

THE POLITICS OF HUMAN NATURE

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Abstract

Human nature is a concept that transgresses the boundary between science and society and between fact and value. It is as much a political concept as it is a scientific one. This chapter will cover the politics of human nature by using evidence from history, anthropology and social psychology. The aim is to show that an important political function of the vernacular concept of human nature is social demarcation (inclusion/exclusion): it is involved in regulating who is 'us' and who is 'them.' It is a folk concept that is used for dehumanization, for denying (a) membership in humankind or (b) full humanness to certain people in order to include or exclude them from various forms of politically relevant aspects of human life, such as rights, power, etc.

Keywords: vernacular concept of human nature, dehumanization, inclusion, exclusion, genealogy, humanness, function, indexicality.

1. INTRODUCTION

“The normal state for human beings is to be white, male heterosexuals. All others do not participate fully in human nature”. (Hull 1986: 7).

“L’espèce, c’est moi”. (Sahlins 2008: 2)

An important political function of the vernacular concept of human nature is social inclusion/exclusion: it is involved in regulating who is ‘us’ and who is ‘them’, a process by which some people are *dehumanized*, i.e. regarded as *not participating fully in what it means to be human*, as David Hull (1986) already stressed in his famous critique of the concept of human nature. This paper claims that dehumanization shows the concept of human nature to be a conceptual blank mold, a concept that is purely *functional*: it is filled – depending on context – with different content, but always with what *those speaking* consider to be *their* ‘essential’ characteristics. Across context, the political dehumanization function remains constant, even if the content (what it means to be human) varies. It is in that sense that “L’espèce, c’est moi,” as Marshall Sahlins (2008) wrote in his recent critique of the concept of human nature.

I distinguish between two ways of addressing the politics of human nature. There is, firstly, the politics of human nature that is *as a matter of fact regularly derived* from the concept of human nature. This refers to dehumanization and possible further political functions of the concept, such as an equality-establishing function (via the concept of *human rights*), a constraining function (i.e. which life forms are possible for humans), or a responsibility-deferral function (via the idea that one is forced by human nature to do this or that). Dehumanization is the sole subject of this chapter. Secondly, there is the politics that can be philosophically *justified* with reference to human nature. I will not address this second issue at all, it being about whether political views can legitimately be based on knowledge about human nature. I rather assume that there is no justification in the name of human nature for *specific* political, economic or social ideas, systems, etc. All we can derive from knowledge about humans are “some constraints on the possible development and behavior of the human organism,” as John Dupré (2011: 162) stressed.¹

In the following, I will show that the concept of human nature facilitates dehumanization independent of the content transported with ‘what it means to be human’. Section 2 introduces dehumanization in a systematic manner. After providing some historical evidence in Section 3, I will introduce a distinction between two forms of dehumanization in Section 4 and add a short history of how dehumanization has been conceptualized in historical, ethnological and psychological scholarship. The result, presented in Section 5, is a *functional account* of the concept of human nature: the content of what it means to be human may well vary, but the function – that it facilitates dehumanization – endures.

¹ See also Reydon (2014) for a convincing, non-exhaustive taxonomy and critique of modes of „arguments from human nature“ (as he calls them), arguments justifying specific political systems.

2. DEHUMANIZATION

Dehumanization would not happen without a concept of human nature (i.e. broadly understood: what it means to be human) in the minds of those that dehumanize others.² Dehumanization can be defined as

an evaluative stance (merely cognitive or also behavioral) towards other humans that involves drawing a line between individuals or groups (as in-group/out-group) according to an assumed concept of what it means to be human.

Thus, even if all forms of dehumanization (that target a group of people) are cases of in-group favoritism (i.e. out-group bias), not all forms of in-group favoritism are cases of dehumanization. Fast changing peer-group fashion codes might be an example of in-group favoritism without a connection to the concept of human nature. To count as a case of dehumanization, the process of inclusion/exclusion must have something to do with the concept of being human.

