

Humanism: A Critique

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Abstract: This paper considers the moral psychology of interpersonal conduct that is cruel, brutal, humiliating, or degrading. On the view I call “humanism,” such behavior often stems from the perpetrators’ dehumanizing view of their targets. The former may instead see the latter as subhuman creatures, nonhuman animals, supernatural beings, or even mindless objects. If people recognized their common humanity, they would have a hard time mistreating other human beings (so the humanist continues). This paper criticizes humanism so understood, arguing that its explanatory power is often overstated, and that there are alternative, “socially situated” explanations that are better in many cases.

Keywords: humanism; dehumanization; moral psychology; social perception; racism; race; misogyny; gender

“You know what pisses me off, Benny? These f*cking bitches look at me like I’m some goddamn piece of meat, you know? Like a f*cking sex toy. But I’m a human being, man! I’m a person, you know, with feelings and emotions ... I’m sitting here, right? Yeah, I exist! They think I’m so tall, my feelings don’t get hurt.”

—George “Pornstache” Mendez, *Orange is the New Black*, S1E11,
“Tall Men with Feelings”

“I often cannot discern the *humanity* in a man.”

—Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*

Witness a common reflex in contemporary moral discourse, evident both inside and outside philosophy. It shows up in numerous discussions of the moral psychology of racist brutality, as well as discussions of misogynist threats and violence. “The overall problem is one of a culture where instead of seeing women as, you know, people, protagonists of their own stories just like we are of ours, men are taught that women are things to ‘earn’, to ‘win’.” So wrote cultural commentator Arthur Chu in the wake of the Isla Vista massacre, committed by Elliot Rodger in May 2014. Rodger had sought to wreak revenge on the “hot blonde sluts” who refused to have sex with him, or even to acknowledge his existence whatsoever.¹

¹Arthur Chu, “Your Princess Is in Another Castle: Misogyny, Entitlement, and Nerds,” *The Daily Beast*, 27 May 2014, <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2014/05/27/your->

Describing her experiences confronting “her cruellest troll” on the internet, feminist writer Lindy West similarly wondered: “What made women easy targets? Why was it so satisfying to hurt us? Why didn’t he automatically see us as human beings?”² West’s troll repented after she confronted him, and apologized for his misogynist behavior—much to her amazement. But this was the one question West reports asking him that he could not answer, despite his best efforts to.

In this paper, I will argue that such questions—for example, “Why didn’t he automatically see us as human beings?”—rest on a common mistake: reflexively attributing “man’s inhumanity to men”³ to some sort of dehumanizing psychological attitude. I’ll call this the “humanist” explanation for interpersonal conduct of the kind that is naturally described as *inhumane*, in being not only morally objectionable, but also somehow cruel, brutal, humiliating, or degrading.⁴ And on the view in moral psychology I’ll subsequently call “humanism,” such dehumanization is held to be the best explanation of such inhumane conduct relatively frequently (although not necessarily always). In other words, on the humanist view, such behavior often stems from people’s failure to recognize some of their fellows *as* fellow human beings. The former may instead see the latter as subhuman creatures, nonhuman animals, supernatural beings (e.g., demons, witches), or even as mere things (i.e., mindless objects). If people could only appreciate their shared or common humanity, then they would have a hard time mistreating other members of the species.

Humanism in the intended sense is a popular, familiar, and in many ways tempting view. In spite of this, however—or, perhaps, because of it—it is not always clearly formulated and defended against rival explanatory models. Nor has it been exposed to much in the way of extended critical scrutiny in contemporary analytic philosophy.⁵ The aim of this

princess-is-in-another-castle-misogyny-entitlement-and-nerds.html. More on this case later; I also discuss it in Kate Manne, “What is Misogyny? A Feminist Analysis” (unpubl. ms.). And see Kate Manne, “In Ferguson and Beyond, Punishing Humanity,” *The Stone*, *New York Times* Opinionator section, 12 October 2014, <http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/10/12/in-ferguson-and-beyond-punishing-humanity/>, for an application of many of the ideas in this paper to racist police brutality in the U.S. context.

²Lindy West, “What Happened When I Confronted My Cruellest Troll,” *The Guardian*, 2 February 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/society/2015/feb/02/what-happened-confronted-cruellest-troll-lindy-west>.

³This famous phrase was coined by the poet Robert Burns, who penned more than one Enlightenment anthem. Burns may in turn have adapted the expression from a line by Samuel von Pufendorf, an important forebear of Enlightenment thinking.

⁴Admittedly, the word “humanist” and its cognates can mean different things to different people—but I can think of no better term that conveys something of its flavor.

⁵Although there are notable, if relatively brief, exceptions: see n. 36. The main set of extended critiques of broadly humanist thought in analytic philosophy comes from those who

paper is hence to go some way towards correcting this omission. Ultimately, I will be mounting a critique of humanism's explanatory ambitions, and some of what I take to be its failings and oversights. To be clear, I won't argue, and indeed I don't believe, that characteristically humanist explanations of inhumane interpersonal conduct are *never* apropos. Rather, I think their scope and power has been significantly overstated by some contemporary moral philosophers—Aristotelians, Kantians, and Wittgensteinians amongst them, as well as more general proponents of a rationalist, Enlightenment ethos.

But I anticipate. First, I try to convey the flavor of humanist thought in some of its most interesting and fruitful philosophical applications, over the course of section 1. After that, I will clarify the humanist position (in section 2), criticize it (in section 3), present an alternative, “socially situated” model for explaining the humanist's target *explananda* (in section 4), and argue that these alternative explanations will often be superior to those offered by the humanist (in section 5, to close). In the end, I will tentatively moot a surprising conclusion: viz., it is not clear that the humanist line works in many of the cases for which it might seem tailor-made, where people participate in mass atrocities under the influence of dehumanizing propaganda. Their actions often betray the fact that their victims must seem human, all too human, to the perpetrators. We notice this when we remember to pay attention to man's inhumanity to *women*, in particular—who are often brutally raped en masse during genocide.

1. Humanist Thought in Action

In Rae Langton's treatment of women's sexual oppression, a central role is played by the idea of “sexual solipsism.” Whereas solipsism in the classic sense consists in skepticism about (or perhaps the sheer denial of) the existence of other minds of *any* kind, sexual solipsism regards the only human minds as male ones. Women are viewed and treated as “mere things,” or objects, in contrast. And in Langton's view, this is closely connected with the moral ills of pornography. Here is Langton introducing her views, via her readings of Simone de Beauvoir and Catharine MacKinnon:

In the company of a creature stabilized “as an object,” [Beauvoir] said, “man remains alone.” Sexual oppression is a solipsism made real ... [Beauvoir] thought it was, for many,

have argued that such views are objectionably “speciesist.” I am increasingly sympathetic to the substance of these criticisms, although I have questions about how best to understand them in relation to other liberatory political movements. But in any event, criticisms of this kind are largely orthogonal to those I'll be developing in this paper, since humanism as I characterize it is not committed to morally suspect claims about the superior value or greater rights of human beings relative to other creatures.

“a more attractive experience than an authentic relationship with a human being.” A distinctive way of treating someone “as an object” is to be found in pornography, so recent feminists have added, saying that in pornography “the human becomes thing.” The ambiguity of [MacKinnon’s] striking phrase conveys the thought that through pornography human beings—women—are treated as things, and also that things—pornographic artifacts—are treated as human beings.⁶

Langton goes on to defend MacKinnon’s view that pornography (of the violent, degrading, heterosexual kind, at least⁷) *silences* and *subordinates* women by objectifying them in this way. This claim is meant to be not only a plausible causal (and hence empirical) claim; Langton’s central thesis is rather a *constitutive* one.⁸

Racism often involves a similar obliviousness or imperviousness to the full inner lives of its victims or targets, according to Raimond Gaita.⁹ Gaita offers us an autobiographical vignette by way of illustration, involving a bereaved mother, M, who has recently lost a child and is still deep in the throes of grief. Gaita and M are watching a documentary about the Vietnam War on television. When the program turns to an interview with a grief-stricken Vietnamese woman who had also recently lost a child to the war, M initially leans forward, as if to catch every word of someone suffering the same kind of loss. But then she promptly leans back again, saying flatly: “But it is different for them. They can simply have more.”¹⁰ Gaita makes it clear that M’s remark is not intended in a merely sociological vein, that is, to mean that the Vietnamese have comparatively large families. Nor is it a remark to the effect that the Vietnamese were so devastated by war during this era that their usual capacity for grief may have been blunted by trauma. Rather, M’s remark expresses her sense that there is something about the Vietnamese *as such* that makes their emotional experiences incapable of “going as deep” as M’s own.¹¹ Gaita:

In M’s eyes, the Vietnamese are not contingently unable to rise to the requirements that are inseparable from the possibility of a deepened inner life, as might happen to a people if

⁶Rae Langton, *Sexual Solipsism: Philosophical Essays on Pornography and Objectification* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 2.

