

DEHUMANIZATION AND THE METAPHYSICS OF GENOCIDE:

A NEW THEORY FOR GENOCIDE PREVENTION

by

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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

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I argue that dehumanization is a necessary condition of modern genocide, and that preventing dehumanization should be part of efforts to prevent genocide. Unlike other scholarship that addresses this issue, I hold that attending to the moral status and role of nonhuman animals in the process of dehumanization is integral to this effort. Throughout the history of Western philosophy, nonhuman animals have been used to define the human and, in dehumanization, provide the excuse for one group of humans to do violence to another. The absence of a concern for nonhuman animals from both dehumanization and genocide literature generally speaking needs to be rectified if new solutions for these problems are to be developed.

Dehumanization is typically treated as an epistemological problem in which one person or group fails to recognize the humanity of the Other, taking the Other to be a subhuman animal. However, I hold that dehumanization and, subsequently, genocide, are possible because of the metaphysical commitments that render humans and nonhumans as fundamentally different and possessing of different moral and ontological statuses. I point to three metaphysical principles widely accepted within Western thought and culture that contribute to the logic of dehumanization: essentialism, purity, and human

exceptionalism. I argue that these principles must be re-evaluated and eventually discarded. Current solutions to dehumanization such as rehumanization and human rights function within this metaphysical framework, maintaining an essential distinction between humans and other animals while retaining the notion that the human is superior to the animal. In response, I contend that we need a different set of metaphysical principles on which to base a practice of ethics and politics that would challenge this human/animal dualism, thereby significantly reducing the possibility of dehumanization and genocide as we know it. To do this, I draw on three metaphysical principles of Native American philosophy: diversity, relatedness, and nonhuman liveliness. I argue that the values of respect, recognition, reciprocity, and consent, which are present in Native American philosophies, stories, and pedagogies, can provide the basis for an ethics of relationality that affirms difference and nonhuman agency rather than sameness and human exceptionalism.

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For my grandparents,
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CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

For the most part a civilized white man can discover very few points of sympathy between his own nature that of an Indian...Nay, so alien to himself do they appear that...he begins to look upon them as a troublesome and dangerous species of wild beast, and if expedient, he could shoot them with as little compunction as they themselves would experience after performing the same office upon him.

Francis Parkman, *The Oregon Trail*¹

Wherever rats appear they bring ruin, by destroying mankind's goods and foodstuffs. In this way, they spread disease, plague, leprosy, typhoid fever, cholera, dysentery, and so on. They are cunning, cowardly, and cruel, and are found mostly in large packs. Among the animals, they represent the rudiment of an insidious and underground destruction, just like the Jews among human beings.

*The Eternal Jew*²

We called them "cockroaches," an insect that chews up clothing and nests in it, so you have to squash them hard to get rid of them. We didn't want any more Tutsis on the land. We imagined an existence without them.

Ignace, *Machete Season*³

To Animal Studies scholars there is an undeniable connection between genocidal violence and the popular assumption that animals are inferior to humans. In the introduction to his book *Animal Rites* Cary Wolfe asserts that –isms like racism, sexism, and classicism are all entangled with speciesism, the favoring of human interests and the human species over the interests and lives of other species. This institution of speciesism, which excludes nonhuman animals from the same moral consideration that humans give to other humans, has the twofold effect of helping to create and sustain Western notions of subjectivity and sociality while making “possible a symbolic economy in which we

¹ Parkman, *Oregon Trail*, 267-8.

² Quoted in Smith, *Less Than Human*, 139.

³ Hatzfeld, *Machete Season*, 231.

can engage in what Jacques Derrida will call a ‘noncriminal putting to death’ of other *humans* as well as marking *them* as animal.”⁴ In other words, when nonhuman animals are excluded from human moral and ethical relations it becomes possible to justify violence toward other humans by dehumanizing them—that is, by seeing them as animal-like or subhuman. Similarly, Kelly Oliver argues in *Animal Lessons* that human rights discourse and humanism will not suffice in solving problems of inter-human violence. She writes, “Without interrogating the man/animal opposition on the symbolic and imaginary levels, we can only scratch the surface in understanding exploitation and genocide of people and animals.”⁵ Oliver contends that throughout the history of Western thought philosophers have, for the most part, maintained a “metaphysical separationism” between humans and other animals. This separation takes both types of beings to be fundamentally or essentially different while holding similarities to be superficial or anthropocentric. Clinging to this notion of metaphysical separationism, human animals have often defined themselves at the expense of other animals. Like Wolfe, Oliver sees this speciesism as inseparable from dehumanization and the human mistreatment of other humans.

Even though there exist assertions about the connection between human-animal relations and genocide, and human-animal relations and dehumanization, genocide scholars have almost uniformly omitted considerations of animals and human-animal relations from their analysis of genocidal violence and genocide prevention. Genocide is typically treated as a uniquely human problem because of the moral standing we grant humans, because the crime of genocide is defined as the destruction of a group based on

⁴ Wolfe, *Animal Rites*, 6.

⁵ Oliver, *Animal Lessons*, 19.

its religious, national, racial, or ethnic identity, and because humans appear to be the only creatures who commit genocide because, in current definitions, genocide requires intent. However, in genocide the status of the nonhuman animal matters immensely. Throughout Western history humans have used “the animal” to define themselves and position themselves as unique from and superior to other life forms. In addition, in Western traditions commandments against murder do not apply to nonhuman animals because it is widely believed that they exhibit no or low levels of self-awareness, they cannot act with purpose, and they are amoral.