Dehumanization comprises three dimensions:³

- (i) It involves, firstly, holding a *seemingly factual* belief (e.g. a projection or an overgeneralization, as in standard stereotyping) with respect to 'being human,' e.g. a belief that "Jews are evil people and ruling the world," that "women are childlike and therefore not fully human," or that "Black men are aggressive rather than civilized and therefore not fully human."
- (ii) It involves, secondly, an *emotive evaluation* leading to prejudice (e.g. pity, disdain, superiority, fear, anger, envy, etc.) as a cognitive stance.
- (iii) Thirdly, the cognitive-evaluative stance can have *behavioral consequences*. It can lead to diverse kinds of discrimination (i.e. the social exclusion of ethnic groups, women, homeless people, etc.) and violence (e.g. rape, war, genocide). Thus, socially important issues such as racism, sexism, eugenics, disability, poverty, as well as violence-related issues such as genocide and other forms of atrocity related to group conflicts are connected with dehumanization.

Dehumanization further commonly involves two contrasts, one between animals and humans and one between machines and humans. Humans are not like other animals and they are not like machines. Consequently, there is *animalistic* dehumanization and *mechanistic* dehumanization, as Haslam (2006) calls these two basic forms of dehumanization that he suggests occur repeatedly and in various contexts. Smith (2011) sets a very narrow focus on cases of dehumanization that lead to aggressive behavior against those being dehumanized. He distinguishes dehumanization from

- objectifications (being regarded as object rather than subject) and
- de-individualization (being regarded as an exemplar for a stereotype rather than an individual). (Smith 2011: 26-29)

Since objectifications can be regarded as a specific mechanistic form of dehumanization, and since de-individualization is a precondition for dehumanization, feeding into the first dimension, I rather opt for a broader focus and terminology. Dehumanization in the broad sense (as used here) includes a variety of forms of dehumanization. If one were to choose Smith's narrower meaning, then one would too easily overlook the systematic connections between objectifications, de-individualization and his narrow animalistic dehumanization. And it is these connections that social psychologists, studying dehumanization

² That broad meaning of 'human nature' can be further specified in a variety of ways. See Kronfeldner, Roughley and Toepfer (2014). Here, it will be primarily understood either as a descriptive concept, referring to a set of properties characteristic of the group of people called 'humans,' or as a classificatory concept, referring to properties (and be they relational) that make an individual human in the classificatory sense, i.e. that decide about membership in the kind. These two meanings match two kinds of dehumanization: property and heritage related forms of dehumanization.

³ This ordering has been inspired by Mejias (2006).

systematically, are interested in, when they use dehumanization in the rather broad sense used here.⁴

Dehumanization does not require essentialist thinking or even the use of the term 'human nature,' even though essentialist thinking and the language of human 'nature' facilitates dehumanization.⁵ What it does require is some vernacular concept of human nature – some understanding of what it descriptively means to be human.⁶

Given that dehumanization requires a concept of human nature, that concept thus plays a political role in inter-ethnic conflicts and in a diversity of forms of dominance and oppression. What we think about human nature influences the way in which we treat other beings who we consider as being 'not human' or 'less human.' We do not just employ the concept of human nature for 'us,' we regularly use it to deny humanness to 'them,' i.e. to out-groups or sub-groups like women, behaviorally deviant people, strangers, pariahs, or enemies, etc.

3. EVIDENCE FROM HISTORY, CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY AND SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

Historians, cultural anthropologists and social psychologists have accumulated plenty of evidence of this darker, social side of the concept of human nature. In this section, I will present this evidence in an exemplary manner, with a focus on animalistic dehumanization. I will start with an example of dehumanization from the history of philosophy, namely the dehumanization of women as part of Aristotelian philosophy. I will then add a second contemporary example, the dehumanization of Africans and Amerindians.

