intuitions present a misleading picture of biological kinds and phenomena, including human nature (Hull 1986, Machery 2008, Griffiths 2002, 2011, Lewins 2012) and impede understanding of evolutionary biology and genetics (Shtulman and Schulz 2008, Dar-Nimrod and Heine 2010, Gelman and Rhodes 2012).³

Two theories of dehumanization

Although there were important earlier contributions (MacCurdy 1918, Kelman 1973, Bandura et al. 1975, Erikson 1984, Staub 1989, Optow 1990), psychological investigations of dehumanization did not really get underway until Jacques-Philippe Leyens and his colleagues began to publish work on a phenomenon that they called *infrachumanization* (Leyens 2000). Slightly later, the Australian psychologist Nicholas Haslam began to investigate dehumanization of which he regards infrachumanization as a variety (Haslam 2006, Haslam and Loughnan 2014). Both Leyens and Haslam continue to investigate dehumanization, and the current literature draws extensively on their contributions.

Leyens' research focusses on what he calls "infra-humanization," a term that he uses for implicit dehumanizing bias against outgroups (Leyens et al. 2000). Leyens infers the presence infrachumanization from skewed attributions of two kinds of affective state. Trading on the distinction between "secondary" emotions (emotions such as sorrow, admiration, fondness, disillusion, admiration, contempt, and conceit that are purportedly unique to human beings), and "primary" emotions (emotions such as anger, surprise, fear, joy, and disgust that are also experienced by nonhuman animals), Leyens and his collaborators found that we are inclined to restrict attributions of secondary emotions to our ingroup, and attribute only primary emotions to members of outgroups (Leyens et al. 2001). Because secondary emotions are proprietary human affects, while primary emotions are shared with other animals, Leyens interprets these results as showing that outgroup members are believed to be "less human and more animal-like" than ingroup members (Leyens et al. 2007, p 140) in virtue of possessing "an incomplete human essence or an infra-human essence" (Leyens et al. 2001, p 396).

Consequently, on Leyens' account, we tend to consider ingroup members as *more human* than outgroup members: "people are inclined to perceive members of outgroups as somewhat less human, or more animal-like, than themselves; such a view corresponds to the word *infrahumanization*. . . . By contrast, dehumanization of an outgroup implies that its members are no longer humans at all" (Leyens et al. 2007, p 143).

There are two major difficulties with Leyens' interpretation of his results. One concerns the inferential leap from the attribution of primary emotions to the claim about *infrahumanization*. One cannot legitimately conclude from the belief that members of kind A possess properties F and G, members of group B lack F or possess it to a diminished degree but possess G, and members of kind C lack F and possess G that members of B belong to kind C *unless one presupposes that possessing F but not G is essential to being C*. So, believing that non-human animals experience only primary emotions and believing that outgroup members experience only primary emotions does not entail believing that outgroup members are less human than ingroup members unless one has established that undergoing secondary emotions is essential to being human. Otherwise, all that it entails is that one believes that outgroup members have something in common with non-human animals, and that this is one attribute that differentiates them from ingroup members.

The second difficulty concerns Leyens' implicit endorsement of the notion of graded essences—the proposal that outgroup members are *less human*, or have a less human essence, than ingroup members. Although some psychologists are prepared to countenance the possibility that individual essences are graded, it is doubtful that

the same applies to kind-essences, which appear to be categorical (Diesendruck and Gelman 1999). Indeed, discussions about degrees of category membership normally occur in the context of the question of whether category membership is best understood as prototype-based or essence-based (e.g., Kailish 1995, who takes apparent gradedness as evidence that judgments of biological category membership are *not* driven by psychological essentialism). The all-or-nothing, categorical character of essences is often stressed in the empirical literature. As Leslie (2013) sums up (using the term “quintessentialism” in place of “psychological essentialism”),

Quintessentialists strongly believe that ...a given individual’s quintessence is the sole determiner of its membership in a real kind. Further, they believe that quintessence lends itself to being ‘carved at its joints’ – that is, quintessence does not vary continuously between individuals of different kinds, but rather is objectively distributed in such a way that, especially at the basic-level, members of the same kind have considerable sameness of quintessence, while non-members have distinctly different quintessences. Thus, membership in these kinds ought to be close to an all-or-nothing matter; that is, Quintessentialists believe that real kinds should have sharp boundaries. (112).