When nonhuman animals and genocide are discussed together, they are usually broached by Animal and Environmental Studies scholars rather than genocide scholars, who are typically arguing that the human mistreatment of nonhuman animals and the environment consists of genocidal activity or ecocide.⁶ These scholars want to draw attention to the fact that the methods of the “crime of crimes” are used in factory farming, rainforest destruction, mountaintop removal and more. These arguments tend to focus on the welfare of nonhuman animals in particular, while acknowledging that the mistreatment of nonhuman animals and the -isms Wolfe enumerates above exist on the same spectrum. However, from the standpoint of genocide scholars, these arguments appear to be irrelevant to the problem of genocide because they do little to help us understand why humans act with such violence toward one another. Nor do these arguments help to solve the problem of genocide, because they do not have anything to say about the causes of genocide within and between human communities. At times such arguments will even oversimplify genocide, focusing on the treatment of victims rather

⁶ Adams, *Sexual Politics of Meat*; Bales, *Blood and Earth*; Coetzee, *Animal Lives*; Higgens, *Eradicating Ecocide*; Patterson, *Eternal Treblinka*; Scully, *Dominion*; Singer, *Animal Liberation*; Spiegel, *Dreaded Comparison*.

than the causes, economics, and politics of particular genocides. Furthermore, the definitions of genocide focus on human relationships and institutions that are typically not affiliated with other-than-human animal life such as religious organization, political affiliation, and ethnicity. Even though definitions of genocide do not include nonhuman animals and even though the causes of genocide are largely within the human realm (politics, economics, ideology), the status of nonhuman animals needs to remain part of the conversation on genocide prevention for one significant reason: dehumanization.

Putting it simply, to dehumanize is to treat some humans as subhuman, as lacking the characteristics and qualities that define or indicate humanness. This preliminary definition of dehumanization does not mention other animals, but many of the most common examples of genocidal dehumanization involve comparing humans to and treating them like other animals. Though dehumanization has been present in every modern genocide, few genocide scholars engage in a critical analysis of the topic despite their frequent assumption of the ubiquity of dehumanization in genocide. Genocide scholars will readily use this word as if the mere mention of dehumanization covers the issue sufficiently and as if the meaning of the word, how it is carried out, its functions, and its results are self-evident. Yet its frequent presence in genocide should provoke further investigation of the issue. The lack of research on dehumanization by genocide scholars is compounded by the fact that dehumanization is also typically framed as a human problem by the social psychologists and sociologists who study the phenomenon. This is remarkable because in order to establish that a being is human, there needs to be something that is not human to define it. Throughout human history and across the various forms dehumanization takes, frequently the other-than-human that sets the

defining limit of humanity is “the animal.” Using dehumanization and humans’ debasement of other animals as a starting point, I aim to unveil some of the ontological aspects of genocide and suggest new avenues for developing methods of genocide prevention that unsettle the metaphysics of genocide.

Most genocide prevention literature is focused on tackling the immediate problems and issues arising in a given situation that has a high probability of leading to genocide such as war, famine, religious persecution, or other factors. The suggested preventative measures include a range of activities from mediation to military intervention depending on how serious the situation has become. Policies and guidelines that call for these measures do so based on the perceived political, social, and/or economic troubles facing a nation or population that foment discontent and violence. Such preventative efforts rarely consider the role of metaphysics in these situations. Nor do they tend to reflect on the ways in which particular ontological assumptions underlie and are juxtaposed with those political, social, and economic problems, creating the conditions for enabling, legitimizing, motivating, and practicing genocidal violence. Because the metaphysics of genocide has been largely unexplored, these preventative guidelines are always trapped in the position of having to respond to an immediate crisis rather than looking at prevention from a higher-level, longer-term vantage. It is my contention, that studying the metaphysics of genocide—that is, the ontological assumptions that are held by the communities in which genocide has occurred or is likely to occur and by the communities who respond to those genocides—we can gain a better understanding of the structure of genocide, paving the way for the possibility of dismantling the foundations of genocidal thinking and reasoning rather than treating the

effects and symptoms of those metaphysics as conventional prevention does. I aim to make apparent the structure of genocide through a study of genocidal dehumanization and present an alternative set of metaphysical principles upon which an effective response to genocide can be built.

Though the vast majority of research on genocide has treated dehumanization as ancillary to more pressing issues regarding the subject, I reject such cavalier dismissals. This apparent lack of interest could suggest that dehumanization is too simple or straightforward to be worth investigating, but I hold, instead, that this apathy indicates a tacit avoidance of tackling the topic because of the metaphysical and ethical reckonings that would result. Dehumanization is a risky topic because it will not just clarify how violent conflicts like genocide, war, and ethnic cleansing work, but reveal the violence that exists in the very notion of the concepts “human” and “animal” and, thus, all the institutions, systems of belief, and doctrines that depend on those concepts. In tracking dehumanization in what is considered the most heinous of crimes against humanity, we can begin to see how dehumanization and genocide are both expressions of a metaphysics that needs revision.

In the final chapters of my dissertation I turn to Native American philosophies and stories to critique the current definitions of genocide as being too narrowly focused on humans to the detriment of other animals. This critique is not only meant to call attention to the regular violence sustained by nonhuman animals, but also to demonstrate a blind spot in most contemporary genocide scholarship—that the genocide of Indigenous peoples is inextricably bound up with ecocide. Drawing on metaphysical principles derived from Native American philosophies, I argue that these principles require a

different orientation toward nonhuman animals and other beings in the world that is antithetical to dehumanization and genocide as we know it. Devising new, productive methods for preventing dehumanization and genocide, as I show, requires openness to non-Western modes of thinking, doing, and being. Though I am not an indigenous person, I argue that Westerners need to take these philosophies seriously if we ever hope to get out of the humanist discourses in which we are stuck.