Example 1

Human nature in Aristotle can be understood as referring to the human life form, which is not only the *form* (contrasted with matter) but also the *end* (telos) of human flourishing. Within that frame, deviations are conceived as not fully realizing the form of the type (because of some interference). Aristotelian essentialism thus implied that variations in a species (e.g. *Homo sapiens*) are deviations of a type. They are regarded as inferior to those more closely realizing the form, since *form is norm* within such an account. Women, for instance, were for Aristotle (infamously in *Politics*, Book 1, 1252a-1260b) such inferior deviations, deviations from human nature and hence inferior to the free men representing the type.

To conceive of certain kinds of people being further away from a specific life form of a species involves making a distinction between proper and improper kinds of developmental causes. If a female is produced during reproduction, as Aristotle writes in the *Generazione Animalium* (GA 767^b7-25), then "[n]ature has in a way departed from the type." He acknowledges that for sexually reproducing species it is a "natural necessity" that some females are produced. But he also holds that when they are produced, the embryo is "deficient," since if "the generative secretion in the catamenia is properly concocted, the movement imparted by the male will make the form of the embryo in the likeness of itself."⁷ (The form of the embryo in Aristotle's picture is due to the male semen alone; women contribute matter only). Without any interfering causes, there would be no variation and only well-functioning Greek men, who had been conceived as realizing in full grandeur the nature of being human, or, in other words, representing the natural state of being human.

⁴ See, for instance, Haslam (2006).

⁵ See Kronfeldner, forthc, on why the language of human 'nature' matters. A detailed argumentation for the claim that dehumanization happens even without essentialist thinking has to wait for another occasion.

⁶ See Footnote 2 above for different ways of understanding the concept of human nature, including the anti-essentialist, minimal descriptive one of 'what it means to be human' used here.

⁷ I am using the translation from Arthur Platt, which is part of the original Oxford edition (ed. by Ross, 1912-).

Aristotle still regarded women (despite their being deviants) as (what we now call) *Homo sapiens*, i.e. as partaking in the same species as Greek men, as Deslauriers (1998) and Witt (2005) stress. It seems that variability within humankind did not prevent Aristotle from including the deviants as members of that one humankind, and consequently as partaking in the same human nature. The deviants were *same same, but different* (as an Asian idiom goes). (Below we will therefore distinguish between a form of dehumanization that concerns species membership and one that concerns exhibited properties).

This explanatory schema in Aristotle's thinking involved teleological thinking. As Neil Roughley (2011: 13) describes it, "nature in this sense has dispositional to-be-realisedness, i.e. in the absence of defeating conditions, the natural entity will realize its full and specific form". Consequently, the deviants (women in the example, but for Aristotle also the slaves and Barbarians of the ancient Greek world) were *less human*.

The explanatory schema was also essentialist in the sense that it picked out some features (such as rationality) as essential and contrasted them with other features that were deemed to be negligible for the essence of being human. In terms of the three dimensions of dehumanization, we can describe the case as follows: it is a case of (i) attributing more or less of *humanness* to a particular group in an overgeneralized manner that (ii) very likely involved some emotional evaluation and (iii) definitely had some behavioral consequences since men were supposed to be the masters of women and women had relatively limited rights in ancient Greek society.

In the 19th century, not much had changed – except the interpretation of the properties women were believed to lack, and the essentialist metaphysics beneath. Gustave Le Bon, for instance, founder-figure of social psychology, part of the craniologist movement and thus far from Aristotle's metaphysics, wrote:

„In the most intelligent races, as among the Parisians, there are a large number of women whose brains are closer in size to those of gorillas than to the most developed male brains. This inferiority is so obvious that no one can contest it for a moment; only its degree is worth discussion. All psychologists who have studied the intelligence of women, as well as poets and novelists, recognize today that they represent the most inferior forms of human evolution and that they are closer to children and savages than to an adult, civilized man. They excel in fickleness, inconstancy, absence of thought and logic, and incapacity to reason. Without doubt there exist some distinguished women, very superior to the average man, but they are as exceptional as the birth of any monstrosity, as, for example, of a gorilla with two heads; consequently, we may neglect them entirely“.⁸

I assume (and hope) that such a radical and explicit dehumanization is unlikely to arise in contemporary science. Yet, women are still regularly dehumanized, even if often only implicitly and not necessarily with respect to rationality or with respect to rationality alone.⁹ The properties change, but the dehumanization endures. In addition, other humans are dehumanized with respect to still different properties, e.g. people of color with respect to aggression, as the next example illustrates. The *content* – the essential properties picked out – might well *change*, but the *function* of dehumanization *endures*.