Diesendruck and Gelman (1999), in an important discussion of the categorical character of essences, point out that,

On this account, all members of a category are believed to possess the category’s essential properties to the same degree and are therefore considered members of the category to the same extent. Members of a category may differ, however,

in the typicality of their nonessential features (e.g., physical appearance) and therefore may vary in how good an example of the category they are. The essentialist account, then, attempts to capture the intuition that, for instance, although a Chihuahua and a German shepherd differ in how representative they are of the category *dog*, the former is as much a dog as the latter. More generally, the essentialist account argues that categorization is all-or-none: Items are judged absolutely as either members of their category or not members of their category (338-339).

Leslie (2013) does note that essences can be mixed, albeit under unusual circumstances such as receiving an organ transplant from another species. However, in such cases, the foreign essence seems to be thought of as a foreign body in the recipient that does not blend with her kind-specifying essence, as is evidenced by the recipient her retaining her kind-membership after the transplant (Leslie offers this as a counterexample to Strevens' "minimalist" approach). Both Diesendruck and Gelman (1999) and Leslie (2013) point out that apparent indications of gradedness might be attributed to *epistemic* factors, reflecting subjects' uncertainty about the category to which atypical items belong.

An interpretation of Leyens' findings that is more consistent with the categorical character of causal essences is to suppose that we regard members of outgroups as not having fully realized their human essence. They are primitive, childlike, or developmentally arrested but nonetheless fully human.

Haslam (2006) points out that one cannot have a conception of what dehumanized people are supposed to lack unless one has a conception of what it is to be human. He proposes that there are two distinct intuitive notions of humanness: one constituted by *uniquely human* traits and the other constituted by what he calls *human nature* traits (Haslam et al. 2005). Uniquely human traits are, like Leyens' "secondary emotions," psychological attributes the possession of which distinguishes humans from other animals (for example, civility, refinement, higher cognition, and morality). In contrast, human nature traits are traits that distinguish both humans and other animals from inanimate objects (for example, emotionality, vitality, and warmth). Within this frame of reference Leyens' primary emotions are human nature traits and his secondary emotions are uniquely human traits. When people are denied uniquely human traits, they are thought to be animal-like (*animalistic dehumanization*) and when they are denied human nature traits they are thought to be object-like (*mechanistic dehumanization*). Both animalistic and mechanistic dehumanization can be either tacit (infracommunication) or explicit. Haslam argues that human nature traits are essentialized, but that uniquely human traits are not. It is not entirely clear what Haslam has in mind in claiming that human nature traits are essentialized. Given that these traits are supposed to be shared by other animals, he clearly does not mean that such traits are regarded as sufficient for being human.

Procedurally, Haslam (2006) had his subjects rate a variety of traits as either human nature traits or essentially human traits and then examined the extent to which these judgments were correlated with judgments of the degree to which the traits were "essentialized." He found that human nature traits were (causally) essentialized

whereas essentially human traits were not.

Four items, adapted from Haslam et al.directly assessed essentialist beliefs (consistency: “This characteristic is displayed in a consistent manner, showing itself in different situations and with different people”; immutability: “This characteristic is not a fixed part of a person’s personality. A person may possess this characteristic but that does not mean they will always possess it” [reverse scored]; informativeness: “This characteristic has great influence over a person, affecting their behavior in a wide range of situations”; inherence: “This characteristic is a deeply embedded part of personality; it is a core aspect of the person and underlies their behavior”).

Four items were based on past work... on predictors of trait essentialism (emotion: “The experience of this characteristic is primarily an emotional one”; desirability: “This characteristic is desirable; it is a characteristic that people generally want”; prevalence: “A large proportion of the population could be described as having this characteristic”; universality: “This characteristic is experienced universally, in all cultures”) [940].

