Forthc. in Routledge Handbook of Dehumanization, edited by Maria Kronfeldner

Preprint for Self-archiving
For publisher's version see: https://www.routledge.com/The-Routledge-Handbook-of- Dehumanization/Kronfeldner/p/book/9781138588158
See also: https://philpapers.org/rec/KRORHO

Ch 24

Psychological Essentialism and Dehumanization[1]

Maria Kronfeldner
Central European University
(New York – Vienna – Budapest)

1 Introduction

This chapter discusses how psychological essentialism relates to dehumanization. It will focus on two dimensions of essentialism: entitativity and natural kind thinking, which include different elements of essentialism. Dehumanization as understood in this chapter can be cognitive and/or behavioral and can involve categorical or graded denials of humanness (see Kronfeldner, Introduction to this volume). It will be assumed (rather than discussed) that beliefs in a human essence can *catalyze* dehumanization: they can strengthen or even immunize the claims made about the differences among people that ground dehumanization. Defending such a catalyzing role of psychological essentialism is a rather weak and uncontroversial claim, even though it is often unclear how exactly the catalyzing works, and even though it is limited to certain cases (see Section 6 on that limitation). That is why the focus in this chapter is on a much stronger and more controversial claim – namely, the claim that essentialism is *necessary* for dehumanization. This chapter will present historical and psychological evidence that shows why such a necessity-claim is contestable and how it can be revised in light of that evidence. The resulting revision of the necessity-claim will also help in explaining *how* essentialism catalyzes dehumanization.

After reviewing examples of authors who claimed a tight connection between essentialism and dehumanization (Section 2), certain assumptions will be laid out (Section 3). These assumptions are important to situate the analysis of whether and in which sense beliefs in essences are necessary for dehumanization to occur (Sections 4 and 5).

2 Examples of connecting psychological essentialism and dehumanization

Scholars differ not only with respect to the strength of the connection between essentialism and dehumanization (catalyzing or necessary) but also with respect to which elements of psychological essentialism are used, and which concept of dehumanization is

[1] I want to thank Nick Haslam, Fabian Krämer, Michele Luchetti, Alexander Reutlinger, Silvia Sebastiani, David Livingstone Smith, Somogy Varga, and two anonymous referees for feedback or recommendations. Thanks also to Justin Leuba, student assistant in 2019/20, for his help in the picture and reference search and copy editing. I would also like to acknowledge the support I received for this paper from *Central European University* as part of the *Research Excellence Support Fund*.

assumed. In his famous philosophical critique of the concept of human nature, David Hull (1986: 7), for instance, stressed that unfortunately many people still believe that

> [t]he *normal* state for human beings is to be white, male heterosexuals. All others do *not participate fully* in human nature. (emph. added)

To dehumanize people, for Hull, is to regard some human beings as not *normal* (deficient) and as not participating fully in human nature, the alleged essence. This entails not only a reference to humans as a biologically delineated group (*Homo sapiens*), but also a reference to a certain kind of *naturalness* of the essence of this group.

Gordon Allport (1954) provides a connection between dehumanization and essentialism via the more general claim that essentialism is involved in prejudices (be they dehumanizing or not). He claimed that humans use a "principle of least effort" when they build their categories regarding humans. They simplify by essentializing:

> To consider every member of a group as endowed with the *same traits* saves us the pains of dealing with them as individuals. One consequence of least effort in group categorizing is that a belief in essence develops. There is an *inherent* 'Jewishness' in every Jew. The 'soul of the Oriental,' 'Negro blood,' Hitler's 'Aryanism,' 'the peculiar genius of America,' 'the logical Frenchman,' 'the passionate Latin'—all represent a belief in essence. A mysterious mana (for good or ill) resides in a group, all of its members partaking thereof. (Allport 1954: 173; emphasis added)

According to Allport, categorizing people into groups involves a belief in essence, which entails a belief in the *homogeneity* of group members with respect to shared traits, and a belief in the *inherence* of these traits. Whether Allport or Hull assumed that essentializing in the respective sense is necessary for dehumanization would require an in-depth textual interpretation of their work that has to wait for another occasion; and it can wait, since there are contemporary scholars who clearly make such strong necessity-claims.

Jacques-Philippe Leyens and colleagues, in a paper that is widely taken as the beginning of a remarkable amount of social psychological work on dehumanization, used the term "infrahumanization" for the form of dehumanization they studied (graded attribution of secondary emotions), and claimed

> [f]or infrahumanization to occur, the members of the outgroup have to be considered radically different from the discriminators and to be attributed a different essence. (Leyens et al. 2000: 194)

Given what they say in the rest of their paper, I take this to mean that an infrahumanizer assumes that

> all members of a specific group *share something in common*, and what they share makes them *distinctive* from members of other groups. (ibid.: 184; emph. added).

As a consequence, infrahumanization of out-group members means "denying them one or several of the typically human characteristics" (ibid.). Essentializing the human category, in their account, boils down to a combination of attributing *homogeneity* to being human and *distinctness* of membership in the respective human kind. It involves building a stere-

otype regarding salient properties of human beings (in the case of Leyens et al., secondary emotions). As a result, variation within the group is discounted, which allows drawing of decisive group boundaries.

David Livingstone Smith (2011, 2014, this volume) similarly argues that for dehumanization to occur there needs to be a denial of the human essence. He writes:

> 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. (Smith 2014: 821)

For him, psychological essentialism involves taking an essence as an inalterable *given* that is *hidden from appearances* and *inherent* to the individuals (see, for instance, Smith 2011: 32-34, 275). This is an account of psychological essentialism that is closely modeled after standard natural kind thinking, which takes natural kinds as having essences in the specified sense, in contrast to artificial kinds (ibid.: 95-102; cf. Smith 2020, 63-70). Smith goes so far to define dehumanization with reference to natural kind thinking:

> Dehumanization is the belief that some beings only *appear* human, but *beneath the surface*, where it really counts, they aren't human at all. (Smith 2011: 5; emph. added)

This contrast between appearance and a 'beneath the surface' essence will concern us in Section 4, in order to clarify whether belief in such 'heavy-metal' essences—unchangeable, hidden, and inherent—is necessary for dehumanization to occur. It is important that this involves a claim that we *observe* (rather than infer) humanity. Historical examples will help us in giving nuance to that claim.[2] It should also be noted that Smith (e.g., 2014: 821) excludes graded forms of dehumanization from being proper forms of dehumanization.