⁷MacKinnon gives a stipulative definition of pornography that centrally concerns violent, degrading, hetero-normative material (although the exact scope of the definition is debatable). This was useful for MacKinnon’s intended purposes in drafting an anti-pornography civil rights ordinance (together with Andrea Dworkin). Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for pushing me to be more careful about MacKinnon’s views and aims here.

⁸Langton, *Sexual Solipsism*, chap. 1.

⁹Raimond Gaita, “Racism: The Denial of a Common Humanity,” in *A Common Humanity: Thinking About Love and Truth and Justice* (New York: Routledge, 1998), pp. 57-72.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, p. 57.

¹¹Unfortunately, we are not told M’s own race or ethnicity, if I am not mistaken. But given that whiteness is often treated as the default (again, unfortunately), it is natural to imagine her as being, like Gaita, a white Australian.

they suffer great hardships. To her, that is how they *essentially* are.¹²

M hence “could not find intelligible that she could converse with them and learn from them about what it means to be married, to love someone or to grieve for them.”¹³ Gaita goes on to argue that M’s moral psychology, with her truncated sense of the human subjectivity of those she is prejudiced against, is characteristic of many of those in the grip of racist ideology:

Victims of racism often say they are treated as “sub-human.” In many cases—perhaps the majority—that is not even slightly an exaggeration. We can see from what I have been saying about M how radically demeaning her attitude is, how literally dehumanising—because it denies its victims any possibility of responding with depth and lucidity to the defining features of the human condition. In a natural sense of the word “human”—when it is not used to refer simply to the species *homo sapiens* ... —those who are deemed incapable of an inner life of any depth and complexity are rightly said to be treated as less than fully human, as sub-human.¹⁴

A similar line is taken by David Livingstone Smith, when it comes to the moral psychology of agents who participate in mass atrocities. Smith takes a more political and historical approach, and bills dehumanization—understood as the attribution of a nonhuman, animal “essence” to the relevant class of people—as a solution to the problem, as it were, of empathy in politics. For:

To recognize someone as a person—a fellow human being—you need to have the concept of a human being. And once you categorize someone as human, this has an impact on how you respond to him ... Thanks to our empathetic nature, most of us find it difficult to do violence to others. These inhibitions account for the powerful social bonds that unite human communities and explain the extraordinary success story of our species. But this generates a puzzle. From time immemorial men have banded together to kill and enslave their neighbors, rape their women, [etc.] ... How do we manage to perform these acts of atrocity? An important piece of the answer is clear. It’s by recruiting the power of our conceptual imagination to picture ethnic groups as nonhuman animals. It’s by doing this that we’re able to release destructive forces that are normally kept in check by fellow feeling.¹⁵

In other words, when some people are tasked with brutalizing and persecuting others under a political regime, they will have a difficult time of it unless their natural tendency to sympathize with these others is tempered. This is where dehumanization in general, and dehumanizing propaganda in particular, often proves invaluable.

If this is the moral psychology characteristic of racism and ethnic hatred, then we would expect that some kind of *humanizing* process would

¹²Gaita, “Racism,” p. 59.

¹³Ibid., p. xxxv.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 60.

¹⁵David Livingstone Smith, *Less Than Human: Why We Demean, Enslave, and Exterminate Others* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2011), p. 127.

be required to overcome it. A nuanced treatment of such a process can be found in Nomy Arpaly's discussion of the case of Huckleberry Finn, which is a classic example in the literature on moral motivation, moral worth, and *enkrasia* (or "inverse *akrasia*").¹⁶ As the story goes, Huck and Jim have been running away together, floating down the river together in a flimsy raft (a none-too-subtle metaphor, on Mark Twain's part, for their being in "the same boat").¹⁷ And despite Huck being a white boy, and Jim being a black slave, the two have become companionable, and at ease with one another. When the slave hunters approach, and Jim is in danger of being captured, Huck cleverly heads them off, and thereby acts rightly. But there is a puzzle about whether and, if so, why Huck deserves moral *praise* for so doing, given that he acted contrary to his explicit, misguided moral belief that he should have handed Jim over. There is also a puzzle about why Huck did what he did at all. Arpaly argues that Huck's deed is indeed morally praiseworthy, since it stems from Huck's morally enlightened, increasingly humane view of Jim. Arpaly:

[D]uring the time he spends with Jim, Huckleberry undergoes a perceptual shift ... Talking to Jim about his hopes and fears and interacting with him extensively, Huckleberry constantly perceives data (never deliberated upon) that amount to the message that Jim is a person, just like him. Twain makes it very easy for Huckleberry to perceive the similarity between himself and Jim: the two are equally ignorant, share the same language and superstitions, and all in all it does not take the genius of John Stuart Mill to see that there is no particular reason to think of one of them as inferior to the other. While Huckleberry never reflects on these facts, they do prompt him to act towards Jim, more and more, in the same way he would have acted toward any other friend. That Huckleberry begins to perceive Jim as a fellow human being becomes clear when Huckleberry finds himself, to his surprise, *apologizing* to Jim—an action unthinkable in a society that treats black men as something less than human ... [W]hen the opportunity comes to turn Jim in and Huckleberry experiences a strong reluctance to do so, his reluctance is to a large extent the result of the fact that he has come to see Jim as a person.¹⁸

That should suffice to give a preliminary taste of humanist thinking of the kind I have in mind here.¹⁹ What should we make of it?

We can grant, I think, that it would be a serious problem to lose sight of the humanity of other human beings (at least with any consistency, or for no good reason).²⁰ But is seeing people *as* people, or recognizing other

¹⁶Nomy Arpaly, *Unprincipled Virtue: An Inquiry into Moral Agency* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 75-78.

¹⁷In describing the case, I draw on Kate Manne, "On Being Social in Metaethics," in Russ Shafer-Landau (ed.), *Oxford Studies in Metaethics, Vol. 8* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), chap. 3, §2.

¹⁸Arpaly, *Unprincipled Virtue*, pp. 76-77.

¹⁹Aspects of the humanist view as I will understand it have also been defended by Christine Korsgaard, Martha Nussbaum, Stephen Darwall, and Julia Markovits, among others.

²⁰I say "with any consistency" because, following P.F. Strawson, I think room must be

human beings as such, really all it is reputed to be? To what extent does it actually dispose us to treat others decently? And to what extent is dehumanization responsible for the most brutal forms of treatment that people visit on each other? To what extent should we take it literally qua psychological phenomenon? These are the main questions I'll be asking in this paper; but first to clarify the key claims of humanism.

2. Clarifying Humanism

The term "humanism" has meant many things to many people, historically, and it continues to do so today. I have already pointed in the direction of my stalking horse in giving the above examples, and in identifying some of the theorists whose views would (I take it) commit them to balking at some of my eventual conclusions. But rather than trying to pin down the specifics of their different positions, it will be helpful—both for the sake of clarity and brevity—to abstract away from any particular theorist's views, and try to distill the humanist position into various key commitments. These comprise descriptive claims (conceptual-cum-perceptual, moral psychological, and historical), and also a normative claim (moral-cum-political). And their conjunction represents my attempt to put together various (it seems to me) complementary humanist thoughts, as gleaned in the previous section, into a natural, attractive package. (Each claim follows fairly naturally, but not deductively, from preceding ones, as we will see.) To be clear though, I don't mean to imply that each of the aforementioned theorists is committed to each of the above claims, let alone to precisely these versions of them. With that caveat in hand, we can begin with the following:

(1) *Conceptual-cum-perceptual claim*: Human beings are capable of seeing or recognizing other human beings *as such*, in a way that goes beyond identifying them as other members of the species.²¹ This involves thinking about

made for intermittent "relief" or "refuge" from the "strains of involvement" with other human beings. P.F. Strawson, "Freedom and Resentment," in *Freedom and Resentment and Other Essays*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2008), pp. 1-28, at pp. 10, 13, 18 (orig. publ. in *Proceedings of the British Academy* 48 (1962): 1-25). This may arguably involve a certain amount of detachment from these others' very humanity. And I say "for no good reason" because there may be circumstances in which such detachment is vital in order to get a certain job done—e.g., as a surgeon who has to view her patients as mere bodies or complex systems while she is operating on them.