Example 2

Cases explicitly likening Africans and Amerindians (indigenous groups of North and South America) to great apes might be even more well-known by now than cases explicitly likening women to apes. The likening of Africans and Amerindians to apes is a form of dehumanization that is especially important in the context of colonialism and prevalent well

⁸ Often quoted in feminist literature, after Gould (1978: 365).

⁹ For a general discussion of dehumanization and women, see Jaggar (1983), Nussbaum (1995), Haste (2000), and Mikkola (2011, forthc). For an empirical study see Eyssel and Hegel (2012), Koepke, Eyssel and Bohner (2014).

into (if not way beyond) the 19th century, a time when abolitionists like the Darwin family were fighting racism. After Columbus's landfall in 1492, Spaniards hacked off natives' limbs, burned them alive and threw babies to the Spaniards' dogs. Some complained, e.g. the Jesuit priest Montensinos, who asked "Are these not men? Have they not rational souls?" Even in the 16th century, humanist scholars such as Giordano Bruno and the alchemist Paracelsus, among others, denied a shared ancestry of *their* people with *those* Amerindians, regarding them as *non-Adamic* in origin (as *not* descending from Adam, the common denominator of the Judeo-Christian-Islamic androcentrism), or by regarding them as *homunculi* – beings with a human body but no soul.¹⁰ In the 19th century, when Charles Darwin was traveling on the *Beagle*, it was still common in certain areas of the world to regard in particular Afro-American people as a *separate* species, an intermediate step between brutes and humans, as Desmond and Moore (2009) report in their new biography on Darwin. Darwin, as a member of a family fighting for the abolition of slavery, also had a "sacred cause" to write his *Origin of Species*: to develop a theory of evolution that relied on *common* descent in order to show that the racism underpinning slavery was scientifically wrong.

Implicitly, the association between 'Black' people and apes is still active today, as Goff et al (2008) demonstrate in a sample of experiments. Their first experiment, a degraded object test, already showed an implicit bias that they name the "Black-ape facilitation effect." Study participants are first subliminally primed with black, white, and neutral faces. They then have to recognize degraded line drawings of animals that gradually become easier to identify. The prediction is (for White as well as non-White study participants): "exposure to the Black male faces would facilitate identification of the ape images, whereas exposure to the White male faces would not." Debriefing confirmed that participants were not aware of priming faces. Completion of the Modern Racism Scale (MRS) and the Motivation to Control Prejudice Scale (MCP scale) were used to make sure that the results were independent of individual differences in explicit anti-Black prejudice or attitudes about prejudice. The results are illustrated in figure 1.

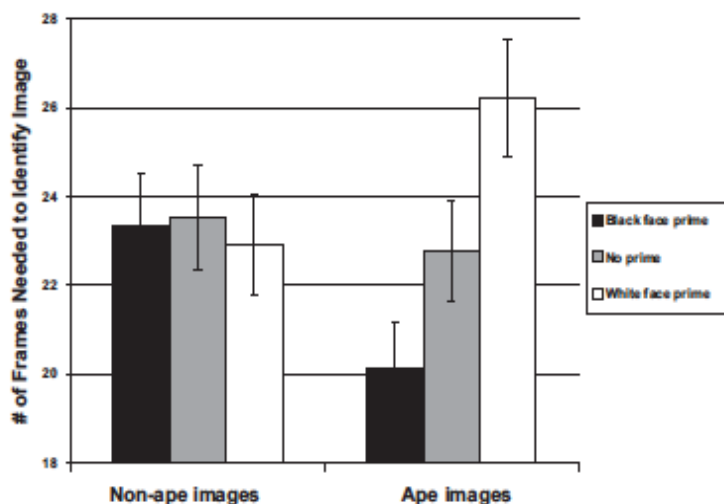


Figure 1. Mean frame number at which the animal could be detected as a function of animal type and race prime (Study 1). Error bars represent the average standard error for each condition.