As a Jewish-American woman I am confronted with two intersecting histories of genocide. In 1944, my grandparents Gabriella Schon Eichler and Morris Eichler were deported from their homes in Hungary to Auschwitz. After the war, unable or unwilling to return to the places where their lives had been upended, they immigrated to North America, Gabriella entering through Canada and Morris through Ellis Island in New York. For them, these two countries promised an opportunity to start something new, to put down roots in a place they would be safe. For that, these countries have my gratitude.

But the story of immigration is not so simple. The US and Canada are what they are today due to the violent dispossession of land from Native Americans and First Nations peoples. This history has been buried under cities built by settlers, but has haunted the places in the US that I have lived. New London, Connecticut, where I went to college, was the site of the Pequot Massacres of 1636 and 1637. In Eugene, Oregon, I attend a school that was built on the traditional lands of the Kalapuya peoples. The Kalapuya have lived in the Willamette Valley for over 14,000 years. As a result of disease, encroachment on their landbase and resources, and conflict with settlers, the Kalapuya population was nearly decimated. In 1959 the tribe was terminated by the federal government following the Western Oregon Indian Termination Act of 1954. After

fighting to have their tribal status restored, the tribe was officially re- recognized in 1977 and is now part of the Confederated Tribes of the Grand Ronde of Oregon. Today, 4000 people are enrolled in the tribe.

From one end of the US to the other, destructive acts and policies wiped out indigenous peoples and their histories. As someone who carries the weight of my grandparents' history while living in a country that will not even formally recognize the violence on which it was built, I feel obligated to think through these two histories together. This dissertation is one attempt to do that. Drawing on both Western and Native American philosophies, I analyze factors that give continuity to these very diverse instances of genocide.

In chapter two, I lay the groundwork for this analysis by reviewing the definitional debates of genocide. The word "genocide," made of a combination of the Greek word *genos*, which means tribe and the Latin word *cide*, which means to kill, was coined by Jewish legal scholar Raphael Lemkin in 1944. Though his definition covered a wide range of acts that could be used to destroy a national group from mass murder to prohibiting use of the national language, the definition eventually adopted by the United Nations in 1948 was far more limited, focused primarily on acts that destroyed the biological foundations of group life. Because of the limited nature of the UN definition, scholars of various disciplines have weighed in on the efficacy of the current definition. In this chapter I review these definitional debates about genocide to determine which acts count as genocide and which acts are technically not included in the definition. Ultimately, as I am exploring the metaphysics of genocidal thought at the theoretical level rather than the legal repercussions of having a particular definition, I use a broad

notion of genocide that covers crimes against humanity, like ethnic cleansing, which are not covered in the UN definition.

Chapter three turns to the phenomenon of dehumanization and the role dehumanization has in genocide. In this chapter I draw on a wide array of research from various disciplines including philosophy, psychology, sociology, literary theory, decolonial studies, and feminist theory to make three interlinked arguments. First, I define dehumanization as a metaphysical as well as an epistemological problem. Dehumanization is not just about the psychology of individual perpetrators, but the fact that perpetrators have positions of power over others, and with that power can shape reality to fit their beliefs. As such, dehumanization involves *doing* as much as it involves believing. In the next section, I argue that as a set of beliefs about the nature of the world and as a doing that make that world a reality, dehumanization is a necessary condition for genocide. Dehumanization has three functions in genocide. These include diminishing moral restraints against violence, motivating violence, and legitimizing violence. In addition to this dehumanization characterizes the process of genocide. As an activity, perpetrators perform dehumanization in such a way as to create a reality in which the dehumanized other must be exterminated.

Dehumanization is an effective tool of genocide because it turns on a shared set of metaphysical principles within Western culture. In chapter four I examine these principles, which include essentialism, purity, and human exceptionalism. Dehumanization is only effective if people buy into the notion that beings and groups have fixed, unchanging essences, that purity is attainable, and that humans are superior to animals and other life forms. The last of these is especially important even though it has

largely been overlooked in genocide and dehumanization scholarship. If dehumanization is necessary for genocide and if dehumanization relies on these metaphysical principles, then it follows that genocide also functions according to the same metaphysics. If this is the case, then preventing dehumanization and genocide would require a reassessment of the validity of these principles and perhaps a reorientation toward reality that would let go of the underlying desires for unity and sameness that exist behind these metaphysical principles.

If dehumanization is a necessary condition of and central to the practice of genocide, then developing methods of preventing dehumanization should be part of the effort to prevent genocide. Developing a method for validating, restoring, enhancing, and/or preserving human dignity has been an ongoing goal of ethics from Plato to the present. In chapter five I argue that this goal needs to be evaluated in light of the metaphysics of dehumanization and dehumanization's role in genocide. Through a feminist critique of four philosophical arguments for rehumanizing the dehumanized, I argue that countering dehumanization means developing a nonhumanist ethics that respects and values difference and relationships rather than ethics that relies on sameness and the purity of the human.

Though it could be argued that preventing dehumanization is the underlying task of all ethics, the works I have selected to analyze were written in response to the dehumanizing effects of genocide and colonial oppression. The authors I examine are Bartolomé de Las Casas, Immanuel Levinas, and Rhianna Oelefson. Las Casas' work provides a more historical perspective on how genocides early in the modern era were responded to. His reliance on Aristotle and Catholic theology presents an approach to

rehumanization that is not shared by the other authors. In Levinas' work, which is largely a response to the horrors of the Holocaust, we get a picture of rehumanization that builds on and deviates from Kant as well as incorporating strains of Jewish philosophy and ethics. Finally, Oeelfson is a contemporary philosopher whose work engages with recent genocide and dehumanization studies, providing a window into how scholars in that field are addressing the issue of dehumanization. I conclude the chapter, by turning to the work of Ann Cahill and Kelly Oliver and the frameworks they lay out for taking steps towards an ethics of difference and relationality.