3 An error theory of essentializing the human category and the diversity of elements of essentialism

In the following section, an error theory of psychological essentialism regarding the human category will be assumed. If we essentialize what it means to fall within the human category, we make an error, since, scientifically viewed, there is no such essence of what it means to be human. Within philosophy of science, Hull (1986) is considered as the starting point for the by-now broad consensus on such an error theory of essentializing the human category (see Kronfeldner 2018, for review and a contemporary defense of it). This also means that some humans (e.g., scientists) *are* cognitively able to categorize humans without using essences. This is compatible with experimental studies, which have been interpreted to show that many children and some adults are unable to reach a post-essentialist style of reasoning (see, for a canonical summary of that body of research, Gelman 2003). The respective studies thus neither show that essentializing is a necessary part of how humans categorize (since it applies to some adults but clearly not all since at least scientists have moved beyond it), nor is the essentialist interpretation of the respective studies uncontested. Strevens (2000), for instance, defends an alternative explanation of

[2] See also Varga, this volume, for a systematic take on how perception and dehumanization relate, independent of the issues dealt with in this chapter and oriented toward psychological literature on mind perception; see Mikkola, this volume, on how this relates to the so-called 'paradox' of dehumanization and the notion of the uncanny.

the accumulated data, an interpretation that does not attribute essentialist thinking to the study participants.

Worse even, there is no agreement on the definition of psychological essentialism, at least not if one takes into account the relevant literature across developmental psychology, cognitive science, social psychology, philosophy, history, and gender studies. Given this situation, I decided to specify and analyze the connection to dehumanization with respect to specific elements and dimensions of psychological essentialism rather than use one definition of essentialism (i.e., one combination of the elements only). We met some such elements already above (Section 2). Rothbart and Taylor (1992), in a paper that is widely acknowledged as an anchor for discussions about psychological essentialism regarding social categories, mention a further element – namely, *informativeness* (inductive potential), which is well known from natural kind thinking and reminds us that knowledge of group membership often comes with a potpourri of information that grounds inductive projection (inferences about further properties of the individual). For instance, learning that a piece of shining stuff in one's hand is a piece of gold is quite informative. One can reliably infer *from that alone* some interesting additional facts about the very stuff in one's hand: the weight of it, the hardness of it, when it melts, the value of it on the market, and so on.

With this, we have the following list of elements of essentialized thinking:

- **Homogeneity** of group members with respect to salient properties;
- **Informativeness** of group membership for inductive inferences about properties typical of the kind;
- **Inherence** of essential properties;
- **Naturalness** of essential properties, either via the concept of human nature as referring to the biological species *Homo sapiens*, or via the concept of natural kind;
- **Inalterability** of essential properties, either developmentally and/or evolutionarily;
- **Non-observability** of essential properties;
- **Distinctness** of group boundary (i.e., group boundaries and membership are mutually exclusive);
- **Normality** of properties and members, with a reference to normativity and thus to deficiency.

There are similar lists in the relevant literature that all differ slightly in the definition and number of elements.[3] These differences do not matter for the purposes of this chapter. What does matter is that, according to Rothbart and Taylor (1992) and Haslam et al. (2000, 2002), these elements can be aligned along two dimensions. In the following, I take it that only homogeneity and informativeness are necessarily part of the first dimension of essentializing social categories. This dimension is called entitativity since it gives these groups an entity-like coherence (an idea that goes back to Campbell 1958).[4] The rest—in particular naturalness, inalterability, non-observability, and distinctness—belong to a second dimension of essentialism. It entails natural kind thinking, since it fits how 20th-century philosophy has characterized the latter (see Ereshefsky 2010, for review). Normality can attach to both dimensions. Since Smith and Leyens et al., who have made explicit

[3] There are six in Gelman (2003), nine in Haslam et al. (2000), eight in Haslam et al. (2002), seven in Haslam and Levy (2006), four in Bain (2014), and five in Rhodes et al. (2017).
[4] See Phillips (draft) on different kinds of entitativity: one "dynamical" and related to group agency only, the other related to similarity (as utilized in this chapter). According to Phillips, dynamical entitativity is attributed to a group "when it is seen as an agentic coalition."

claims about essentialism being necessary for dehumanization, used either natural kind thinking or entitativity, we will scrutinize these two kinds of essentialisms in the following. I will start with the more demanding natural kind thinking.

4 Is reference to a hidden and inherent essence necessary?

Smith assumes that in dehumanization a human appearance is *first* observed and *then* cognitively discounted. Therefore, difference with respect to humanness (dehumanization) is located in a *hidden* and *inherent* essence. That natural kind essences are often also perceived as fixed does not play such a big role in his necessity-claim; it will thus be ignored here too (see Section 5, for one specific issue regarding it).[5]

We need an example. When the Spaniards dehumanized the Amerindians, then, according to Smith (2014: 815), the Spaniards literally *saw* that these individuals were humans (perception of sameness), but they *attributed* a different essence. The story goes that after Columbus' landfall in 1492, Spaniards hacked off natives' limbs, burned them alive, and fed their babies to the Spaniards' dogs, and so on. Some complained, including the Dominican friar Antonio de Montesinos who asked, famously, in 1511, "Are these not men? Have they not rational souls?" This question was not rhetorical since, in addition to the colonizers *treating* the 'natives' as less than human, there were scholars, such as Giordano Bruno or the alchemist Paracelsus, among others, who denied a shared human group membership of *their* people with *those* Amerindians. They did so by regarding the Amerindians as, for instance, homunculi—beings with a human body but no soul—which explains Montesinos' question about the soul. Regarding Amerindians as beings without a proper soul exemplifies the sort of natural kind thinking that Smith has in mind with his necessity-claim: the 'other' was understood as human-looking but as devoid of the hidden and inherent property of having a (proper) soul, which was, in the ontology of the time, the essence of being human. (For a short review of this case and context, see Smith 2011: 77ff; for details see, for instance, Pagden 1986, Abulafia 2008, and Kontler, thisvolume). Hence, this example confirms Smith's claim.