Figure_1: Results of the degraded object test study. From Goff et al (2008: 296).

¹⁰ The quotation from Montesinos and further references regarding that history can be found in Smith (2011: 77ff), also with respect to the famous month-long debate between Sepúlveda, an Aristotelian scholar defending the notion that indigenous people are natural slaves, and Bartolomé de Las Casas, defending their status as equally human. For a in-depth study of likening people to apes, see Hund et al (2016).

When primed with Black faces (black columns), fewer frames are needed to identify the ape images compared to non-ape images, and compared to when study participants are not primed (grey columns). When primed with White faces (white columns), more frames are needed to recognize the ape images compared to the non-ape images, and compared to when study participants are not primed (grey column). Images of Black faces facilitate ape recognition. Further experiments added the following points: firstly, the effect is bidirectional (images of apes also facilitate attention to Black faces) and, secondly, the effect is specific for Black people (rather than a general out-group bias, since analogous tests with Asian faces did not show the same results). By using colorless line drawings, they tried to rule out the possibility that the effect was due to simple perceptual color matching. By also testing associations with other animals (e.g. big cats such as lions that are also stereotypically perceived as being aggressive), they tried to rule out that what they were observing was simply an association with aggression, rather than a specific Black-ape-association. Yet, aggression seems to play a role in the specific Black-ape association.

In two further studies, Goff et al sought to establish whether also judgment (rather than only perception and cognition) is influenced by the Black-ape association. Firstly, they studied whether priming with ape images and big cat images influences the judgment whether police violence against suspects (shown to study participants in a video) is justified. The results (among other things) showed that violence against Black people was more likely to be regarded as justified, when participants were primed with ape images. Their final, historical (rather than experimental) study on death sentences in Philadelphia between 1979-1999 adds evidence in the same vein. Goff et al (2008: 304) conclude with respect to the latter: "Black defendants are more likely to be portrayed as apelike in news coverage than White defendants and that this portrayal is associated with a higher probability of state-sponsored executions".

4. TWO FORMS OF DEHUMANIZATION, FROM EXPLICIT TO IMPLICIT

I take it that in the 21st century it is unlikely that somebody *explicitly* regards women or non-Europeans as (a) members of a *different species* or as (b) *like apes*. Thus, explicitly denying (a) membership in humankind and (b) humanness should be rather rare. An exception, at least for (b), is propaganda and caricature, as in the following famous poster that combined the dehumanization of women and enemies simultaneously.

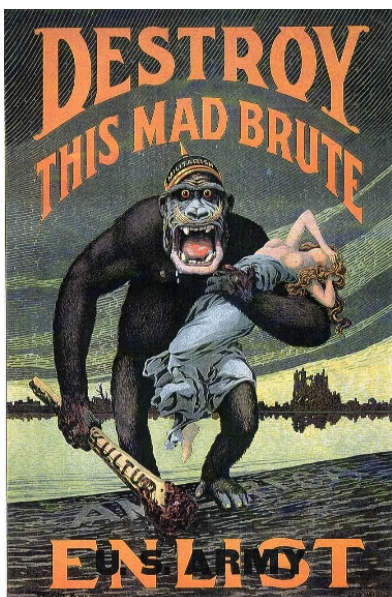


Figure 2: Army poster encouraging U.S. soldiers to enlist in the army. The enemy was WW1 Germany. Ca. 1917 (public domain, picture at Harry Ranson Center University of Texas, Austin).