There are at least five significant problems with Haslam’s formulations. The first concerns confusion about the logical role of causal essences vis-à-vis the phenotypic traits that they are thought to cause. Essences are supposed to be hidden, unobservable properties of kinds that are causally responsible for organisms’ manifest, casually observable attributes. Morphological and behavioral traits do not constitute essences: they are caused by essences. However, Haslam appears to consider

phenotypic traits as actually (in the case of human nature traits) or possibly (in the case of uniquely human traits) constitutive of a human essence. Alternatively, it might be that Haslam regards ‘essentialized’ traits as traits that are tightly causally bound underlying essences. If this is what he has in mind, then his pattern of inference is problematic for a different reason. Suppose that Haslam is right that we are disposed to believe traits that are expressions of underlying essences have certain attributes. This does not license the inference that if traits display these attributes, then they are believed to be manifestations of underlying causal essences. This problem has the knock-on-effect of obscuring the relationship between causal essences and the kind-typical traits that they are supposed to engender. Haslam does not consider that essences are thought to be subject to developmental vicissitudes that affect the degree to which they are expressed. This, in conjunction with his apparent conflation of essences with the traits that they are supposed to cause (or his assumption that a trait is caused by an essence if and only if it has certain attributes), leads Haslam to assume that traits are thought to count as essences only if they are invariably present, are ontogenetically early, are difficult or impossible to alter, and are universally displayed by members of the kind—and that a trait’s sensitivity to socialization, its variability, its malleability, and its developmentally late emergence, indicates that it is not considered to be part of an essence (Haslam 2005). These assumptions flow from a conflation of the properties attributed to essences with the properties of the traits that they are believed to cause. Although Haslam identifies human nature traits with a *human essence*, he also asserts that human nature traits are shared by other, non-human animals, but this is inconsistent with the kind-individuating role of essences. If human nature traits point

towards an underlying causal essence, this must be a more broadly animal essence, rather than a specifically human essence.⁴ Recall that Haslam’s “animalistic” form of dehumanization is supposed to be a function of denying that the dehumanized other possesses uniquely human traits, thus leaving them with only human nature traits. However, dehumanized others are often represented as kinds of organisms that do not possess so-called human nature attributes. They have often been described as cockroaches, worms, microorganisms, lice, and leeches (Smith 2011)—none of which are known for their emotionality, vitality, and warmth. Finally, as Godwyn’s writings illustrate, one does not have to look far to find cases in which those who dehumanize explicitly state that their victims lack a human essence. As Godwyn’s contemporary John Locke perceptively remarked, “Who is there almost who would not take it amiss, if it should be doubted whether he called himself a man, with any other meaning than of having the real essence of a man?” (1689, p.162).

Prospects for a theory of dehumanization

I will now briefly consider how Leyens’ and Haslam’s theories fare in with respect to the three desiderata that were specified earlier in this paper, and conclude with a sketch what I consider to be a more satisfactory approach to the analysis of dehumanization. The first two desiderata that a theory of dehumanization should satisfy are (1) to give an account of how it is possible to consider beings with a human appearance as non-human creatures, and (2) to explain what it is the lack of which accounts for their non-human status. Neither Leyens nor Haslam address either (1) or (2), presumably because they believe that dehumanization involves conceiving of

others as less human rather than non-human. Leyens accounts for this by claiming that infrahumanized others are thought to have less of the human essence (or to have a less human essence) than ingroup members, and Haslam accounts for it by claiming that dehumanized others are thought to lack distinctively human psychological traits but not to lack a human essence.

In contrast, I do not think that it is possible to understand the dynamics of unambiguous episodes of dehumanization unless one views them through the lens of psychological essentialism, because it is often the case that when people are dehumanized they are explicitly described as lacking that special something that makes one human. This was the attitude that the slaveholders cited by Godwyn took to their human chattel, the attitude that National Socialist ideologues took to Jewish *Untermenschen*, and the attitude that European colonists took to indigenous people of the New World. Admittedly, these are extreme examples—but perhaps dehumanization is by its very nature extreme, and it may be a mistake to include such phenomena in the same category as the less absolute and more subtle processes described by Leyens and Haslam.⁵ As I have already gestured to a sense in which we may regard some populations as being “less human” than others. We think of them as unable to fully exemplify the human essence in their phenotype. White people in the antebellum South did not always think of slaves as subhuman creatures. They seem to have more often conceived of them as chronically and irremediably underdeveloped human beings—primitive and childlike but nonetheless human. Aristotle’s notion of the “natural slave” seems to fall into this category, as do certain sexist and homophobic attitudes. I call this dyshumanization to distinguish it from dehumanization.