Yet, there are cases of dehumanization that happen in a different manner. Already, the colonial context of Spaniards dehumanizing Amerindians provides us with such cases. Sometimes, the behavioral dehumanization of Amerindians happened with reference to their non-Adamic origin. They were dehumanized because they were taken to *not descend from Adam*, the common denominator of the Judeo-Christian-Islamic androcentrism. This form of dehumanizing the Amerindians violates Smith's claim that denial of a *hidden and inherent* essence is necessary for dehumanization. After all, a specific genealogy is not an inherent property; it is (if at all a property) a relational property. Such a *relational* dehumanization, as Kronfeldner (2018) calls it, was also still in use when Charles Darwin wrote his *On the Origin of Species*, in which he developed a theory of evolution that opposed such polygenic accounts, and with it slavery. His theory, famously, relied on the claim of a *common* descent of all humans (and ultimately of all other living beings), thereby showing that a polygenic justification of slavery is already scientifically wrong. Desmond and Moore (2009: xiii-xix), who write about Darwin's opposition to slavery, regard it therefore as historically "paradoxical" that Darwin's theories "have been used to justify racial conflict and ethnic cleansing."

[5] Part of what follows in the rest of this section is based on Kronfeldner (2018: 19-23, 26, 234-237).

From the perspective of dehumanization studies, and in particular with respect to the question about how essentialism and dehumanization connect, it is simply evidence that dehumanization is quite persistent—so persistent that it is not eradicated by a change in ontology. Having every human included into one species was, at Darwin's time, a step toward less dehumanization. Yet, it still allowed to regard some of the included to be *less* human – namely, in the sense of *less evolved* (see Kontler, and Sebastiani, this volume). And even nowadays evolutionary hierarchies are in use, as psychological studies about so-called blatant dehumanization confirm. In these studies, participants are shown the conventional picture of an evolutionary ascent (from 'lower' creatures, via apes, to humans) and asked to position the respective out-groups. It turned out that Hungarians believe that Roma people are less evolved, and (similarly) that North Americans believe that Hispanics are less evolved, to take two results as examples (see Kteily et al. 2015; see also Haslam, this volume).

I take the available historical and psychological evidence to show that relational dehumanization of the sort described, where an individual or a group is regarded as less human simply because of a certain assumed genealogical distance to the individual (or group) that dehumanizes, *can involve but does not require* that the dehumanized 'other' is also believed to lack in *inherent* essence. As long as genealogy can be used to create distance, it can be used in a dehumanizing manner. 'The more closely related, the more human' would be the logic within that variant of post-essentialist relational dehumanization.

Whether non-relational dehumanization necessarily involves attribution of differences in *unobservable* (and in that sense hidden) essence is a slightly more difficult case, but it points in the same direction. I will use the history of dehumanization of women as a case in point that will show that we actually have to distinguish three different interpretations of Smith's necessity-claim if it is applied to non-relational dehumanization.

Dehumanization of women, dating as far back as the beginning of Western philosophy (not to speak of other, non-Western androcentric contexts), standardly involves claims about women's intellectual inferiority. Certain intellectual abilities, taken as mental and thus as not directly observable, are *not* or are *less* attributed to women. The decisive point in two of the three interpretations of the non-relational necessity-claim will be how these unobservable mental abilities are connected to observable physiological or behavioral differences: are they correlated with the latter or not?

If the non-relational necessity-claim is interpreted as *not applying* to the case of dehumanization of women since women have never been regarded as less *than* human, then the necessity-claim becomes trivially true since it becomes true by definition. It is made to be true by applying a very narrow concept of dehumanization. Smith's claim is actually intended that way since the dehumanization of women usually follows a graded form of dehumanization, which he, as mentioned, excludes from his account of dehumanization. Attribution of different essence *and* dehumanization then both boil down to nothing but claiming that the dehumanized belongs categorically to a different kind, utilizing the distinctness element of essentialized thinking. But even though Smith has his reasons for narrowing the concept that way (see Smith, this volume), I take this narrowing to be a price too high to pay, given that there are so many similarities (if not intersectionalities) between the dehumanization of women and other kinds of dehumanization. A too narrow stipulated definition ignores these similarities (see Jeshion 2018 for a similar point against Smith's definition of dehumanization). In addition, it trivializes natural kind thinking (the intended kind of psychological essentialism) since the claim can mobilize for it only one element – namely, the distinctness element.

If the necessity-claim is interpreted as claiming that dehumanization of women as intellectually inferior involves, necessarily, the attribution of differences in *mental* properties, contrasted to observable physiological or behavioral characteristics, then the necessity-claim is again trivially true for the respective cases, even though for different reasons. It is true simply because one will have difficulties finding a historical or contemporary case where the assumed concept of being human completely lacks reference to mental properties. And again, it also trivializes the assumed psychological essentialism. It would involve nothing but reference to mental properties understood as not directly observable. In other words, this interpretation can again mobilize for its defense one element only: in this case, the non-observability element of essentialized thinking. What we would end up with, given that interpretation of the necessity-claim, is again a far cry from natural kind thinking as is usually constructed and as introduced by Smith.

Hence, if not trivially true, the claim can only amount to the assertion that dehumanization (whether graded or categorical) requires that the respective 'other' is taken to be *observably the same but different in essence*. I take this to be closest to what Smith intended with his necessity-claim (taken to also apply more broadly to cases of graded dehumanization and to ignore, for the moment, relational dehumanization). The problem with this version of the necessity-claim is that already Aristotle's justification of why slaves and women are by nature mentally inferior violates it. For the sake of the argument, I will again focus on the case of women's inferiority and take Aristotelian essentialism to be close to what is, above, called natural kind thinking. I thus ignore that Aristotelian essentialism is actually quite difficult to classify historically.[7] I assume the following: Aristotle's essentialism implied that variations in a species are deviations from a type. The essence of the human species consists in the human life form, which is not only the form (contrasted with matter) but also the end (telos) of human flourishing. The end (and, thus, function) of humans is to be rational. Deviations are members of the same kind who have *not fully realized* the form of the kind and are thus inferior. Form is norm in Aristotelian essentialism.