In addition to a very likely ongoing explicit dehumanization in propaganda and caricature, people might still implicitly be regarded in all kinds of contexts as less human in the two forms just mentioned, i.e. as less human: (a) in heritage (*heritage-related dehumanization*) or (b) with respect to humanness, i.e. with respect to properties such as rationality or civility-vs-aggression or any other putative 'essential' property of being human (*property-based dehumanization*). In such an implicit form, (a) membership in humankind or (b) instantiation of 'essential' properties is not denied, but graded.

Given these two forms of animalistic dehumanization, the results, especially of the last two studies by Goff et al (2008) can be explained either by (a) a heritage-based exclusion attitude of *Black-means-ape-like-means-less-human-by-heritage-and-therefore-not-as-much-protected-by-human-rights* or by (b) a specific triadic association of *Black-means-ape-like-means-aggressive-and-therefore-exhibiting-less-humanness*. I concede the difficulty of deciding which form of dehumanization is taking place, but the important issue is that they both can happen and can be distinguished from each other.

I thus conclude that implicit dehumanization in both these forms is still among us and likely to be very widespread. I take the evidence accumulated in social psychology, reviewed in Haslam and Loughnan (2014), to confirm this.

5. FUNCTIONAL PERSPECTIVE NECESSARY

Before I add theoretical background from historical, ethnological or psychological scholarship, let me draw a *first philosophical conclusion*: the *content* of the concept of human nature (e.g. that rationality is part of human nature, or that other animals are aggressive and humans civilized) changes historically and varies between people and scientific contexts. The examples used above illustrate:

- a change from Aristotelian metaphysics to craniology with respect to the dehumanization of women;
- a change from colonial dehumanization of Amerindians as non-Adamic in heritage or as homunculi, to the Black-ape facilitation effect;
- ways in which different traits can be used to liken people to apes. (Recall the list from Le Bon for women and compare it with the role of aggressiveness in the Black-ape facilitation effect.)

Despite changes in content, the concept of human nature has not changed its *function*, namely *social inclusion/exclusion*, i.e. including *this* kind of people and excluding *that* kind of people, regulating who is 'us' and who is 'them'. That means: the function of the concept endures, even if the content may well vary.

A philosophy of science point of view on the concept of human nature should thus not restrict itself to the *content* of the concept of human nature as such (since it changes throughout history anyway). It should acknowledge the *function* the concept plays in the social realm. After all, the function is much more stable across contexts.

I take the results of other experimental studies on dehumanization in social psychology to converge on such a functional perspective, despite differences in details, as described in overview by Haslam & Loughnan (2014).¹¹ I also take the history of theorizing about dehumanization to also confirm that functional perspective. David Hume (in his *Treatise*, as part of his analysis of love and hate, Book II, Part 2, Sect. 3) has already discussed

¹¹ As a side note: This functional perspective also helps to understand why the concept of human nature has such a great (and even normative) authority in science. For that topic, see Kronfeldner (forthc).

sympathy as a bias that favors members of one's own group and dehumanizes others. The anthropologist and sociologist Graham Sumner (1906: 12-15) then established "ethnocentrism" as a technical term for a dehumanizing out-group bias and stressed how widespread it is, since "[a]s a rule, it is found that nature peoples call themselves 'men.' Others are something else – perhaps not defined – but not real men" (Sumner 1906: 14). Examples Sumner mentioned for the (a) heritage-related form of dehumanization were Caribbeans, Kiowa, Lapps, Greenland Eskimos, and Tunguses. Others, he writes, exhibit a less strong dehumanizing ethnocentrism, by believing in various kinds of superiority, i.e. that others are less human in sense (b) specified above. Sumner mentions Ainos, Jews, the Chinese, Greeks, Romans, and Arabs of antiquity. Lévi-Strauss (1952: 12) then, famously, put the mindset of ethnocentrism as follows: "Humanity is confined to the borders of the tribe, the linguistic group, or even, in some instances, to the village". He also stressed a specific reciprocity, namely the reciprocity of dehumanization attitudes:

"In the Greater Antilles, some years after the discovery of America, while the Spaniards sent out investigating commissions to ascertain whether or not the natives had a soul, the latter were engaged in the drowning of white prisoners in order to verify, through prolonged watching, whether or not their corpses were subject to putrefaction".