²¹I mean "see" somewhat metaphorically here, in that the distinctively visual aspect of this kind of recognition should not be overstated. On the other hand, something perceptual or quasi-perceptual in terms of its holism often seems to be at issue. Fortunately, I can remain neutral about the appropriate story about social (so-called) perception on behalf of

people in a way that has both perspectival and richer cognitive dimensions. It is to view them as a “*fellow human being*,” as a member of one’s own kind, or (similarly) as a member of “our *common humanity*.” Or, closely relatedly, it is to recognize them not merely as belonging to the species *homo sapiens* (if it in fact involves this at all), but rather, as a *person*.²²

What does this come to? Recognizing someone as a fellow human being is generally supposed to comprise (inter alia) thinking of her as having, or at least as having had, the potential to:²³

- Be *mind*ed in a similar way to oneself (cognitively, conatively, emotionally, phenomenologically, and so on);
- Develop and exercise various characteristically *human capacities*, including sophisticated forms of *rationality*, *agency*, *autonomy*, and so on, as well as a capacity to *value*, and to reflectively form and revise at least some of those values;
- Enter into and sustain various characteristically *human social relations*, including marriage, parenthood, siblinghood, friendship, collegial relations, and so on; and
- Be the intelligible intentional object of others’ *deep emotional attachments*, including one’s own, at least potentially.

With this conceptual-cum-perceptual claim in hand, the humanist can now make her second key claim, which presupposes the first (or something much like it):

(2) *Moral psychological claim*: When we recognize another human being as such, in the sense given by claim (1), then this is not only a necessary condition for treating her humanely, in interpersonal contexts, but also strongly *motivates* and *disposes* us to do so.²⁴

the humanist for my purposes in this paper.

²²Identifying someone as a fellow member of the species of course would not have been necessary before the concept of a species became salient, or in contexts in which it still isn’t.

²³The clause about “potential” is included so as to allow the criteria below to encompass those human beings whose development has had, or will take, an atypical course, due to certain illnesses, injuries, disabilities, and so on. Many humanists are loath to exclude people who currently do not, and will likely never, fit the criteria below. To my mind, this is one of the most attractive (and humane) aspects of humanist thinking.

²⁴I’ll accept the necessity claim contained in (2) for the sake of argument. Given the deep human desire for interpersonal recognition, it is *prima facie* plausible, and nothing hangs on rejecting this claim for my purposes. However, I intend it to be fully compatible with holding that there is nothing special about being human, in the sense that nonhuman animals are just as valuable as human beings. (Although one may still hold that there are deep differences between different kinds of animals, including both human and other non-human species.)

Why should this be so, though? What is the mechanism that connects the recognition of someone's humanity with the motivation to (e.g.) be kind, and the aversion to being cruel, to her? This is an especially pressing question for those of us who subscribe to the Humean Theory of Motivation, according to which beliefs and other "world-guided" mental states don't motivate by themselves. One also needs to posit a suitable desire or other "world-guiding" mental state in order to explain someone's disposition to take action.

A plausible account of the connection can be gleaned by considering an example from George Orwell, which more than one humanist has cited.²⁵ Orwell recalls a morning in the trenches during the Spanish Civil War, trying to snipe at the Fascists, when:

[A] man presumably carrying a message to an officer, jumped out of the trench and ran along the top of the parapet in full view. He was half-dressed and was holding up his trousers with both hands as he ran. I refrained from shooting at him. It is true that I am a poor shot and unlikely to hit a running man at a hundred yards, and also that I was thinking chiefly about getting back to our trench while the Fascists had their attention fixed on the aeroplanes. Still, I did not shoot partly because of that detail about the trousers. I had come here to shoot at "Fascists"; but a man who is holding up his trousers isn't a "Fascist," he is visibly a fellow-creature, similar to yourself, and you don't feel like shooting at him.²⁶

Orwell speaks of the soldier as appearing on his radar as a "fellow-creature," rather than a "fellow human being," as Cora Diamond acknowledges. But she nevertheless argues that a humanizing vision of a would-be target is especially prone to engender pity, and hence make the agent reluctant to pull the trigger.²⁷

We can generalize. The most promising route from claim (1) to claim (2) will invoke a concept like empathy, sympathy, compassion, or "fellow feeling." And the thought will be that in view of our recognition of someone's similarity to ourselves, we will be able and inclined to identify with her, or (somewhat more modestly) to take her perspective. We will subsequently often feel what we imagine she feels, or at least experience congruent or "helper" emotions (pity being one such).²⁸ This being the case, we will tend to want to be kind, rather than cruel, to her—or even to help,

²⁵Cora Diamond, "Eating Meat and Eating People," *Philosophy* 53 (1978): 465-79, p. 477; Gaita, "Racism," p. 48.

²⁶George Orwell, *A Collection of Essays* (New York: Harcourt, 1981), p. 194.

²⁷Orwell, for his own part, was more circumspect. Before recounting this incident, he warns the reader that it does "not prove anything in particular." And immediately afterwards, he reiterates: "What does this incident demonstrate? Nothing very much, because it is the kind of thing that happens all the time in all wars" (*ibid.*).

²⁸See Shaun Nichols, *Sentimental Rules: On the Natural Foundations of Moral Judgment* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), chap. 2, for a discussion of the role of perspective-taking in various candidate forms of empathy, and homologous versus nonhomologous forms of distress and concern.

not to hurt, her more generally. The conclusion that we will be disposed to treat her in humane ways in interpersonal contexts is thereby significantly helped along. She will now be not only recognized but *embraced* as a member of our common humanity, an object of moral concern, reciprocity, or similar. Recognizing someone as a fellow human being can hence now be said to have a *motivational* upshot, at least in typical cases (e.g., absent certain psychological profiles).²⁹

So claim (2) follows naturally, if not inevitably, from claim (1), together with additional claims about a subsequent capacity for empathy or something like it, and the altruistic dispositions that characteristically follow.³⁰

A number of claims now become plausible on the basis of claim (2) without, again, following deductively.

(3) *Quasi-contrapositive moral psychological claim*: In order for people to mistreat others in the most morally egregious ways (e.g., to murder, rape, or torture them with relative impunity), a failure to see them as fellow human beings is a powerful, and perhaps even necessary, psychological lubricant.³¹

(4) *Historical claim*: When a class of historically oppressed people come to be seen as fellow human beings by members of dominant social groups, and in society as a whole, moral and social progress becomes much more likely, perhaps even virtually inevitable.³² Relatedly (or again, quasi-contrapositively), when people who belong to certain social groups are the targets of the most morally egregious forms of widespread mistreatment (e.g., genocide, massacre, mass rape, systematic torture), then this is typically due to their *not* being seen as full human beings in the first place, or dehumanized shortly thereafter, often due to the influence of dehumanizing propaganda.

²⁹These being, e.g., psychopathy, sociopathy, autism, depression ...? This is a delicate issue, which I don't want to speculate about here. There is too little space to do it justice, and too much risk of perpetuating stigma—not to mention reifying concepts that wrongly pathologize certain people.

³⁰An alternative route from claim (1) to claim (2) would involve construing the notion of a fellow human being as an essentially *moralized* concept—e.g., very roughly, as someone who one ought to treat with the same kind of respect, kindness, and care that would be reasonable to claim for oneself and one's intimates—and then to endorse some version of motivational internalism. In this context, however, this would be question-begging without an independent account of *why* the concept of a human being has this moral content. In other words, this alternative would simply build in the altruistic dispositions that the above line of thinking makes a (defeasible) case for.

³¹I say “quasi-contrapositive” because neither of the relevant claims is meant to be a genuine conditional. They are rather generalizations along the lines of “if *p*, then probably *q*.”

³²For particularly strong historical-cum-teleological claims along these lines, see Steven Pinker, *The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined* (New York: Penguin Books, 2012), chap. 7.

(5) *Moral-cum-political claim*: When the members of certain social groups are mistreated in the above ways, then one of the most crucial immediate political goals should be to make their humanity salient to other people (whatever that involves, exactly). And this would also constitute a crucial form of individual moral progress for the people whose outlooks are transformed in the process.