Women were for Aristotle such inferior deviations—deviations from human nature and inferior to the free men who represented the kind (see, Aristotle, *Politics*, Book 1, 1252a-1260b). Women's inferiority is naturalistically explained with reference to observable differences stemming from the way women are physiologically generated. These observable differences have to do with the movements of the particles involved in embryonic development and the ancient distinction of hot versus cold matter (see Schiebinger [1989: 161-165] and Tuana [1993: 18-52] for how the ancient cosmology and ontology of four elements relates to the history of dehumanizing women). Thus, according to Aristotle, a concrete observable difference (lack of heat) explains why women end up being less developed, including less developed in terms of their intellectual capacities.

In terms of elements of psychological essentialism, one can summarize the case as follows: the explanatory schema is essentialist in the entitativity sense, since a trait (rationality) is picked out as group defining and informative when contrasted with other traits that were deemed to be negligible for what it means to be human. It is also essentialist in the natural kind sense since it refers to an inherent and fixed form that can materially be realized in a more or less ideal manner. With respect to dehumanization, it follows that Aristotle's dehumanization of women is a case of attributing less humanness to a particular group in an overgeneralized and thus homogenized manner on the basis of observable differences, which is then taken to be correlated with and explanatory for mental differences. This cognitive dehumanization definitely had some behavioral consequences. After all, in ancient Greek society, men were supposed to be the masters of women and

[7] See Roughley (forthc) for review of how not to interpret Aristotle; see also Winsor (2006), McOuat (2009), or Müller-Wille (2011) for the historically shifting contours of essentialism.

women had quite restricted rights. With respect to the focus of this chapter, it follows that Aristotelian dehumanization of women is *not* a case of regarding women as observably the same but essentially different. Women were for Aristotle already observably different and these differences were salient for issues of equality. That they were salient is important since, after all, there are plenty of observable differences, some of which might not actually be observed or, if observed, they might not be taken as salient.

Over historical time, observation of anatomical and physiological differences even gained in importance as a way to justify the oppression of women, for various reasons which go beyond the scope of this chapter. Over time, different anatomical or physiological measures of mental differences were tried (e.g., as part of craniology) and taken to confirm what was so 'evident' to those men doing science at the time. Take Gustave LeBon (1881: 155-159), founding figure of social psychology and part of the craniologist movement. He famously speaks about the "intellectual inferiority" of women as "quite evident" (*trop évidente*). For him, women "represent the most inferior form of human evolution and are much closer to children and savages than to civilized adult man." He added:

> It is beyond doubt that there are very distinguished women, far superior to the average men, but these are cases as exceptional as the birth of any monstrosity, such as, for example, a gorilla with two heads, and therefore negligible entirely. (ibid.: 158, my translation)[8]

In the 19th century, quite generally, the Aristotelian metaphysics of telos, form versus matter, and 'to-be-realizedness' was gone and a materialist ontology dominated the study of human diversity. What remained is that a specific property was utilized to regard women as less human (intelligence), and—most importantly for this chapter—mind was either reduced to the brain or so linked with the brain that one could *infer* mental differences from differences in anatomical or physiological properties. That means that the crucial element of natural kind thinking, the belief in a *hidden* (rather than an observable) essential property, plays either *no* role (in cases where mind was equated with brain), or at least a *different* role (in cases where the exact correspondence of differences in brain and mind was assumed). In both cases, women were clearly taken as already *observably different* in their humanity.

That observable differences were gaining in significance over time is particularly interesting given an important earlier historical shift during the age of Columbus (see Kontler, this volume, for a general take on that time). The 'Columbian shift' (as I would like to call it) was one from expectations of 'otherness' that involved quite some observable differences to actual encounters with Atlantic people, who looked (at the time, given historical evidence) shockingly similar. In medieval times, pictures of monstrous people circulated, often with reference to Plini the Elder (see Friedman 1981). These monstrous people, often called 'Plinian races,' had one eye only, faces on the thorax, heads of animals, etc. (see Figure 1).

[8] The original says, "…représentent les formes les plus inférieures de l'évolution humaine et sont beauceup [sic!] plus près des enfants et des sauvages que de l'homme adulte civilisé."(157); "On ne saurait nier, sans doute, qu'il existe des femmes fort distinguées, très-supérieures à la moyenne des hommes, mais ce sont là des cas aussi exceptionnels que la naissance d'une monstruosité quelconque, telle, par exemple, qu'un gorille à deux tètes, et par conséquent négligeables entièrement." (158)

Figure 1 Plinian races in Sebastian Münster's Cosmographia (1544: DCCLII). (Public domain)

Distant people, believed to live at the edge of the perceiver's world, were depicted that way. Friedman (1981: 25) explains the imaginative power of Plinian races as ethnocentric "errors in perception" that "were willful, poetic and imaginative." Through *actual encounters* with Atlantic people, their imaginative power changed to a considerable degree during the age of Columbus. As the historian Abulafia (2008: 4) reports, "experience" with Atlantic people "did not quite match the stories of dog-headed people found in medieval literature. They looked fully human." The imaginary of monsters, as other historians have shown, clearly persisted in travelogues, maps, natural history, and elsewhere well into the 18th century and beyond, and for various reasons (see Daston and Park 1997: 173-314, Krämer 2014, Davies 2017, Sebastiani forthc). But whenever the *perception* of significant similarity replaced the *expectation* that the encountered were physiologically extreme (i.e., monstrous), something had to step in to justify the dominion of those encountered. Not surprisingly, stories about these others as exhibiting different kinds of *conduct* (most prominently the cannibalism attributed to them) and assumptions about *unobservable* properties such as 'not having a soul' circulated, either replacing stories of physical monstrosity or in parallel to them. They stepped in or were added, in order to have something sufficiently credible to justify the often pre-existing dehumanizing prejudice against those encountered.

With this in mind, we can finally distinguish between four strategies that can facilitate dehumanization, taking relational and non-relational dehumanization together. Dehumanizing practices can point to

- physiological or anatomical differences,
- relational differences,
- behavioral differences, or
- unobservable differences.