Just as rehumanization is often considered the proper ethical response to dehumanization, advocating human rights is often the primary political and ideological response to the dehumanization wrought by genocide. In chapter six I argue that current efforts to prevent genocide do not address the metaphysical and logical problems of genocide. In particular, human rights and rehumanization actually reproduce the very logics that make genocidal thinking possible. This chapter lays out and critiques the dominant paradigm for generating discussions of genocide prevention—human rights. Non-foundationalist arguments in favor of human rights typically hold that human rights are not based on metaphysical principles, but on history, the needs of the times, and other contingent factors. I respond to three such arguments by showing how even in supposedly non-foundationalist discourses, the metaphysics of essentialism, purity, and human exceptionalism are still at work. This becomes evident when the notion of the “human” in human rights is interrogated. In addition to this, I call attention again to the way in which nonhuman animals are used in this schema, showing that expanding rights to nonhuman animals will also be insufficient for addressing the metaphysical problem and how the

human rights approach conveniently turns its back on the regular and sustained violence directed at billions of nonhuman animals every year by human animals.

The consequences of the exclusion of animals from the discussion of genocide appear clearly when we turn to an examination of ecocide and genocide in the context of genocide of Indigenous peoples. In chapter seven I argue that from the perspective of Native American metaphysics, ecocide—the destruction of the environment, nonhuman animals, and land—and genocide are not separate phenomena but two aspects of the same thing. Drawing on three metaphysical principles—diversity, relationality, and liveliness—I argue that the extermination of nonhuman animals is genocide not simply because it harms the humans who depend on those nonhuman animals for their own livelihood, but because nonhuman animals (and other aspects of nonhuman nature like land and water) are considered kin and independent nations of their own with their own agency and purposiveness. The worldview presented in indigenous cosmologies calls for a thorough and meaningful assessment of the viability of Western metaphysics.

In the concluding chapter of my dissertation I consider the consequences of taking seriously Indigenous metaphysics as providing foundations for a world in which modern dehumanization and genocide are unthinkable. Through an analysis of two Native American creation stories, I argue that if an Indigenous cosmology more accurately reflects the state of reality then the consequence is that humans need to radically reorient themselves toward different kinds of relationships with nonhuman animals and nature than what is called for by the current dominant paradigm. Through Native philosophies and stories I cash out the promise of the ethics of difference and relationality sought for

by philosophers like Cahill and Oliver by drawing on Native American principles of recognition, reciprocity, consent, and respect.

CHAPTER II DEFINING GENOCIDE

The first step to figuring out how genocide works and developing ways to prevent it is to define the problem we want to understand and solve. This dissertation does not aim to engage in debates about the legal aspects of genocide; rather, given current definitions, I want to investigate and unveil some of the philosophical, especially metaphysical and logical, mechanisms of genocide as an activity in order to develop a theory of genocide and genocidal dehumanization. As Erik Schneiderhan points out, “The legal definition of genocide—created for the purposes of criminal prosecution and of guiding states considering interventions—does not necessarily provide a good point of departure for social scientists” or for philosophers because doing so may mean beginning a discussion with certain assumptions about issues like agency and social action already in place.⁷ I aim to bracket these assumptions in order to think outside the definitional construction of genocide for the purpose of developing awareness about broader and more general patterns and principles that ground and enable genocidal violence. However, a theory of genocide cannot be constructed without careful consideration of the definition of genocide, some of the conversations around that definition, and the consequences of these discussions on the development of preventative methods and practices. One of my concerns regarding current literature on genocide prevention is that by building off the legal definition, scholars and politicians are more likely to focus on short-term, “practical” solutions rather than on bigger-picture, long-term solutions that would depend on theories that can help identify some of the common principles of genocide. In other words, current genocide scholarship takes for granted the assumptions

⁷ Schneiderhan, “Genocide Reconsidered,” 284.

that Schneiderhan worries about without examining those assumptions or tracing where they come from, which in turn, artificially limits the ways we can think about genocide and prevention and obscures some of the deeper foundations of genocidal thought and action. In looking at the history of the definitional debate, I hope to shed light on some of these assumptions as a way of directing attention toward the ontological and logical principles of genocide. In taking a metaphysical turn, we will be able to more accurately assess whether or not current efforts at genocide prevention will actually achieve their goals.

In this chapter I consider the scope and limits of two definitions of genocide, then examine some of the current conversations about some of the most commonly debated characteristics of genocide: the nature of groups, the nature of intent, types of acts, scope, and the nature of modern genocide. Through this review I provide a groundwork for explaining genocidal thought from a metaphysical standpoint.