3. The Trouble with Humanism

What should we make of humanism, understood as the conjunction of the preceding five claims? How well does the humanist diagnosis capture the moral-cum-social outlook of those in the grip of various oppressive ideologies (e.g., racist and misogynist ones)? In this section, I will consider some important potential objections to humanism, in light of which certain of its target *explananda* will tend to escape its clutches. In the section that follows, I will go on to consider a now-motivated alternative, which may be more appropriate in at least some such cases.

We should start by considering claim (1) above—that is, that there is a way of seeing people that goes beyond identifying them as another member of the species. It instead involves a sense of *commonality* with them sufficient to give rise to something like empathy (which, as we saw, is one concept of the kind that it would be natural to invoke to make the transition from claim (1) to claim (2)). I think that claim (1) is quite plausible in some version, and I'll accept it for the sake of argument. The trouble, however, is that it is radically incomplete. For a fellow human being is not just an intelligible spouse, parent, child, sibling, friend, colleague, and so on, in relation to you and yours. She is also an intelligible rival, enemy, usurper, insubordinate, betrayer, and so on. Moreover, in being capable of rationality, agency, autonomy, and so on, she is also someone who could coerce, manipulate, humiliate, or undermine you. In being capable of abstract relational thought and congruent moral emotions, she is capable of thinking ill of you and regarding you contemptuously. In being capable of forming complex desires and intentions, she is capable of harboring malice and plotting against you. In being capable of valuing, she may value what you abhor, and abhor what you value. She may hence be a threat to all that you cherish. And you may be a threat to all that *she* cherishes in turn—as you may realize. This provides all the more reason to worry about others' capacity for cruelty, contempt, malice, and so forth.

The basic upshot is this: under even moderately nonideal conditions, involving, for example, exhaustible material resources, limited sought-after social positions, or clashing moral and social ideals, the humanity of some is likely to represent a double-edged sword or outright threat to

others. So, when it comes to recognizing someone as a fellow human being, the characteristic human capacities that you share don't just make her relatable; they make her potentially dangerous and threatening in ways only a human being can be—at least relative to our own, distinctively human sensibilities.³³

What follows from this? In view of the radical incompleteness of claim (1)—and thus, on the whole, the half-truth it represents—claim (2) can now be seen to be problematic. The capacity for empathy and the associated tendency to form altruistic dispositions may still be allowed to hold; but these dispositions will have to compete with, and may arguably be canceled by, the dispositions associated with various hostile stances.³⁴ For example: the stance towards one's purported enemies that comes with a disposition to try to destroy them; the stance towards one's purported rivals that comes with a disposition to try to defeat them; the stance towards one's purported usurpers that comes with a disposition to try to turn the tables—that is, to undermine and again surpass them; the stance towards those perceived as insubordinate that comes with a disposition to try to put them in their place again; and the stance towards those perceived as traitors that comes with a disposition to try to punish them for desertion.

Claim (3), in being close to the contrapositive of claim (2), will plausibly be impugned along with it. And the remaining claims, (4) and (5), now lack their former justification. We will have to see if these claims should be tempered or dropped, or whether they can be furnished with independent justification.

So far in this section, my criticisms of the key claims of humanism have

³³See Lynne Tirrell, "Genocidal Language Games," in Ishani Maitra and Mary Kate McGowan (eds.), *Speech and Harm: Controversies over Free Speech* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 174-221, for an illuminating account of the way the Tutsi were represented as *threatening* (among other things) by the Hutu in the lead-up to the Rwandan genocide, owing partly to new forms of dehumanizing hate speech. The Tutsi were called "inyenzi" ("cockroaches") and "inzoka" ("snakes") by the Hutu, terms which Tirrell plausibly argues had an *action-engendering* function, since there are characteristic actions one takes towards such creatures—namely, destructive ones. Tirrell also insightfully emphasizes the embeddedness in oppressive social contexts that make these deeply derogatory terms (as she calls them) much more pernicious than ad hoc terms like "sausage face" (an example Tirrell gives of a term spontaneously made up by some children during a game they were playing).

³⁴If we allow for the latter possibility—which is something like John McDowell's idea of motivating reasons being "silenced"—then claim (1) will be positively false, in being subject to an important range of counterexamples. But even if not, i.e., if we insist on taking the former view, claim (1) will leave out half of the story—a half that the humanist would need in order to make the crucial transition from claim (1) to claim (2) plausible. See John McDowell, "Might There Be External Reasons?" in J.E.J. Altham and Ross Harrison (eds.), *World, Mind and Ethics: Essays on the Ethical Philosophy of Bernard Williams* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), chap. 5.

been largely conceptual in nature. But a glance at recent history serves to underline their pertinence. Many of the nastiest things that people do to each other seem to proceed in full view of, and are in fact plausibly *triggered* by, these others' manifestations of their shared or common humanity.³⁵

Consider, for example, the aforementioned misogynist murderer, Elliot Rodger, who declared his intention to wreak vengeance on the "hot blonde sluts" of the Alpha Phi Sorority House at the University of California, Santa Barbara. These women had failed to give Rodger the love, sex, affection, and attention that he craved so sorely. Indeed, they had failed to notice him at all, so preoccupied were they, Rodger complained, with "throwing themselves" at the "obnoxious brutes" they preferred to him, "the supreme gentleman." "What don't they see in me?" Rodger wondered, self-pityingly, in a self-recorded video. But the mood then shifted, both emotionally and grammatically. "I will punish you all for it," Rodger assured these women. He was now speaking *to*, not *of*, them, second-personally.

What is striking about these sentiments is that they not only presuppose but hinge on the women's presumed humanity in the sense canvassed earlier (see claim (1), section 2). Rodger ascribes to these women subjectivity, preferences, and a capacity to form deep emotional attachments (love, as well as affection). And he attributes to them agency, autonomy, and the capacity to be addressed by him. But far from being a panacea for his misogyny, such recognition in fact seems to have been its precondition.³⁶

³⁵In addition to the triggers being odd, the *symptoms* of a supposed failure to recognize others as fellow human beings often seem wrong as well, since they often consist in the manifestations of characteristically interpersonal "reactive attitudes," in P.F. Strawson's sense (see "Freedom and Resentment"). I make this point elsewhere; see "In Ferguson and Beyond" and "What is Misogyny?" It will also figure later on, in section 5.

³⁶Similar points have been made by Adam Gopnik, "Headless Horseman: The Reign of Terror Revisited," *The New Yorker*, 5 June 2006, <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2006/06/05/headless-horseman>; and Kwame Anthony Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2006), and *Experiments in Ethics* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2008), in relation to genocide. (Thanks to David Livingstone Smith for originally giving me these references; see his "Paradoxes of Dehumanization," *Social Theory and Practice*, this issue, pp. 416-43.) Appiah writes: "At their worst [conflicts between groups] can lead to genocidal massacres. How? The familiar answer is: by persuading us that members of some outgroup aren't really human at all. That's not quite right: it doesn't explain the immense cruelty—the abominable cruelty, I'm tempted to say—that are their characteristic feature. The persecutors may liken the objects of their enmity to cockroaches or germs, but they acknowledge their victims' humanity in the very act of humiliating, stigmatizing, reviling, and torturing them. Such treatments—and the voluble justifications the persecutors invariably offer for such treatment—is reserved for creatures we recognize to have intentions, and desires, and projects" (*Experiments in Ethics*, p. 144). In a subsequent footnote, Appiah also points out that *génocidaires* will often "tell you why their victims—Jews or Tutsi—*deserve* what's being done to them" (*ibid.*, p. 247 n. 25). In *Cosmopolitanism*, Appiah offers a slightly different take on things (pp. 151-53). He writes there that the problem is not that marginalized people

Rodger wanted what these women were not giving him; they subsequently had a “hold” over him. He did not deny women’s power, independence, or the reality of their minds. Rather, he hated and sought to punish them for exercising these capacities.³⁷

4. A Socially Situated Alternative

But if the humanist explanation does not work terribly well in some of the cases in which it tends to be invoked, what might we put in its place? What else could explain the inhumane forms of treatment that people visit on each other, in the cases that elude the humanist diagnosis?

We can make a start here by taking a closer look at the puzzle that the humanist takes himself to be addressing. If a human agent A understands that a human subject S is much like A, then how can A so mistreat S—or, alternatively, ignore or turn away from S in her suffering?