These strategies can be (and have been) combined (and in various ways), but they can fall apart too. For instance, all four ways of combining physiological differences and mental differences can be observed in the history of thought (see Table 1).

	Significant *mental* differences	***No* significant mental differences**
Significant *physiological* or anatomical differences	1. A belief in significant physiological or anatomical differences corresponding to significant mental differences (e.g., Aristotle; Plinian races; 19th-century dehumanization of women; contemporary cases of neurological reductionism of gender differences)	2. A belief in significant physiological or anatomical differences without a belief in mental differences (e.g., more or less conservative theories of biological differences between sexes)
***No* significant physiological or anatomical difference**	3. A belief in physiological and anatomical sameness combined with a belief in significant mental differences (e.g., mentioned cases of Atlantic encounter)	4. A belief that there are no significant differences what so ever (e.g.; more radical cases of contemporary theories of sexual difference; contemporary non-racist theories)

Table 1 Four different ways of establishing (non-)difference by combining physiological and mental differences

Only (3), the lower-left corner of the four-partite classification of cases, can exemplify Smith's picture. The top-left and top-right corners (1 and 2) provide counterexamples since they do not involve regarding humans as *observably the same but essentially different.* The lower-right corner (4) does not involve any claims about significant differences and thus fails to exemplify dehumanization.

For summary, I would like to highlight four points: First, cases of relational dehumanization and cases of dehumanization on the basis of claims about observable differences show that not *all* cases of dehumanization involve an *observation-based attribution of sameness* and consequent cognitive *discounting of essence*. There are other ways, other forms, to arrive at a justification for dehumanizing attitudes. With respect to relational dehumanization, it needs to be mentioned that it is certainly possible (and maybe even likely) that historical cases of dehumanization that are *at first glance* based only on genealogical distance ultimately turn out to *also* involve a belief in different essences. But it need not be so; it is equally possible that they do not. It is that second possibility which shows that a belief in a natural kind essence is not necessary for dehumanization to occur.

Second, at the meta-level of writing the history of dehumanization, the following holds: as scholars studying cases of dehumanization, we do not need to and should not, at least not without necessity, assume an essentialist belief in the mind of the dehumanizer in order to make sense of a historical case. As a researcher, one always runs the risk of wrongly (i.e., anachronistically) attributing to historical actors an assumed timeless ontology of the human. With respect to essentialism, this is a danger in parts of the literature on dehumanization that stems, in my opinion, from the above-mentioned recent general debates on psychological essentialism, especially as these grew out of developmental psychology. These debates have a tendency to treat psychological essentialism itself (at the meta-level) as inherent and innate, and thus as a historically invariant and inalterable feature of our cognition. This is a meta-essentialist move (essentialism about psychological essentialism, so to say) that lacks sufficient justification for the reasons mentioned in Sections 3 and 4.

Third, the historical cases mentioned suffice to illustrate a pattern: when no observable differences are available to establish a clear-cut difference justifying dehumanization, then reference to a difference in unobservable essence can still be used (as it happened during the Columbian encounters); but when observable differences were available, these were used and the epistemic role of unobservable essences changed. This is *how a dehumanizer can have it both ways*: if one has observable differences, one can dehumanize people on the basis of these; if that 'light solution' does not suffice (for whatever reason), one can still invoke the ontologically more 'heavy-metal' machinery of unobservable natural kind essences. As so often in history of science and philosophy, reference to non-observables helps as an epistemologically immunized step-in to justify believing or doing what one wants to believe or do anyway – in our case, to dehumanize certain people. For those cases where observable differences are available, reference to hidden essences can certainly still be used as a catalyzer to boost the dehumanization possible on the basis of observable differences alone. Yet, and that is the decisive point, reference to a *difference in* essence (or, if categorically minded, a *different* essence) is not necessary in such cases of dehumanization.

Fourth, the above shows that in analyzing the history of dehumanization, a distinction should be made between essentialism being necessary (by stepping in for missing observable differences) and essentialism being merely catalytic. This distinction helps to derive a revised version of the natural kind necessity-claim—a version that is more precise, weaker but not too weak, and less conjectural in face of historical and contemporary evidence about dehumanization. In and of themselves, beliefs in hidden essences are *not* necessary for dehumanization; if at all, then they *become* necessary for dehumanization *if and only if the search for (or assumption of) salient observable differences cannot be 'cashed in' in an intent to dehumanize*. In such a case, reference to unobservables is a last-resort strategy for the dehumanizer. If everything fails, this is how the dehumanizer can do it: deny something unobservable!

5 Is entitativity necessary?

So far, we have only seen that natural kind thinking is not necessary for dehumanization to occur. When Leyens et al. claimed that essentialism is necessary for dehumanization, they obviously used a different, very broad sense of essentializing – namely, entitativity attributions. Is psychological essentialism, in the sense of assuming high entitativity of a group, necessary for dehumanization?

It seems so, at least at first glance, since dehumanization often involves group stereotypes. Such stereotypes can lead to dehumanization, even if no natural kind thinking is involved. One can even hypothesize that the more informativeness there is in the concept of the human, the more potential there is to use it for dehumanization. A richer concept of the human makes dehumanization deeper. Sometimes the dehumanization of women is based on physiological differences only – for example, when the limitations regarding their social roles or rights are justified simply by reference to their biological ability to bear a child. Keeping them in their traditional and confined social roles is then justified by pointing to the fact that it makes it more likely that women actually use their unique biological capacities. Yet, sometimes such a biologistic confinement strategy is combined with claims about mental differences regarding rationality and morality, further deepening the dehumanization (see Tuana 1993 on this multi-dimensionality). The more properties (linked to being human) involved, the richer the stereotype; the richer the stereotype, the harder the spell.