I. Two Definitions of Genocide

Since Raphael Lemkin first coined the term genocide in 1944, the definition has been fraught. Scholars have engaged in an ongoing debate about the meaning of genocide, its particular characteristics as a crime, and the moral harms it causes that distinguish it from other crimes against humanity. In its first iteration, the term genocide (*genos*- meaning race or tribe and *-cide* meaning killing) was defined by Lemkin as “the destruction of a nation or of an ethnic group...Generally speaking, genocide does not necessarily mean the immediate destruction of a nation. It is intended rather to signify a coordinated plan of different actions aiming at the destruction of essential foundations of

the life of national groups, with the aim of annihilating the groups themselves.”⁸ For Lemkin, annihilation of a group does not necessarily mean killing members of the group. Annihilation can include the dissolution of political and social institutions, cultures, languages, and religions. It can also extend to the destruction of the economic means of a group as well as their personal dignity, health, liberty, and security.⁹ Even though genocidal acts are directed toward individuals, they are carried out insofar as the individuals are members of a particular national or ethnic group. Lemkin takes care to specify that genocide involves a biological element to the crime (the physical destruction of the victim group), that the oppressor imposes its national pattern on the oppressed group, and that the crime involves more than just stripping citizenship and rights from the oppressed. According to Lemkin, the particular harm caused by genocide is the loss of a nation’s contributions to human civilization, which are necessary for the continued development of the world community. Genocide represents the opposite of civilization insofar as it demonstrates a lack of respect and appreciation for the contributions made by various nations to world culture and “offends our feelings of moral justice.”¹⁰

In 1948 the United Nations recognized and codified genocide as an international crime against humanity. According to the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, the legal definition of genocide states:

Genocide means any of the following acts committed with the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group as such:

- a) killing members of the group
- b) causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group

⁸ Lemkin, *Axis Rule*, 79.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 91.

- c) deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part
- d) imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group
- e) forcibly transferring children of the group to another group¹¹

Notably, the definition settled on by the UN is much narrower than Lemkin's original definition. In Lemkin's formulation genocidal acts include endangering the health of the victims by refusing to provide them with medical care, the destruction of cultural and historical artifacts and buildings such as religious centers, the imposition of new political parties, and the exclusion of the victims from politics. Unlike Lemkin's definition, the UN emphasizes the intention of the perpetrator as a primary aspect of genocide. It also focuses heavily on the biological aspects of genocide with little consideration for how acts of cultural destruction like prohibiting members of a national or ethnic group from speaking their language might contribute to the destruction of the group as such.

Lemkin's definition also provides descriptions of the crimes and, in some cases, explanations of how these acts contributed to the destruction of a national or ethnic group. Until the drafting of the 1998 Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court and Elements of Crimes, the nature of the acts listed above remained vague. Though the text of the Rome Statute has not been added to the UN articles, the descriptions of the acts in the "Elements of Crimes" document serve to provide more specific guidance for lawyers on how to interpret when an act can or should be considered genocide. For example, in regards to (a), the Rome Statute specifies that "[t]he perpetrator killed one or more persons. Such person or persons belonged to a specific national, ethnical, racial or religious group. The perpetrator intended to destroy, in whole or in part, that national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such. The conduct took place in the context of a

¹¹ UNGA, Convention on Prevention of Genocide.

manifest pattern of similar conduct directed against that group or was conduct that itself effects such destruction.”¹² In the elaboration on the elements of crimes, the Rome Statute establishes scope (one or more persons must be affected), reinforces the importance of intent, and contextualizes the violence in relation to a larger pattern of activity directed at destroying a group as such.

Even though the UN definition remains the current legal definition of genocide, scholars have continued to debate its efficacy. Four main areas of contention include which groups can be victims, the role of perpetrator intent, the types of acts that count as genocide, and how thorough or successful those acts must be to constitute genocide. In addition to these, there has also been some discussion about the history of genocidal violence. While some scholars argue that genocidal violence is “normal” in that examples of such episodes can be found throughout the world at many points in human history, other researchers contend that genocide as we currently define it is a relatively new phenomenon within human history that can be tied to the rise of race-thinking and the modern nation-state. I will review some aspects of these debates here as they pertain to an analysis of genocidal dehumanization to explain why I adopt an expansive conception of genocide that is limited to the “modern era” in developing a theory of genocide.

II. Groups

In order to understand how genocidal dehumanization works and how it is a product of particular metaphysical commitments, we must look more closely at how genocide perpetrates violence against groups. What distinguishes genocide from other

¹² ICC, Rome Statute.

crimes against humanity like persecution is that the victims of genocide are individuals qua their membership in a particular group and groups themselves. However, not just any group can be the target of genocide. The UN definition states, “Genocide means any of the following acts committed with the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group as such.” This sentence has provoked a slew of questions including whether or not the groups listed in the definition are too narrow or too vague, if perpetrator and victim groups exist objectively or subjectively, whether or not groups can be harmed or only the individuals who compose them, and how to interpret “as such.”

While Lemkin’s definition of genocide focuses primarily on national groups, the UN definition expands this slightly without making a radical break from Lemkin’s original idea by including ethnic, racial, and religious groups. Many efforts have been made to clarify what these groups mean. One such effort was during the trial of Jean-Paul Akayesu by the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR). The court defined the four groups in the following ways. A national group is considered “a collection of people who are perceived to share a common legal bond based on common citizenship, coupled with reciprocity of rights and duties.”¹³ In other words, a national group consists of people who have legal membership in a sovereign state. Ethnic groups refer to individuals who share common language, ancestry, and culture including values, beliefs, and traditions that have developed over time.¹⁴ Racial groups refer to people who share at least some common hereditary physical characteristics that are identifiable enough to single out members for persecution. Finally, members of religious groups share religious

¹³ ICTR, *Akayesu*, para. 514.

¹⁴ Verdeja, “Debating Definitions,” 28.

beliefs, doctrines, and practices. Even though the ICTR provides greater detail about whom or what constitutes these groups, scholars have been quick to point out some limitations to these definitions. For instance, Ernesto Verdeja argues that ethnic and racial groups are particularly difficult to define because they are unstable. He points out that “ethnic identity changes over time as members emphasize certain aspects of shared identity while downplaying others” and that “core elements are always open to contestation.”¹⁵ In regard to racial identity, Verdeja notes that race is not an objective biological attribute but a “highly socialized identity, interpreted through the particular historical and political frames of reference that operate in society.”¹⁶ Because all of these groups are unstable and subject to change, identifying them and their members always involves some element of subjectivity.