A’s lack of recognition of S’s common humanity is one potential explanation, which would negate the antecedent of the opening conditional. This would block the supposedly far-fetched possibility that someone could brutally mistreat another human being while representing them as being one. But another, equally sensible place to look, structurally speaking, for an explanation of people’s inhumanity to each other is for some *additional* representation—that is, a way of envisaging people that gives rise to motivations that compete with or even cancel the incipient altruistic ones. This would open up the possibility that seeing someone as a fellow human being, while treating her abominably, is not in fact far-fetched; it is merely in need of some kind of backstory, without which the assertion of the conjunction would be pragmatically anomalous.

What could these additional ways of seeing people be? We have already encountered some of them. Seeing someone as one’s enemy engenders a motivation to try to destroy her, and seeing someone as one’s rival engenders a motivation to try to defeat her, for example.³⁸ I’ll continue to focus

are not held to matter at all; it is that they are held to matter *less* than dominant group members, on the basis of ad hoc rationalizations.

³⁷West’s ex-troll told her, similarly, that his misogynist hostility was due to the fact that she was so outspoken and secure in her opinions. “You almost have no fear when you write. You know, it’s like you stand on the desk and you say, ‘I’m Lindy West, and this is what I believe in. Fuck you if you don’t agree with me.’ And even though you don’t say those words exactly, I’m like, ‘Who is this bitch who thinks she knows everything?’ ... It’s threatening at first.” See Manne, “What is Misogyny?” for a longer discussion of West’s revealing interview.

³⁸What is the connection between the relevant representation and motivation here? This is an especially important question for me, given that I outed myself earlier as a proponent of the Humean Theory of Motivation, at least in some version. I think the crucial observation

on these categories in what follows, along with that of a usurper, an insubordinate, and a betrayer, to keep the discussion focused. But it would not be difficult to extend this list of (more or less covertly) hostile socially situated stances—that is, stances that are taken towards people from somewhere specific in the social world—more or less indefinitely. Think of the terms “thug,” “welfare queen,” “urban youth,” or even “looter,” as they figure in political discourse in the U.S. currently. These are all primarily terms that white people use to refer to black citizens disparagingly.³⁹ Yet none of the concepts these terms express seems, on the face of it, well-described as dehumanizing. True, they each reflect and help to shape a sort of “us” and “them” mentality. But the “us” in question need not be human beings writ large; it may be human beings in a particular social position, or who occupy a certain rank in one of many potential hierarchies (including *moral* hierarchies, crucially). I will leave the task of identifying the motivations these stances characteristically engender as an exercise for the reader.⁴⁰

The motivations associated with hostile stances can result in some very ugly behavior (although they certainly need not in every instance). They often bring with them a temptation to lash out, put people down, or otherwise try to (re)establish dominance. And these ways of envisaging people need not be blocked by a sense of shared humanity. Indeed, they plausibly depend on that very recognition, for only another human being can sensibly be conceived of as an enemy, a rival, a usurper, an insubordinate, a

here is that the world-guided or “mind-to-world” representations in question aim to fit a state of the world that is *itself* world-guiding or “world-to-mind.” Your enemy is (among other things) a minded creature in the world in a world-to-mind state of mind, i.e., who wants to destroy you. Similarly, your rival is a minded creature in the world in a (different) world-to-mind state of mind, i.e., who wants to defeat you. Representing someone as your enemy or a rival hence has accuracy conditions about others’ desires where *you* are concerned. And this will naturally solicit a certain response from you. Namely, it is very natural to respond to these (purported) desires on the part of the other by responding in kind—at least, under the (typically safe) assumption that you do not want to be destroyed or bested by the agent in question. In other cases, the response called for is not symmetrical; but there is still a natural progression from representing someone as insubordinate (say) to being motivated to try to regain the upper hand over that person. Again, this has to do with the fact that an insubordinate is represented as a minded creature with “ideas beyond her station,” or as someone who wants to “get one over you.” If you don’t want that to happen, then you will need to take action.

³⁹This is why these terms can all serve as effective racist “dog-whistles”; see Jason Stanley, *How Propaganda Works* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), pp. 158-60.

⁴⁰Like Strawsonian stances, these stances should be seen, I think, as a holistic, overall, “take” one can have on a person, which encompass affective dimensions, and constrain and enable what one may do with, to, and for her, in addition to the aforementioned motivational upshots. Although the latter are most relevant for my purposes in this paper, I don’t mean to suggest that this is their only extra-cognitive dimension.

traitor, and so on, at least in the fullest sense of these terms.⁴¹ Nonhuman animals to whom human beings do violence are rather envisioned as prey, as game, as menacing, or as dangerous. Or, alternatively, they are viewed as disobedient, in the case of domesticated animals who can be taught to respond to complex commands. But wayward dogs and horses are not insurgents. The different terminology that we tend to reach for when it comes to human versus nonhuman animals is suggestive. Namely, it suggests that there are distinctively interpersonal, yet distinctly hostile, postures that we typically only take towards recognized fellow humans.

It is worth pausing over the notion of an enemy for a moment, since the claim that it is sustained by the recognition of shared humanity seems to have been rejected by some humanists.⁴² Cora Diamond writes, for example, that the notion of an enemy and the notion of a “fellow human being” “are there in a kind of tension,” in connection with the Orwell passage quoted earlier.⁴³ But what kind of tension is this? And why think that it is operative, in this case or elsewhere? It is true that the latter expression has a friendly sound that the former manifestly lacks. But this may be just pragmatics. The task is to give some kind of determinate content to the thought that there is something in the similarity of others to ourselves the perception of which can make it hard to treat them as an enemy combatant. And this I do not see. If anything, the more similar these others are to ourselves, the more one may have to watch out for them, in the case of competing or warring interests.⁴⁴

⁴¹“Sensibly” might be construed as either “intelligibly” or “reasonably” here, depending on how one construes the folly of a Captain Ahab, vis-à-vis his white whale. But I don’t need to decide this issue for my purposes.

⁴²I owe this helpful way of putting my views to Smith, “Paradoxes of Dehumanization.”

⁴³See Diamond, “Eating Meat and Eating People,” p. 477. In a previous draft of this paper, I mistakenly implied that Diamond holds that these concepts are *inevitably* in tension. I now take it that Diamond only means to be committed to the view that they “are *there* in a kind of tension” (my emphasis). It’s not obvious to me why these concepts would be in tension here and not elsewhere; but I leave further discussion of this nuance for a future occasion. Thanks to Professor Diamond for helpful correspondence about her views here.

⁴⁴A similar thought applies to the idea that there is a fundamental tension between seeing someone as a person and seeing her as a piece of property. *Pace* the remark of Arthur Chu’s that I quoted in opening, this can’t simply be assumed; it needs to be argued for. Admittedly, on some conceptions (e.g., some Kantian ones), seeing someone as a person encompasses seeing her as a morally autonomous being who cannot be bought, sold, or owned, is just as morally valuable as any other person, has equal rights to another, and so on. But humanism as I understand it here needs to walk a certain tightrope in order to make good on its explanatory ambitions. If the idea of recognizing someone as a fellow human being packs in all this moral content, then it is hard to see how it could be the promised *explanans* in moral psychology. (Attributions of such recognition to an agent come precariously close to saying approvingly, “She gets it!” where the referent of “it” has been given a substantive characterization.) On the other hand, if the idea of recognizing someone as a

I do not want to suggest that this is the end of the argument, of course. Perhaps there is some residual meaning in the notion of a “fellow” that I have not gleaned, which could do the necessary work here without simply begging the question. But more would need to be said than I think has been said in the literature to date (at least to the best of my knowledge) in order to be convincing. And the argumentative burden plausibly falls on the humanist to elaborate.

To make matters worse for the humanist at this juncture, there is a competing explanation of what made the soldier’s enemy status fade from salience for Orwell. This has to do, again, with hierarchical relations. When Orwell saw the enemy soldier running across the battlefield holding up his trousers, it did not merely underline the soldier’s similarly human, or perhaps simply vulnerable, creaturely body. Rather, or at least in addition to this, Orwell caught a glimpse of the man at his most ridiculous. And this would plausibly have altered Orwell’s perception of their relative social positions for a moment. It became natural to view him, as Orwell did, with pity—a kindly attitude, but one that nevertheless involves stooping downwards, sometimes condescendingly. It is hard to see a “fellow-creature” in such an abject position as fair game, or hence as an enemy at all, in the sense of the former that matters for the latter. Although those engaged in battle may be confident of winning, the enemy is not typically conceived of as so helpless and defenseless as to make it an ambush.