In the entitativity sense, the stereotype of 'being human' refers to what Kronfeldner (2018) calls a minimal descriptive concept of human nature: contingent generalizations about humans at a certain time, without assuming a narrow-sense, 'heavy-metal' concept of a natural kind essence. Yet, reasoning with such contingent generalizations about humans still has dehumanizing potential since individuals who do not conform to the generalizations forming the stereotype can still be dehumanized. Any case of ableism or contemporary eugenics is a case in point for such non-natural-kind dehumanization (see Crary, this volume; see Wilson, this volume). Thus, dehumanization can and often will take place solely on the basis of a minimal concept of a descriptive nature – that is, on the basis of a stereotype of being human.

Having that clarified, we can return to what is at issue here: whether dehumanization can happen even without such an already quite 'minimal' variation-discounting stereotype. There are at least two cases that show that it indeed can. There can be dehumanization without entitativity-based essentialism involved – that is, without any reference to a variation-discounting postulation of group homogeneity (stereotype).

The first case continues the earlier discussion of the dehumanization of women. In Le Bon's picture (see the quote discussed earlier) everything is graded, consistent with the spread of statistical thinking in the 19th century. In his view, it is a 'large' number of women that are 'closer' to gorillas than to 'most' developed men. This, and in particular the additional claim that women that are evidently superior to the 'average man' are 'exceptional' and therefore comparable to a monstrous being, is best interpreted as a case of *statistical dehumanization*—a dehumanization based on partly overlapping so-called normal distributions (a.k.a. bell curves) (see Figure 2 for illustration).

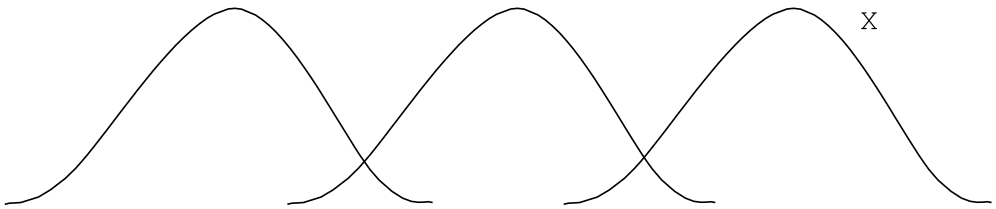

Figure 2 A graphic representation of a statistical dehumanization of women modeled after LeBon's account. The first bell curve represents the distribution of intelligence for apes, the second for women, and the third for men. The single cross sign represents the to-be-discounted 'monster women' in LeBon's account.

Such a statistical dehumanization allows for a few apes being more intelligent than some women and some women being more intelligent than some men, even though not more intelligent than the 'average man.' It is clear from the historical scholarship of 19th-century sciences that most of the thinking at the time was still typologist – that is, still discounting the observed variation and packaging things into (stereo-) types. In addition, normal distributions are the result of idealizations, via curve fitting of the actual data obtained. As LeBon wrote and as represented in Figure 2, the "monstrous" women are still regarded as "negligible entirely"; they are crossed out of the generalizations. Both the discounting of variation and the curve fitting are not surprising. From a contemporary vantage point, the "problem of stereotypes is" precisely, as Tajfel (1969: 177), wrote "that of the relation between a set of attributes which vary on continuous dimensions and classifications which are discontinuous."

Yet, it still holds that there *can* be cases from the past (and the future) where dehumanization is based on statistical distributions with variation being fully acknowledged (i.e., statistical thinking showing up in full) and without dehumanization becoming impossible. A variation-discounting entitativity essentialism is thus *not* necessary for dehumanization to occur.

As before, it is important to mention that such a statistical form of dehumanization can, and often will, connect to stereotyping and even to natural kind thinking, but it does not have to. One such way to connect statistical thinking to natural kind thinking has been entirely ignored in this paper: it might well be that the statistical distributions themselves, those grounding the dehumanization of women, are taken to be fixed and explainable as the result of heredity.[9] Russett (1989), for instance, mentions this tendency toward hereditarian thinking in the case of 19th-century sexual science. Hence, beliefs in fixity of the statistical distributions can connect to post-essentialist, variation-acknowledging styles of reasoning about the 'other.' But that alone does not make the dehumanizing beliefs about women essentialist, at least not with respect to the other elements of psychological essentialism. In addition, it does not make the beliefs in fixity necessary for dehumanization of (groups of) individuals. (For how fixity—i.e., beliefs in biological determinism, or generally, the naturalization of being human—connect to dehumanization of the human species as a whole, see Milam, this volume).

The best case, though, that is available for showing that dehumanization does not necessarily involve entitativity claims stems from the data on what Haslam et al. (2005) call self-humanization (see also Demoulin et al., this volume) or from what is called the "lesser mind problem" (for review, see Waytz et al., 2014). Both are pointing to an individual-to-individual form of dehumanization since sometimes one attributes to other individuals (or even to one's own future self) *lesser mind*, with mind standardly taken to be realized as agency (cognitive abilities) or experience (emotional abilities). Since 'mind means human' in most contemporary ontologies of the human, 'lesser mind' means 'lesser human' (see also, Machery, this volume and Varga, this volume). While stereotypes can facilitate mind attribution, such attribution is not necessarily based on stereotypes. This is simply because the relationship between two human individuals is not necessarily based on stereotypes, nor is the relationship between me and my future self. A graded attribution of a specific property (or set of properties) is all that is needed for attributing lesser mind. I thus take the literature on self-dehumanization and the 'lesser mind' problem to confirm that homogenized stereotypes *can but do not have to be* involved in these forms of dehumanization.

6 Conclusion and outlook

This chapter illustrates how one can dehumanize people without using essentialized thinking. Dehumanization most abstractly viewed is about navigating the responsiveness that we show to each other, either as individuals or as members of groups. Dehumanization is a pernicious and unfortunately quite easy-to-use cognitive tool. We use it to structure the kinds of social interactions that result in discriminations, hierarchies, and exclusions. It is a cognitive mechanism for managing difference and similarity, closeness and distance. It is not necessarily one of discounting or negating variation so that distinct boundaries between groups can be utilized. Shades of being human are enough to dehumanize.

[9] Thanks to Christina Brandt, who reminded me about this.