In addition to the problems with defining these groups, for many scholars, this list seems arbitrarily limited, leaving out significant groups of people who have or may experience harm in the form of the acts listed in the convention. These might include economic, social, and political groups. In response, some scholars have coined new terms for describing acts of destructive violence against these groups such as Barbara Harff’s and Ted Robert Gurr’s term “politicide.” According to Harff and Gurr, politicide occurs when governments target victim groups based on “their hierarchical position or political opposition to the regime and dominant groups.”¹⁷ For these authors, both genocide and politicide are acts carried out by the state or agents of the state for the purpose of eliminating a threat to the state or dominant group’s power. Other authors like Larry May

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Harff, “Genocides and Politicides,” 360.

argue that the definition of genocide should be reworded to include clearer criteria for determining how groups are determined and to include any groups that meet those criteria beyond the original four. Unlike Harff and Gurr who suggest that the perpetrator defines the victim group, for May, groups must have some kind of “objective” existence—groups cannot be determined subjectively by the group members or those outside the group alone. Rather, both sets of people need to recognize that certain individuals constitute or make up a group. May calls this the “publicity condition.” May defines the publicity condition as “a test for whether there is consensus of sorts in the society about the naming of a collection of individual people as a group.”¹⁸ For May, the publicity condition helps to establish that the group being harmed is a real group rather than an arbitrary collection of persons. Unlike Sartre who argued in *Anti-Semite and Jew* that anti-Semites make Jews, May does not think the perpetrator can be solely responsible for naming or creating a group because doing so without some acknowledgment of a common identity between group members means that no group exists.¹⁹ If the people being targeted for membership in the group do not recognize their own group identity as significant or meaningful then their membership in the group and the violence enacted against them becomes arbitrary and does not fit the definition of genocide. On the other hand, if a collection of individuals refers to themselves as a group but neither seeks nor receives acknowledgment of group membership by the out-group then they also cannot be the recipients of genocidal violence because as far as non-members are concerned the group does not exist and thus cannot be targeted for genocide. To be a group that can be targeted for genocide the following conditions must be met: (1) the group must consist of

¹⁸ May, *Genocide*, 47.

¹⁹ Sartre, *Anti-Semite and Jew*.

“individual human persons, (2) related to each other by organizational structure, solidarity, or common interests, and (3) [be] identifiable, to the members, and to those who observe the members, by characteristic features.”²⁰ Thus, the publicity condition ensures that a group exists both subjectively (in the minds of the members) and objectively (in the world for non-members).²¹ Consequently, for May, this means that all sorts of groups beyond the four listed in the UN definition could potentially be victims of genocide.

However, other authors have contended that expanding the scope of the groups covered risks diluting the horror of the crime of genocide. Like May, William A. Schabas argues that the victim groups must have some objective existence beyond the subjective determination of the perpetrator because legally the offender cannot define the crime.²² However, unlike May, Schabas contends that the four listed groups are sufficient and appropriate for the crime of genocide. Furthermore, he argues that these four categories were not meant to be read separately from each other; rather, the four terms listed in the Convention work together to create a holistic view of which persons and groups can be the target of genocide.²³ Drawing on Lemkin’s definition, Schabas claims that the intent of the Convention is to call attention to violence aimed at minority groups within a society. For him, even though when taken individually the four group types appear vague,

²⁰ Ibid., 50.

²¹ Though May’s criteria may seem appealing and reasonable, the publicity condition is not sufficient for determining the reality of a group because perpetrators of genocide (the out-group) may fail (deliberately or otherwise) to recognize the existence of a group that wants to be recognized as such. In this respect, the failure to recognize the group may constitute genocide.

²² Schabas, *Genocide*, 111.

²³ Ibid., 110.

together they exist “in a dynamic and synergistic relationship, each contributing to the construction of the other.”²⁴ For Schabas, other types of groups like political parties, genders, or people with disabilities do not speak to the national, cultural, or ethnical aspects of human life. They are not necessarily minorities, they can cross national and cultural identities, and they do not necessarily contribute to a shared sense of cultural or national identity among those persons who may be categorized by those labels. This does not mean that groups like political parties or people with disabilities could not experience oppression, dehumanization, or violence, but that the violence directed toward these groups would not be genocidal.

While these conversations call attention to some important ambiguities in the definition of genocide, their narrow focus on dissecting the definition for legal purposes has led some scholars to overlook some important theoretical aspects of genocide that affect how we should understand which groups should be protected and how those groups are determined. The most significant aspect is the “dichotomous social reality of genocide.”²⁵ According to Thomas Kühne, there are two sides to genocidal violence: 1) hatred of the other and the construction of an alien “them” and 2) love for oneself and one’s community, which leads to the construction of a virtuous “us.” Theoretically, genocide could be carried out by one individual, but given the various activities, scope, and time involved in existing examples of genocide, the crime typically requires groups of people acting in various levels of coordination to carry out the goal of destruction. The genocides of the Jews, Tutsis, and Bosnians all involved the participation of their former community leaders, members, and neighbors. In these cases, especially in Nazi Germany,

²⁴ Ibid., 112.