These socially situated ways of envisaging people—that is, as enemies, rivals, usurpers, insubordinates, betrayers, and so on—seem clearly ripe to do useful work in explaining inhumane behavior. Why, then, aren’t they called upon to do this work more often? One reason for this, I suspect, is that the position of the agent is often under-described in setting up the cases. Often, the agent is not depicted as firmly situated in the human world, embroiled in complex social practices, roles, institutions, and (in this context, crucially) oppressive hierarchical relations. The agent is rather depicted merely as trying to *assess* other people and evaluate their merits, rather as a god might; whereas all of the stances mentioned above are essentially relational, and many of them hierarchical, in nature. They involve dispositions to try to protect, improve, or regain one’s social standing, relative to other people. They involve (in a useful phrase) “jostling for position.”

In addition to enmity, many of these forms of jostling involve some kind of rivalry. And one need not think poorly of one’s rival, in order to regard him as a rival, or even as a nemesis. Indeed, quite the contrary—if

fellow human being is thinned down to the point of being a suitable potential *explanans*, then it is not clear that it will provide the most plausible explanations of the target *explananda* all that frequently. Thanks to Nomy Arpaly for pushing me on this point, and for valuable discussion and comments here generally.

one did not have some appreciation of his merits in the relevant domain, then competing with him would tend to lose much of its intrinsic (if not extrinsic) interest. And while competition can be healthy, it can also be vicious. Rivalry can be friendly, but also, bitter. It can lead us to be resentful and hostile towards our rivals, to think of them uncharitably (due to the effects of motivated reasoning, among other things), and to subsequently treat them poorly. So the inference from an agent A's thinking highly of a subject S's abilities, at least deep down, to A's being disposed to treat S kindly is simply not a good one.⁴⁵

But why was this inference thought to be plausible in the first place?⁴⁶ In particular, why think that the recognition of the humanity of the members of subordinate social classes—in a sense that involves recognizing their equal capacity for human excellence—would come as uniformly good news to hitherto dominant group members? On reflection, this seems unlikely. The recent ingress of (e.g.) nonwhite people and white women to the most prestigious positions in contemporary Western societies has meant that white men now have novel sources of competition. Add to this the fact that the competition will often result in these white men being surpassed by those who they tacitly expected to be in social positions beneath them, and you have a recipe for resentment and a sense of “aggrieved entitlement,” to borrow sociologist Michael Kimmel's notion.⁴⁷

This becomes clear when we are careful to picture the agent as *embedded* in the social world, rather than merely trying to form a “view from nowhere” about other people's merits. Even so, we will have to be careful to picture the social landscape properly. Another common way of (in my view) under-doing the set-up is to place comparatively privileged agents at the center of what Peter Singer calls “the circle of concern,” such that their main moral task in the struggle to end oppression is simply to open their arms and embrace the humanity, or perhaps just the sentience, of the rest of us.⁴⁸ This picture situates the (supposedly relevant) agent *in* the world, but forgets all of the vertical structure that the world contains—that is, the bastions of privilege that would need to be dismantled in order to achieve social justice. These bastions are often well-defended and difficult to challenge; for people are often, unsurprisingly, invested in them. To make matters worse, these structures are often quite invisible to the people whose privileged social positions they serve to buttress. So dismantling them will often

⁴⁵Nor conversely, importantly; see n. 23.

⁴⁶I draw in this paragraph on Manne, “In Ferguson and Beyond.”

⁴⁷Michael Kimmel, *Angry White Men: American Masculinity at the End of an Era* (New York: National Books, 2013), chap. 1, pp. 18-25.

⁴⁸Peter Singer, *The Expanding Circle: Ethics, Evolution, and Moral Progress* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011).

feel not only like a comedown, but also an injustice, to the privileged. They will tend to feel flattened, rather than merely leveled, in the process.

I would hence suggest, on the strength of this, that the mistreatment of historically subordinated people who are perceived as threatening the status quo often needs no special psychological story, such as dehumanization. It can rather be explained in terms of current and historical social structures, hierarchical relations, and norms and expectations, together with the fact that they are widely internalized and difficult to eradicate. The dehumanization paradigm is, as we have seen, premised on the idea that it will typically be difficult for an agent to commit acts of violence or otherwise aggress against vulnerable and innocent parties. So something has to be done to alter the agent's perception of his soon-to-be victim. But this misses the fact that agents in a dominant social position often don't start out with such a neutral or salutary view of things. They are perpetually mired in certain kinds of delusions about their own social position relative to other people, and their respective obligations, permissions, and entitlements. So, from the perspective of the dominant, the people they mistreat are often far from innocent. Judged by morally bankrupt yet socially prevalent norms and values, subordinated people may be deeply guilty. For example, white women and nonwhite people may have committed acts of gross disrespect, intimidation, insubordination, negligence, and so on, by the lights of patriarchal and white supremacist ideologies. And the mere presence of these historically subordinated people in prestigious social roles may constitute highway robbery, by the lights of these highly unjust, but deeply internalized, social orders.⁴⁹

5. Dominating People

Where does all this leave us, then? I have argued that an agent's recognition of a human subject as such may be insufficient to dispose her strongly on balance—or, arguably, at all—to treat this subject humanely (i.e., with due consideration, respect, and care, in interpersonal contexts). This is not because I think the humanist is wrong that the recognition of someone's humanity will tend to motivate humane conduct, all else being equal. It is rather that all else is often *not* equal—indeed, is as unequal as can be. Relatedly, I think the humanist has taken insufficient account of the fact that such recognition may be overlaid, and the altruistic disposition outweighed

⁴⁹Kimmel reports (on the basis of extensive interviews) that, when a historically subordinated person, e.g., a black woman, is hired over a white man with similar qualifications, then the latter is prone to complain that the former took his job. Kimmel asks: why *his* job, not *a* job? (*Angry White Men*, chap. 1). I think the answer is relatively straightforward. This woman *has* taken his job, relative to unjust patriarchal and white supremacist expectations.

or even canceled, by competing representations and the dispositions they engender. For we may see others as rivals, insubordinates, usurpers, betrayers, and enemies (inter alia), without ever losing sight of these people's full humanity. And we may subsequently be disposed to try to defeat, chastise, trounce, punish, and even destroy those who we know full well are human.

With that in mind, let us return to the opening examples, and see what might be made of them, now that the socially situated view is on the table alongside the humanist position. Which of these models, if any, is more explanatory in some of the main cases that humanists have leaned on?

Arpaly interprets Huck's morally good deed (and, in her view, his morally praiseworthy action) as the product of his burgeoning recognition of Jim's fellow humanity. Elsewhere, I argue that what is crucial in bringing about Huck's moral turnaround is something that Arpaly mentions only in passing: Huck's having formed a genuine friendship with Jim.⁵⁰ This makes sense of the fact that at this point in the story, Huck is actually seething with anger at Jim for having ideas beyond his station—his station as a slave, and hence as a piece of property. Huck fumes:

Jim talked out loud all the time while I was talking to myself. He was saying how the first thing he would do when he got to a free State he would go to saving up money and never spend a single cent, and when he got enough he would buy his wife, which was owned on a farm close to where Miss Watson lived; and then they would both work to buy the two children, and if their master wouldn't sell them, they'd get an Ab'litionist to go and steal them. It most froze me to hear such talk. He wouldn't ever dared to talk such talk in his life before. Just see what a difference it made in him the minute he judged he was about free. It was according to the old saying, "Give a n— an inch and he'll take an ell." Thinks I, this is what comes of my not thinking. Here was this n— which I had as good as helped to run away, coming right out flat-footed and saying he would steal his children—children that belonged to a man I didn't even know; a man that hadn't done me no harm. I was sorry to hear Jim say that, it was such a lowering of him.⁵¹

Huck subsequently decides to right these wrongs, as well as vent his spleen, by snitching:

My conscience got to stirring me up hotter than ever, until at last I says to it, "Let up on me—it ain't too late, yet—I'll paddle ashore at the first light, and tell." I felt easy, and happy, and light as a feather, right off. All my troubles was gone.⁵²

So Huck's plan to turn Jim in isn't simply born of a genuine sense of duty, tempered by sympathy or conscience, which eventually wins out. It is at least as much an expression of Huck's resentful, self-serving desire to

⁵⁰See Manne, "On Being Social in Metaethics."

⁵¹Mark Twain, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (New York: Vintage Classics, 2010), pp. 99-100.