What about the third desideratum? How can one account for the notion of subhumanity? Neither Leyens nor Haslam address this question, perhaps because neither of them are inclined to think of dehumanization in terms of a categorical denial of humanness. The notion of subhumanity—the idea that other organisms are less or lower than human beings in a specifically moral sense—presupposes the idea of a moral hierarchy. This idea was traditionally represented by the Great Chain of Being (Lovejoy 1960, Kuntz and Kuntz 1987), a representation the cosmos as a hierarchy in which every natural kind has a fixed rank. God, the most perfect of beings, was placed at the top, and inert matter was relegated to the bottom. We human beings placed ourselves just “a little lower than the angels” (Psalms 8: 4-5) and assigned every other organism to one or another lower rank. The Great Chain is considered to be a moribund artifact of the neoplatonic synthesis of Platonic and Aristotelian ideas that disappeared in the wake of the Darwinian revolution. But even a cursory examination of the sorts of moral distinctions that come naturally to us shows that the idea of a normative hierarchy is still very much alive in our moral psychology. All of us, it seems, attribute different degrees of intrinsic value to different kinds of things. We regard our own kind as having the greatest value, and think of animals as having greater value than plants. We esteem “higher” animals like primates⁶ more than “lower” animals like invertebrates (notice that terms like “higher” and “lower,” which roll off the tongue so easily, are hierarchical and ultimately normative notions that are inconsistent with a scientific conception of the biosphere). Subhuman creatures, then, are creatures that occupy a rank that is lower than the human rank—creatures to which we attribute a lower degree of intrinsic value than we attribute to our own kind and towards which we feel a lesser degree (if

any) of moral obligation. When we dehumanize others we think of them as having the essence of a subhuman kind—a kind ranked lower than us on the axiological hierarchy. This suggests that dehumanization consists of two processes. One consists in denying that others have a human essence. When this occurs, one thinks of them as non-human but not as sub-human, a condition corresponding to Haslam’s mechanistic dehumanization (I prefer the term “objectification”). The other process consists in attributing a subhuman essence to them (Haslam’s “animalistic dehumanization”). This analysis suggests that dehumanization is more complex than objectification. When we objectify others we simply deny their humanity, but when we dehumanize them we both deny their humanity and attribute a subhuman essence to them.⁷

NOTES

¹There is reason to think that we are intuitive essentialists about individuals as well as kinds (Meyer et. al. 2013, Leslie 2013).

² Sober’s (1980) explanation of how Aristotelian essentialists accounted for biological variation mirrors these folk-essentialist intuitions.

³These considerations do not apply to what have been called “new essentialist” approaches to biological taxa (Griffiths 1997, 1999; Boyd 1999a, 1999b; Wilson 1999; Okasha 2002; LaPorte 2004; Devitt 2008), as these are versions of sortal essentialism rather than causal essentialism. For a good critical discussion, see Ereshefsky (2010).

⁴There is nothing objectionable about a theory of human nature that includes characteristics that are shared by other animals. Machery (2008) gives such an account,

but he presents it as an alternative to accounts that identify human nature with a human essence.

⁵Haslam (2014) regards partial dehumanization as continuous with complete dehumanization, whereas Leyens et. al. (2007) regard them as different phenomena.

⁶In fact, “primate” is Latin for “of the highest rank”!

⁷The claim that objectification involves one process while dehumanization involves this plus another one enjoys support from the Neuroimaging studies by Jack et al. (2013) who have found that in mechanistic dehumanization the task-positive network is activated and the default mode network is disengaged, whereas in animalistic dehumanization the task-positive network and the default-mode network are both active (normally the task-positive network is shut down and the default-mode network is activated when we are socially engaged).

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