²⁵ Kühne, *Belonging and Genocide*, 78.

genocide did not just destroy communities, it also built them. As Kühne explains, “No community, no unity exists without the ‘other’: those who do not belong, who really or supposedly threaten the community either physically or just by looking different, by pursuing different ways of life, by harboring different experiences and visions—thus by challenging the identity of those who belong. If there is no enemy, one has to be invented.”²⁶ Kühne notes that for complex multicultural societies, achieving unity was more difficult and often meant eradicating an “enemy” that already exists within or alongside the larger community. In this respect both objective factors (i.e. differences in religious customs) and subjective factors (i.e. ideologies of racial purity) can augment one another in the determination of which group(s) will be targeted for exclusion and which members of a society belong to that group. Take, for example, the delimitation of the group called “Jews” by the Nazis. While there were some objective differences such as religious customs, traditional foods, and some physical traits that distinguished people of Jewish descent from people of German descent, the rules for who belonged in the group “Jewish” under the Nazi regime were largely invented, arbitrary, and applied regardless of an individual’s own feelings of identity toward that group. New myths, stories, and theories were invented by the Nazis to help isolate the Jews and enhance their alien-ness. In this respect the perpetrator’s actions honed in on already existing but otherwise harmless differences, exacerbating them and turning them into something more concrete and “real” than the actual differences signified.

In genocide, the us/them narrative can only be sustained as long as the victim group remains the same. In this respect groups targeted for genocide need to be perceived by the perpetrators as ontologically fixed or tied to an inherent, static nature. Unlike some

²⁶ Ibid., 37.

other types of groups such as political or economic groups, the four groups protected by the UN convention are groups into which individuals are born. Human agency, from the perspective of a liberal society, would suggest that individuals can voluntarily come and go from all of these groups, perhaps with the exception of racial groups. However, the connection between national, ethnical, religious, and racial groups to birth, ancestry, and human origins cannot be dismissed so quickly. Whether there is any biological truth to it or not, these groups are frequently associated with myths about human origins. Members of the group called Christian, for example, accept that they are created by God, in His image. In affirming this story, they also affirm a particular metaphysics for ordering the world and a particular notion of human nature. In genocide, the implications of the different origin myths that may exist within a given society are taken to a violent extreme as the victim group is defined based on some natural, biological, or essential component shared by all members that can be traced to the group's origins. This element remains the same through time, space, personal choice, changes in political, economic, and social affiliation or status. As philosopher Berel Lang explains, for the targeted individuals, "[n]o personal deed, accomplishment, or possession is at issue; the persons who comprise the group can do nothing, short of revising their biological history, to alter the genocidal intention...Genocide singles them out on the basis of their association with a group quite aside from any choices they have made and indeed aside from any individual characteristics other than the allegedly biological feature(s) that identifies them with the group."²⁷ In marking the out-group as naturally and biologically other, the perpetrators also reify their own genetic uniqueness and superiority. Maintaining and protecting that genetic purity can then become a motive for carrying out genocidal policies.

²⁷ Lang, "Concept of Genocide," 9.

Depending on the goals of the oppressors, this natural difference can be defined in different ways. For example, according to the Nuremberg Laws, a person was considered Jewish if she had three or four Jewish grandparents. Jewish ancestry of a lesser degree resulted in the individual being labeled a *Mischlinge*, a designation that had the potential to save a person from losing their German citizenship depending on the local law enforcers. Or, to take a related example, in the US white slave owners determined that “one drop” of African blood made a person black while the same white settlers determined that one drop of non-Indian blood made a person white rather than Native American.²⁸ In all of these cases, these determinations were made regardless of the person’s physical features, nationality, ethnicity, or religious practices. Membership in the group was not necessarily something that could be observed by outsiders or felt by those grouped into the categories. Rather, in these cases, the oppressors are marking an ontological difference, a difference in essences between themselves and the oppressed. Because the perpetrators are targeting groups for genocide using perceived innate metaphysical differences as markers, the list of groups that can be victims will not necessarily include other types of groups like political and economic groups. A political group like communists or the Tea Party cannot be targeted for genocide because there is nothing biologically inherent or fixed about the qualities that the members of the group share. When political groups have been targeted it is generally because, as in the case of the communists in Nazi Germany, those political beliefs have been associated with a targeted racial, ethnic, national, or religious group.

As we will see in chapters three and four, the process that delineates differences between groups in genocide is the same process that occurs in genocidal dehumanization.

²⁸ Hannaford, *Race*.

In dehumanization, the logic of the us/them dichotomy and the metaphysics of essences are mapped onto the concepts of and boundaries between “human” and “animal.” We will see how together the us/them dichotomy, essentialism, and the perceived biological and ontological inferiority of animals and other nonhumans enables genocidal dehumanization, which becomes a core component for carrying out genocide. When it comes to genocide prevention, the emphasis should not necessarily be strictly limiting which groups can be targeted, but rather should focus more on why and how groups get targeted, with an eye to the establishment of an us/them dichotomy, which depends on the essentialism of members’ group identity.

III. Intent

The UN definition of genocide consists of two parts: a *mens rea* (mental element) and *actus rea* (physical element). The former involves the intent of the perpetrator. To understand what intent means in the definition of genocide, two distinctions must be made. First, there is the distinction between knowledge and intent. According to the Rome Statute, the mental element of genocide consists of knowledge and intent.²⁹ As Schabas explains, to say that the perpetrator has knowledge means that she was aware of the circumstances of the crime or the plan to commit the crime.³⁰ The emphasis on knowledge takes into account the fact that genocide typically takes place through collective action, usually organized by the state or some group with significant power within the state rather than by individuals. Knowledge also implies the existence of a plan

²⁹ ICC, Rome Statute.

³⁰ Schabas, *Genocide*, 207.

for genocide. Intent implies that the action was not accidental or committed in ignorance. However, in the case of genocide, what counts as intent is quite specific. Intending to cause harm to someone or some group is not enough; rather the intent must be directed at *destroying* certain types of groups (national, ethnical, racial, and religious) *as such*.