Furthermore, it is expectable that the next years of studying dehumanization will uncover even more complexity with respect to psychological essentialism and dehumanization. For instance, there are empirical hints that psychological essentialism can have positive effects in fighting discrimination and exclusion: Haslam et al. (2002) report, for instance, that in their studies "some anti-essentialist beliefs were associated with anti-gay attitudes," meaning, in specific contexts and with respect to specific elements, it holds that essentialist beliefs can be *less dehumanizing* (compared to their anti-essentialist counterpart). This happens, for instance, when homosexuality is presented as given and fixed rather than chosen.[10] This conundrum fits the back-and-forth in discussions about gender and essentialism, as part of which the postcolonial theorist Spivak (1988: 13) recommended to use essentialism strategically, in the form of claims about shared properties. This utilizes the homogeneity element in order to improve the social, political, and material conditions of oppressed people.[11] The direction of connecting essentialism and dehumanization matters too. Haslam et al. (2006: 68) show that some heterosexual men maintain an identity for themselves by utilizing distinctness beliefs, *given* their prejudice against homosexual men. In such a case, the pre-existing dehumanizing prejudice would explain and catalyze essentialist thinking, rather than the other way around (this refers back to the limitation of the catalyzing claim mentioned in Section 1). If, as discussed in this chapter, the catalyzing works from essentialism to dehumanization, then the connection is conditional only: if no significant differences in observation (of behavior and body) are discernible, then essentialist thinking can still ground the dehumanization of (groups of) individuals. Essentialist thinking can involve homogenized group stereotypes, assumptions about heritage or other relational properties, or ontologically 'heavier' machinery, such as elements from natural kind thinking, in particular claims about hidden differences in unobservable properties inhering in individuals, such as 'having a soul.' But it does not have to. None of the elements of psychological essentialism is in and of itself necessary.

Using hidden differences, I reckoned, has a special advantage for the dehumanizer and that elucidates, finally, *how* the catalyzing can work: beliefs in hidden essences are usually immune to revision in the face of stereotype-inconsistent information. Believing in unobservable essences is thus very likely a more 'efficient' and 'secure' way to uphold stereotypes (negative and positive ones). Elaborating on this special 'power' of non-observables in the context of dehumanization is something that remains to be done in the future.

[10] See Haslam and Levy (2006), Rhodes et al. (2017, 2018), Agadullina and Lovakov (2018), and Ryazanov and Christenfeld (2018) for more from social psychology on the complexity with which psychological essentialism and prejudice generally connect.

[11] See, for a brief summary of the debate on strategic essentialism in gender and sexuality studies, Eide (2016); for a systematic take on the argumentative structure of anti-essentialism in feminist literature, see Witt (1995, 2011) or Phillips (2010).

References

Abulafia, David. 2008. *The Discovery of Mankind: Atlantic Encounters in the Age of Columbus*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Agadullina, Elena R., and Andrey V. Lovakov. 2018. "Are People More Prejudiced towards Groups That Are Perceived as Coherent? A Meta-Analysis of the Relationship between Out-Group Entitativity and Prejudice." *British Journal of Social Psychology* 57 (4): 703–31.

Allport, Gordon W. 1954. *The Nature of Prejudice*. Cambridge, MA: Addison-Wesley Pub. Co.

Bain, Paul G. 2014. "The Human Category: Its Structure, Its Content, and Its Implications," in *Humanness and Dehumanization*, edited by Paul G. Bain, Jeroen Vaes, and Jacques Philippe Leyens, 227–55. New York, NY: Routledge.

Campbell, Donald T. 1958. "Common Fate, Similarity, and Other Indices of the Status of Aggregates of Persons as Social Entities." *Behavioral Science* 3 (1): 14–25.

Crary, Alice. 2020. "Dehumanization and the Question Of Animals." Chapter 10, this volume.

Daston, Lorraine and Katharine Park. 1997. *Wonders and the Order of Nature,* 1150-1750. Cambridge, MA: Zone Books.

Davies, Surekha. 2017. *Renaissance Ethnography and the Invention of the Human*. New Worlds, Maps and Monsters.

Demoulin, Stéphanie, Pierre Maurage, and Florence Stinglhamber. 2020. "Exploring Metadehumanization and Self-Dehumanization from a Target Perspective." Chapter 17, this volume.

Desmond, Adrian J. and James R. Moore. 2009. "Darwin's Sacred Cause: Race," in *Slavery and the Quest for Human Origins*. London: Penguin.

Eide, Elisabeth. 2016. "Strategic Essentialism," in *The Wiley Blackwell Encyclopedia of Gender and Sexuality Studies*, edited by Nancy Naples, online 1–2 at https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118663219.wbegss554. American Cancer Society.

Ereshefsky, Marc. 2010. "Species." In *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by Edward N. Zalta, Spring 2010. http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2010/entries/species/.

Friedman, John Block. 1981. *The Monstrous Races in Medieval Art and Thought*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press (quoted after 2000 ed.).

Gelman, Susan A. 2003. *The Essential Child: Origins of Essentialism in Everyday Thought*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Haslam, Nick. 2020. "The Social Psychology of Dehumanization." Chapter 8, this volume.

Haslam, Nick, B., Bastian P. Bain, and Y. Kashima. 2006. "Psychological Essentialism, Implicit Theories, and Intergroup Relations." *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations* 9 (1): 63–76.

Haslam, Nick, and Sheri R. Levy. 2006. "Essentialist Beliefs about Homosexuality: Structure and Implications for Prejudice." *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 32 (4): 471–485.

Haslam, Nick, Louis Rothschild, and Donald Ernst. 2000. "Essentialist Beliefs about Social Categories." *British Journal of Social Psychology* 39 (1): 113–127.

Haslam, Nick, Louis Rothschild, and Donald Ernst...2002. "Are Essentialist Beliefs Associated with Prejudice?" *British Journal of Social Psychology* 41 (1): 87–100.

Haslam, Nick, Paul Bain, Lauren Douge, Max Lee, and Brock Bastian. 2005. "More Human than You: Attributing Humanness to Self and Others." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 89 (6): 937–950.

Hull, David L. 1986. "On Human Nature." *Philosophy of Science, Proceedings of the Biennial Meetings of the Philosophy of Science Association* 2 (Symposia and Papers): 3–13.