⁵²*Ibid.*, p. 100.

teach Jim a lesson, and to put him in his place again; for Jim had been getting “uppity.”⁵³

What happens in the story to change Huck’s mind, then? Just as Huck makes off in the direction of the slave hunters who have (coincidentally) turned up, Jim comes out with this:

Pooty soon I’ll be a shout’n for joy, en I’ll say, it’s all on account o’ Huck; I’s a free man, en I couldn’t ever ben free ef it hadn’t been for Huck; Huck done it. Jim won’t ever forgit you, Huck; you’s de bes’ fren’ Jim’s ever had; en you’s de only fren’ ole Jim’s got now.⁵⁴

The next lines read:

I was paddling off, all in a sweat to tell on him; but when he says this, it seemed to kind of take the tuck all out of me ...⁵⁵

So I suggest it is primarily Huck’s recognition of his friendship with Jim, and his background awareness that one does not betray one’s friends, that trumps his explicit belief that one ought to return stolen property, and turn runaway slaves over to the authorities. I am happy to agree with Arpaly that recognizing Jim’s humanity does play an important role here, in the sense that it is plausibly this recognition that allows Huck to enter into the friendship in the first place. But this just goes towards my point in this context (which matters less for the point that Arpaly is using the case to make). Recognizing Jim’s humanity does little to block Huck’s intention to cruelly betray him. Rather, this recognition conditions the sense of friendship that ultimately does the conceptual-cum-psychological heavy lifting. Huck undergoes a kind of gestalt shift from representing Jim as an “insubordinate” and as “uppity” to a “friend” at the crucial moment. And this is what seems to “take the tuck” out of the dispositions that flow from the former set of perceptions. Huck’s basic grasp of Jim’s humanity remains a constant throughout all of this.

What about the case of Gaita’s character, M? Suppose we accept

⁵³Pace Jonathan Bennett’s original discussion of the case (“The Conscience of Huckleberry Finn,” *Philosophy* 49 (1974): 123-34). My reading of the case also runs counter to Arpaly’s claim that Huck initially “hopes against hope to find some excuse not to turn Jim in ... [but] fails to find a loophole” (*Unprincipled Virtue*, p. 75). However, Arpaly’s instructive account of the role of motivated reasoning in certain instances of racism and sexism means that she (unlike many other theorists) plausibly has the resources to accommodate my point here (*ibid.*, pp. 98-114). And, as she points out, the correct interpretation of the episode in the novel isn’t terribly important for philosophical purposes (*ibid.*, p. 76). An interesting remaining question is whether Huck’s *volte-face* is more or less morally admirable than Arpaly holds, given his spiteful self-righteousness leading up to it. But I won’t attempt to weigh in on this issue here.

⁵⁴Twain, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, p. 100.

⁵⁵*Ibid.*

Gaita's view of M as ascribing only a truncated inner life to the Vietnamese woman in the documentary. This form of racism seems possible, indeed common. But Gaita seems to assume that this is M's view of Vietnamese people quite generally—that she consistently attributes to them a certain nature or essence. This is one possibility, but it is surely not the only one. And it seems relevant in this context that the Vietnamese were considered the enemy by many Australians, for over a decade, in living memory. The fact that the documentary was about the Vietnam War would presumably have served to draw out the association. So it seems like an open question, for all that has been said, whether M would have had the same reaction to a Vietnamese person in a very different context, where their nationality and ethnicity were known to M, but their erstwhile enemy status was rendered much less salient.

In order to tell whether this charitable thought has any plausibility in M's case, we would need to know more. Did M have relatives who fought in the Vietnam War, for example? Might she hence be warding off the incipient recognition that her intimates visited much the same kind of intense suffering and grief on the Vietnamese people as she is currently experiencing? The capacity for empathy with fellow human beings can be confronting, even overwhelming, and dispose us to turn away from them.

This raises a possibility that Gaita dismisses rather summarily in developing his overall account of racism⁵⁶—viz., that a person like M's tendency to minimize the subjectivity of outgroup members (at least in certain cases) is something like wishful thinking or, rather, willful denial. It is not a straightforward belief, nor even an implicit representation, of the relevant people's nature, at least in the first instance. Whatever representations are in play may instead be the result of something like motivated reasoning, stemming from an inchoate desire to minimize these people's subjectivity. And such a desire might in turn owe to the risk of guilt and shame otherwise, or the possibility of being flooded with debilitating compassion. Alternatively, and more shabbily, it might owe to the (again, often inchoate) yen to hang onto the kind of privilege that relies on taking outgroup members' preferences and plans less seriously than those of ingroup members.

The upshot is that there are possible ways of filling out M's story that would make her denial of the full human subjectivity of the Vietnamese relatively superficial, and ultimately dependent on her uncomfortable awareness that they are of course equally capable of being wounded and grief-stricken. It would then be emotional strength, not a humanizing experience, standing between M and a less racist outlook.

What, now, of Langton's views about the nature of pornography? This

⁵⁶Gaita, "Racism," pp. 62-66.

is obviously a huge issue, and I can't hope to defend my views about it properly here.⁵⁷ Instead, let me just briefly sketch them. In some sense, Langton is clearly right that there is a genre of heterosexual pornography that depicts women as blank, staring, comparatively mindless creatures. (The female lead always wants what he has to give her, and breathy affirmations tend to exhaust her vocabulary.) But I think it is a mistake to suppose that such pornography engenders this literal view of women. I find it more plausible to think it is rather a marketable fantasy, in offering an escape from more painful and confronting realities. Women's subjectivity and autonomous sexuality is increasingly difficult to deny, for anyone not utterly delusional, and endowed with an internet connection (ironically); for women's voices ring too loud and clear in cyberspace.⁵⁸ Hence, from the perspective of patriarchal values, women may be human, all too human, I have argued.⁵⁹ Pornography may provide a welcome relief from these realities—which are difficult to bear, in being apprehended. It may soothe by imaginatively defusing the psychic threat that women's humanity poses, rather than expressing or even shaping men's literal view of women's nature.

So far, the socially situated model has been proving rather fruitful, but it faces an obvious challenge to extending it much further. What should be said about the moral psychology of agents in the grip of explicitly dehumanizing ideologies, due to the influence of dehumanizing propaganda, in particular? If this cannot be explained on the situated approach, then this would serve to delineate an important arena in which the humanist model is clearly superior.

I am not convinced that the situated approach should be set aside so hastily even here, though. This is another large issue, to say the very least, and there is a rich and growing literature that bears on it directly.⁶⁰ So I will just try to say something preliminary about it in the remainder of this paper, leaving a fuller discussion for a future occasion.

One simple point that I have made in another context is that dehumanizing speech can function to intimidate, insult, demean, belittle, and so on; for it helps itself to certain powerfully encoded social meanings.⁶¹ Given that human beings are widely held to be superior to nonhuman animals (rightly or, as I believe, quite wrongly), denying someone's humanity can

⁵⁷I endeavor to elsewhere, in work currently in progress.

⁵⁸The obvious irony of this being that the rise of internet pornography seems not unconnected with the platform for the expression of women's subjectivity that the internet has provided; see n. 37.

⁵⁹Manne, "What is Misogyny?"

⁶⁰See, e.g., Tirrell, "Genocidal Language Games"; Stanley, *How Propaganda Works*; Smith, "Paradoxes of Dehumanization."

⁶¹Manne, "In Ferguson and Beyond."

serve as a particularly humiliating kind of put-down. When a white police officer in Ferguson called a group of black political protesters “fucking animals” three days after Michael Brown’s death, he was using this trope to demean and degrade black people, and to re-assert his own dominance. White supremacist ideology benefits from having a ready stock of put-downs of this kind to draw upon. Such put-downs would hardly be apropos when it comes to actual nonhuman animals, who could neither comprehend the insult, nor *be* successfully put down by having their nonhuman status correctly identified. This requires human comprehension, not to mention an incipient human status to be degraded *from*. There is no shame in being called a rat if, in fact, you are one.

The point can be extended some way towards meeting a challenge raised by Smith. Since members of ingroups also speak of outgroup members in these ways amongst themselves, Smith points out that dehumanizing speech cannot serve *simply* to dominate, intimidate, insult, and so on.⁶² This is clearly right. However, there is also the simple point that ingroup members can egg each other on and sanction certain previously proscribed behaviors towards outgroup members by reiterating the terms in question, whose central purpose may still be to humiliate outgroup members in other contexts.⁶³

One might retreat to the view that dehumanizing ideologies are best suited to explaining the moral outlook of agents who participate in mass atrocities, as per Smith’s focus. But even here, there are grounds to worry about reading the moral psychology off the literal content of dehumanizing propaganda (or people’s subsequent parroting of it).⁶⁴ It remains possible that the uptake of dehumanizing propaganda amounts to false consciousness, at least in many instances. I suspect this is the case more often than is recognized.