The Spaniards were skeptical about the humanness of the natives in terms of them 'having a soul,' whereas the natives were skeptical about the humanness of the Spaniards in terms of them 'having life' (tested by whether the decaying pattern characteristic for life occurs). The first was a case of animalistic dehumanization, the second a case of mechanistic dehumanization.

I conclude from all this anthropological and psychological research: the specific *form* of dehumanization varies with the *content*, but – again – the *function* of excluding those regarded as others from being human in the full sense remains the same. Only such a functional perspective can explain the *reciprocity* of dehumanization that Lévi-Strauss stressed.

Lévi-Strauss fought ethnocentrism as the psychological underpinning of racism, which he regarded as being (in part) responsible for the Holocaust and other war-related atrocities during WWII. Dehumanization is clearly involved in some but not necessarily all group-related violence.¹² But as mentioned above, dehumanization as understood here does not have to be connected with violence. It is a much more unbound phenomenon, much more widespread and often quite implicit, as Goff et al's (2008) studies show. Dehumanization not only manifests itself in group-conflicts or other kinds of violent or oppressive behavior. It is, as I stressed above, everywhere and has consequently to be systematized from a functional perspective: the details vary (general forms as well as specific properties that are regarded as essential for humanness), but the function of inclusion/exclusion endures.

The historian Reinhart Koselleck (2006 [1993]: 279) concluded from historical material that actually the concept of 'being human' is historically viewed a 'blank mold' ("Blindformel") only. In contrast to other historical asymmetric concepts for collectives, such as "Christian", leading to concepts for enemies ("Feindbegriffe", e.g. the non-Christians), "human" is a conceptual blank mold ("Blindformel"). It is a conceptual blank mold since *any group can fill it with what that group is like* and exclude the respective others as being *less human*. – *L'espèce, c'est moi* (to use Sahlin's ingenious words again), all others are less human. I take Smith (2013) to agree on this, when he claims that "being human" is a term that is indexically used, like "being here".¹³

¹² For book-length historical and further anecdotal evidence consult Smith (2011).

¹³ An indexical term like "being here" is contrasted with substantive terms like "water" that stand for specific substances.

CONCLUSION AND OUTLOOK

To conclude: dehumanization is *ubiquitous, reciprocal* and there is a central *exchangeability* of the content of what it means to be human. The vernacular concept of being human/human nature have to be understood from a functionalist perspective, since there is an independence between the dehumanization function of these concepts and the varying contents that might be filled into the terms 'being human'/'human nature.' These terms are like indexicals.

Yet one might ask: doesn't science give us some *objective content* for the concept of being human/human nature? It does, since any approach from contemporary science that uses the concept of human nature will try to remove the indexicality in the vernacular concept. Yet, these approaches will have their own problems that lead to an open-ended list of scientific disagreements, as described in Kronfeldner (forthc). In addition, filling the concept of human nature with objective content will not resolve the politics of human nature. As long as the sciences say something on heritage or humanness, it holds that these sciences can be used for each respective form of dehumanization, i.e. heritage-based or property-based dehumanization. Illustrating this in detail and elaborating on what follows from this for these sciences needs to be the subject of future research. The basic point that I want to make here can be summarized as follows.