Jeshion, Robin. 2018. "Slurs, Dehumanization, and the Expression of Contempt," in *Bad Words: Philosophical Perspectives on Slurs*, edited by David Sosa, 77–107. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Kontler, László. 2020. "Humanity" and Its Limits in Early Modern European Thought." Chapter 3, this volume.
Krämer, Fabian. 2014. *Ein Zentaur in London: Lektüre und Beobachtung in der frühneuzeitlichen Naturforschung*. Affalterbach: Didymos-Verlag (forthc in English version with Johns Hopkins UP).
Kronfeldner, Maria. 2018. *What's Left of Human Nature? A Post-Essentialist, Pluralist, and Interactive Account of a Contested Concept*. Cambrige, MA: MIT Press.
Kronfeldner, Maria. 2020. "Introduction," this volume.
Kteily, Nour, Emile Bruneau, Adam Waytz, and Sarah Cotterill. 2015. "The Ascent of Man: Theoretical and Empirical Evidence for Blatant Dehumanization." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 109 (5): 901–931.
LeBon, Gustave. 1881. *L'homme et les sociétés: leurs origines et leur histoire*. Paris: J. Rothschild.
Leyens, Jacques-Philippe, Paola M. Paladino, Ramon Rodriguez-Torres, Jeroen Vaes, Stéphanie Demoulin, Armando Rodriguez-Perez, and Ruth Gaunt. 2000. "The Emotional Side of Prejudice: The Attribution of Secondary Emotions to Ingroups and Outgroups." *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 4 (2): 186–197.
Machery, Edouard. 2020. "Dehumanization and the Loss of Moral Standing." Chapter 9, this volume.
McOuat, Gordon. 2009. "The Origins of 'Natural Kinds': Keeping 'Essentialism' at Bay in the Age of Reform." *Intellectual History Review* 19 (2): 211–230.
Mikkola, Mari. 2020. "Why Dehumanization is Distinct from Objectification?" Chapter 21, this volume.
Müller-Wille, Staffan. 2011. "Making Sense of Essentialism." *Critical Quarterly* 53 (4): 61–67.
Münster, Sebastian. 1548. *Cosmographia: Beschreibu[n]g aller Lender Durch Sebastianum Munsterum, in wölcher begriffen Aller völcker, Herrschafften, Stetten … härko[m]men: Sitten, gebreüch … fürnemlich Teütscher nation … Alles mit figuren vnd schönen landt taflen erklert, vn[d] für augen gestelt …* Basel: Petri.
Pagden, Anthony. 1986. *The Fall of Natural Man: The American Indian and the Origins of Comparative Ethnology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Phillips, Anne. 2010. "What's Wrong with Essentialism?" Distinktion: *Journal of Social Theory* 11 (1): 47–60.
Phillips, Ben. draft. "Dehumanization and the Varieties of Group Perception."
Rhodes, Marjorie, and Tara M. Mandalaywala. 2017. "The Development and Developmental Consequences of Social Essentialism." *Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Cognitive Science* 8 (4): e1437.
Rhodes, Marjorie, Sarah-Jane Leslie, Katya Saunders, Yarrow Dunham, and Andrei Cimpian. 2018. "How Does Social Essentialism Affect the Development of Inter-Group Relations?" *Developmental Science* 21 (1): e12509.
Rothbart, Myron and Marjorie Taylor. 1992. "Category Labels and Social Reality: Do We View Social Categories as Natural Kinds?" In *Language, Interaction and Social Cognition*, edited by G. R. Semin and K. Fiedler, 11–36. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.
Roughley, Neil. forthc. "Human Nature." *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.
Russett, Cynthia Eagle. 1989. *Sexual Science: The Victorian Construction of Womanhood*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
Ryazanov, Arseny A., and Nicholas J. S. Christenfeld. 2018. "The Strategic Value of Essentialism." *Social and Personality Psychology Compass* 12 (1): e12370.
Schiebinger, Londa L. 1989. *The Mind Has No Sex? Women in the Origins of Modern Science*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Sebastiani, Silvia. 2020. "Enlightenment Humanization and Dehumanization, and the Orangutan." Chapter 4, this volume.
Sebastiani, Silvia. forthc. "Lord Monboddo's 'Ugly Tail': Orangutans in Enlightenment Sciences of Man." *History of European Ideas.*
Smith, David Livingstone. 2011. *Less than Human: Why We Demean, Enslave, and Exterminate Others*. New York, NY: St. Martin's Press.
Smith, David Livingstone. 2014. "Dehumanization, Essentialism, and Moral Psychology." *Philosophy Compass* 9 (11): 814–824.
Smith, David Livingstone. 2020. *On Inhumanity: Dehumanization and How to Resist It*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Smith, David Livingstone. 2020. "Dehumanization, the Problem of Humanity, and the Problem of Monstrosity." Chapter 23, this volume.
Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. 1988. "Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography," in *Selected Subaltern Studies*, edited by Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 3–34. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Strevens, Michael. 2000. "The Essentialist Aspect of Naive Theories." *Cognition* 74 (2): 149–175.
Tajfel, Henri. 1969. "Cognitive Aspects of Prejudice." *Journal of Social Issues* 25 (4): 79–97.
Tuana, Nancy. 1993. *The Less Noble Sex: Scientific, Religious, and Philosophical Conceptions of Woman's Nature*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
Varga, Somogy. 020. "Could Dehumanization Be Perceptual?" Chapter 25, this volume.
Waytz, Adam, Juliana Schroeder, and Nicholas Epley. 2014. "The Lesser Mind Problem," in *Humanness and Dehumanization*, edited by Paul G. Bain, Jeroen Vaes and Jacques Philippe Leyens, 49–67. New York, NY: Routledge.
Wilson, Robert A. 2020. "Dehumanization, Disability, and Eugenics." Chapter 11, this volume.
Winsor, Mary P. 2006. "The Creation of the Essentialism Story: An Exercise in Metahistory." *History and Philosophy of the Life Sciences* 28 (2): 149–174.
Witt, Charlotte. 1995. "Anti-Essentialism in Feminist Theory." *Philosophical Topics* 23 (2): 321–344.
Witt, Charlotte. 2011. *The Metaphysics of Gender*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.