Why think this? It is significant in this context that war, genocide, and so-called ethnic cleansing often encompass the mass rape of women. This seems to me to raise an important question for the humanist to answer. If the perpetrators of mass atrocities often dehumanize their victims, then

⁶²Smith, “Paradoxes of Dehumanization.”

⁶³See also Tirrell, “Genocidal Language Games,” for a discussion of a case in which the derogatory terms (as described in n. 33) were initially used primarily by ingroup members amongst themselves in a similarly action-engendering way, and only later leveled derisively towards outgroup members (p. 175). Tirrell also points to the ways in which derogatory terms can function to police outgroup members, by threatening the “good ones” who are privy to the insult (while the “bad ones” being insulted are not) with being similarly disparaged if they do not toe the line (p. 192). These possibilities vis-à-vis dehumanizing speech are all fully compatible with the socially situated model.

⁶⁴Compare Stanley, *How Propaganda Works*, chap. 2, for an instructive discussion of what he calls “the sincerity condition,” which can hold despite the fact that dehumanizing rhetoric is, in his view, often clearly metaphorical.

why do the perpetrators so frequently rape the female ones? It is not just that sex between human beings and nonhuman animals is generally taboo, and relatively unusual, presumably partly because of this.⁶⁵ It is also that the *spirit* in which mass rapes tend to be committed is typically vindictive, punitive, triumphalist, and domineering. These acts hence bear all of the hallmarks of *interpersonal* violence, which is expressive of and gives vent to paradigmatically interpersonal reactive attitudes—such as resentment, righteous anger, jealousy, and so on.⁶⁶

How might the humanist deal with this challenge? One interesting possibility, which Smith pursues, is that the victims of dehumanization are represented as *both* human and subhuman.⁶⁷ Specifically, they are held to have the outer appearance of a human being, but to share an essence with some kind of nonhuman animal that often represents a threat or hazard to humankind (e.g., snakes, cockroaches, rats). The victims of mass atrocities hence tend to be perceived as “uncanny” and monstrous, he argues.

I think Smith is tracking something important here, when it comes to the gestalt shifts in perception and the subsequent ambivalence that often marks an agent’s stance towards those they are tasked with persecuting or destroying. But I worry that his specific story makes mass rape even harder to explain, if anything. Sexual liaisons with those who are perceived as uncanny, and subsequently inspire horror and revulsion, ought to be at least as aversive as any other interaction with them.

The notorious Soviet minister of propaganda during World War II, Ilya Ehrenburg, was confident of this himself. According to a recent account by historian Antony Beevor, the German propaganda ministry charged Ehrenburg with inciting the Red Army to rape German women when they occupied Berlin.⁶⁸ Ehrenburg, hardly one to shrink from charges of viciousness and ruthlessness, nevertheless held that the Soviet soldiers “were not interested in Gretchens but in those Fritzes who had insulted our women.” The Soviet political department echoed Ehrenburg’s sentiment, saying: “When we breed a true feeling of hatred in a soldier, the soldier will not try to have sex with a German woman, because he will be repulsed.”

Ehrenburg’s propaganda contained a classic mixture of dehumanizing

⁶⁵Compare Bernard Williams’s remark: “Take the case of the slave-owners who drafted the Bill of Rights. There was a great deal of false consciousness there, since when these slave owners took advantage of their women slaves, they didn’t actually think they were engaged in bestiality. They were well aware that they were fucking a human being!” (From the uncorrected proofs of an interview with Williams by Alex Voorhoeve, December 2002; released posthumously.)

⁶⁶As Smith himself points out (“Paradoxes of Dehumanization”), when it comes to the humiliating nature of the rape of women during the Rwandan genocide.

⁶⁷Ibid.

⁶⁸Antony Beevor, *The Fall of Berlin 1945* (New York: Penguin Books, 2003), p. 25.

tropes and the reification of enmity. The former aspect of it is particularly striking, in the context of this paper. It features prominently in the pamphlet *Kill!* (1942), distributed to over a million Red Army soldiers, which opens with the statement: “The Germans are not human beings.” It is also central to the more searching, “The Justification of Hate” (1942), in which Ehrenburg takes pains to emphasize the sympathetic nature of the Soviet people, as was supposedly evident from their conduct during World War I. This leaves him with the following puzzle, not to mention justificatory burden:

How did it happen then that the Soviet people came to abhor the Nazis with so implacable a hatred?

Hatred was never one of the traits of the Russians. It did not drop from the skies. No, this hatred our people now evince has been born of suffering. At first many of us thought that this war was like other wars, that pitted against us mere human beings dressed only in different uniforms. We were brought up on the grand ideas of human fraternity and solidarity. We believed in the force of words, and many of us did not understand that opposing us were not human beings but frightful, loathsome monsters, and that the principles of human brotherhood imperatively demand that we deal ruthlessly with the fascists ...

The Russians have a song and in it the people have expressed their attitude towards just and unjust wars: “Wolfhounds are justified where cannibals are not.” It is one thing to destroy a mad wolf; it is another thing to raise one’s hand against a human being. Now every Soviet man and woman knows that we have been attacked by a pack of wolves.⁶⁹

The rhetoric here is strikingly in line with Smith’s claim that the dehumanized are represented as wolves in sheep’s clothing—or human clothing, rather. And the reference to “frightful, loathsome monsters” is equally grist for Smith’s mill. Or at least, this would be so if we take this piece of propaganda to have succeeded in helping the Red Army soldiers to see German people in the way that it depicted them.

But the Soviet soldiers’ mass rape of German women casts doubt on this hypothesis. So does the fact that they were not just following orders in doing so. Indeed, quite the contrary—there were widespread concerns, which came from as high up as Stalin himself, that the brutal behavior of the soldiers (which included looting and extensive destruction in Berlin) would undermine their military efforts—not to mention destroy valuable resources, such as factories. So the Soviet soldiers were actually being disobedient. Despite that, the mass rape of German women continued over the course of several years. At least two million women were raped during this period—and many, if not a majority, were raped multiple times. Gang rapes were very common. There were documented rapes of girls as young as twelve and women as old as eighty. Nobody was exempt—not nuns, not women pregnant in hospital, nor even women currently in the process

⁶⁹Ilya Ehrenburg, “The Justification of Hate” (1942), in James von Geldern and Richard Stites (eds.), *Mass Culture in Soviet Russia* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), pp. 401-6, at p. 402.

of giving birth there. And many of these women were raped in the most brutal ways imaginable. When certain of the soldiers were too inebriated to proceed as planned, they would violate women using bottles, sometimes broken ones. Frequently, this led to severe tissue damage and bleeding. Many women died as a result; and many committed suicide.⁷⁰

The question I am left with, in trying to grapple with this, is the following: if the dehumanizing propaganda had seeped very deeply into the soldier's moral outlooks, then how could their subsequent behavior towards women be explained? But if it did not go deep in this instance, then does it usually? Does it ever?

This leaves us with an important, albeit confronting, possibility: people may know full well that those whom they treat in inhumane ways are fellow human beings, underneath a more or less thin veneer of convenient false consciousness. And yet, under certain social conditions—the surface of which I have just barely scratched in this paper—they may massacre, torture, and rape them en masse anyway.^{71,72}

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⁷⁰Beevor, *The Fall of Berlin 1945*, pp. 24-38.

⁷¹Interestingly, Beevor emphasizes the envy the Soviet soldiers felt towards the people of Berlin, for the latter lived more comfortably than the former had ever dreamed of. He gives a striking example of the enraged Soviets destroying so many pillows and mattresses—paradigmatic creature comforts—that the streets of Berlin often resembled a snowstorm, so awash were they with feathers (ibid., p. 35). The envy of Jews is similarly an important theme in some recent historical explanations of the escalation of antisemitism in Germany prior to 1933. See, e.g., Amos Elon, *The Pity of It All: A Portrait of the German-Jewish Epoch, 1743–1933* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2013); and Götz Aly, *Why the Germans? Why the Jews? Envy, Race Hatred, and the Prehistory of the Holocaust* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2014).

⁷²Thanks to the audience at the Dominating Speech workshop at the University of Connecticut in November 2014, where this paper was first presented. Special thanks to Jason Stanley, David Livingstone Smith, and also Daniel Manne, for their help and encouragement with this paper during its development.