Even given that it is regarded as a scientific fact that all currently living humans belong to the same one species, some can be regarded as being less human. Genealogy allows for grading within the one humankind since a genealogical relationship can be more or less direct. The Black-ape facilitation effect can thus be explained by (and would be predicted) on the sole basis of a belief in a *different or at least more distant heritage* of a Black person to a White person (compared to the genealogical distance between a White person to another White person). Such a belief in an individual's genealogical distance does not need to rely on phenotypic properties such as skin color, it can go deeper as in current use of genetic modeling of ancestry.¹⁴ Furthermore, it might (but does not have to) involve a belief in races, separate groups united only indirectly far back in history by a common human ancestor. Dehumanization can thus utilize racism in the sense of a belief in human groups that are genealogically (i.e. reproductively) isolated to a certain degree so that they can now be regarded as real taxonomic units, as separate groups. If such genealogical racism combines with a dehumanizing ethnocentrism, *same close heritage* is all that would count in such a mindset as a criterion for being fully human or not. The closer genealogically related, the more human – that would be the 'logic' of that contemporary variant of heritage-based dehumanization. It is a matter of historical and sociological study, whether such a form of dehumanization is still widespread, but I assume that it can exist and that it is likely to be the basis of some forms of contemporary racism, given that genealogy has been used historically for the dehumanization of ethnic groups with a specific geographic origin (e.g., in the case of the Amerindians or Afro-Americans as non-Adamic in heritage). As long as genealogy is used for delineating biological kinds, it can be used to regard some individuals as *not* human or as *less* human. As long as that delineation is politically relevant (which does not have to be the case but might often be the case), this dehumanization is politically relevant too.¹⁵

If the term 'human nature' means nothing but a set of properties that are widespread within humankind, then these properties can still be differentially applied to outsiders.

¹⁴ See Olson (2002) on this issue.

¹⁵ Where exactly to draw the line (given that genealogy is a transitive relation) is certainly always a pragmatic and equally politically important decision, as Hull (1986), Antony (2000) and Proctor (2003) stressed. For instance, in paleoanthropology, given the lack of evidence, there is a thorough even though contingent under-determination of theory by data. Consequently, one can choose to dehumanize the Neanderthals. One can be more strict (i.e. more exclusive) or choose to include them by being less strict (i.e., more inclusive) in drawing the line of where 'our' species began. Given that under-determination, Proctor (2003) has argued, how ex/inclusive a society is has an effect on how ex/inclusive the respective 'science' is, highlighting thus an interesting mingling of science and society.

Human nature would thus simply refer to contingent generalizations about humans (e.g. that 'we' use spoken language, walk upright, have opposable thumbs, etc.). These generalizations still have dehumanizing potential since those individuals that do not confirm to the generalizations can still be dehumanized. Any case of ableism or contemporary eugenics would be a case in point of such non-essentialist dehumanization.¹⁶ As long as the majority rules (descriptively and socially) in science and society, those not in the majority can face some discrimination in terms of being regarded as less human. Thus, dehumanization can take place on the basis of an objective concept of human nature too. Furthermore, which generalizations are regarded as *important* for the respective life form might well vary across cultures. Since there will always be a plentitude of properties that are widely shared among humans, talk about human nature (even in sciences) will involve a choice of those properties. As mentioned elsewhere (Kronfeldner, forthc), an interesting under-determination results: certain properties can be prioritized without science giving you any foundation in objective facts for the priority chosen. Some researchers will highlight rationality, others morality, still others the opposable thumb, or some other trait. As in all cases of under-determination, not only disciplinary focus but also social values will govern the choice of what is most important for 'being human,' with often no scientific way of finding agreement on the result.

Given that both forms of dehumanization can persist even given an objective concept of human nature, how can sciences limit the danger of dehumanization? Given the authority in the term 'nature' (as described in Kronfeldner, forthc), eliminating the language of 'human nature' (to rather speak of widespread properties or a specific heritage) is a suggestion that has been in existence since Hull's (1986) famous critique of the concept. Eliminating the language of human nature might help to keep dehumanization in check, but its elimination might also have negative consequences. Only a detailed analysis of how to balance the risks of misuse and the social and scientific prize of elimination can provide a convincing answer to this question.

¹⁶ See St. Pierre and Wilson (forthc) on eugenics and Wolbring (2008) on disability.

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