This brings us to the second distinction: motive and intent. Put succinctly, a motive is one's reason for doing something while the intent or intention is that at which one aims. According to Schabas the writers of the UN Convention included the words "as such" as a way of trying to capture the motive of the perpetrators.³¹ May speculates that as motive "as such" would mean that the only reason to intend to destroy the group was that the defendant hated the group and wanted the group destroyed."³² May argues that trying to ascribe motive to individuals who participate in genocide will not be particularly productive because "motives sometimes compel us and are not necessarily chosen; whereas aims are indeed things that people choose."³³ Making these distinctions between knowledge, motive, and intent can facilitate prosecution of genocide in a court of law.

Many scholars agree that intent serves an important role in establishing whether or not certain acts constitute genocide. As Alex Alvarez explains, "...perhaps the most important element of this definition concerns the component of intent. This means that the crime of genocide must evidence purposive behavior. It has to be planned and deliberate. This is a basic principle of Western criminal law. For something to constitute a crime, behavior must be intended; it cannot be accidental or unwilling."³⁴ Harff

³¹ Ibid., 245.

³² May, *Genocide*, 143.

³³ Ibid., 141.

³⁴ Alvarez, *Native America*, 28.

concurr, arguing that establishing intent makes it possible to distinguish genocide from similar phenomena, to detect early warning signs, and to develop plans for genocide prevention.³⁵ For both of these authors, the importance of establishing intent has specific practical outcomes like the ability to try someone in court or to determine when international intervention might be necessary in a potentially genocidal situation. Yet, there are some ambiguities about what counts as genocidal intent. Elaborating on the legal definition of genocide, Schabas points out various possibilities for interpreting intent and how intent might be followed through. He notes that it is unclear as to whether “the destruction that is part of the intent...must correspond to the physical or biological destruction defined.”³⁶ For example, in settler colonialism the colonial state may intend to destroy the native population by removing aboriginals from their land, limiting their ability to practice their cultural traditions, and enforcing economic sanctions against them. If, during these processes, members of the victim group were incidentally killed, then a case could be made that these deaths constituted genocide even though the state did not plan to destroy the group by killing its members. Thus, genocidal intent could be determined after the fact based on the particular policies used against a given group.

Even though intent is one of the distinguishing features of the definition of genocide, some scholars argue that when it comes to developing a theory about genocide, the notion of intent does not always capture the way in which genocide unfolds. Schneiderhan points out that social scientists studying genocide often take a teleological approach to intent. In this framing of intent, “the actor (person, group, state) is depicted as setting a goal (the end), figuring out the best way to get there (the means), and then

³⁵ Harff, “No Lessons Learned,” 59.

³⁶ Schabas, *Genocide*, 229.

doing it (the action).”³⁷ Drawing on the work of pragmatist thinkers like John Dewey, Mary Parker Follett, and C. Wright Mills, Schneiderhan advocates that scholars adopt a more processual approach to genocidal intent and action that takes into account contingency, varying motives, and changing circumstances. This would allow for a more nuanced understanding of how actors get involved in genocide, recognizing that intention may vary among agents and may be something that develops over time when particular situations manifest. In this respect, genocide may not be the original plan or intent of all of the actors involved, but may arise as a possibility for solving the perpetrator’s perceived problem depending on the context. For example, in nation *n* the people wish for an ethnically pure state. After a series of unsuccessful acts intended to get people of other ethnicities to leave or assimilate, the leaders of the nation decide that more extreme measures are necessary and implement a program of extermination. While some citizens knowingly and intentionally participate, others do so out of fear of repercussions or because of the material gains in store for them as a result. In this situation, the intention develops over time and arises due to particular circumstances, yet cannot get carried out perfectly due the different motives and aims of the individuals involved. Genocide is a group effort, but like all groups comprised of individuals, there is rarely clear uniformity of motive or intent among those individuals.

Verdeja points out that while establishing intent may prove necessary for prosecuting the crime of genocide, the intent requirement is too strict and narrow because it singles out individual intent rather than collective intent. Focusing too much on the legal definition of genocidal intent can have negative effects on the development of useful genocide prevention policy because policymakers do not have the time or

³⁷ Schneiderhan, “Genocide Reconsidered,” 283.

resources to establish intent as they need to “operate and make decisions in the present, when killings are ongoing and information on perpetrators’ purposes is difficult to decipher.”³⁸ Focusing too much on individual intent can also have the unforeseen impact of absolving certain participants of responsibility for their actions, especially if they do not directly participate in genocidal acts but stand to benefit significantly from them. For example, many white settlers in the United States took advantage of and benefited from laws such as the 1887 General Allotment Act, which forced Native Americans to privatize their land and sell off remaining plots to settlers. However, few of the settlers who moved onto that land would have acknowledged that they were doing violence to the Indigenous community whose land they were taking. Problems like these lead Verdeja to suggest that outside of a criminal tribunal, genocide scholars and prevention policymakers should focus more on the behavior of the perpetrators rather than in trying to establish their intention: “Barring clear orders or statements calling for extermination, we can infer an intentional plan to destroy a group to the extent that violence becomes more lethal, appears coordinated and sustained over time, and targets an increasingly wider proportion of the victim group.”³⁹ In other words, genocide prevention policies cannot be based solely on intent because establishing genocidal intent can be extremely difficult and because destroying a group as such may not be the primary motive of genocidal violence. Furthermore, focusing on individual intent makes efforts at restitution and repair of relationships after the fact much more difficult.

In addition to the concerns raised about intent by the above scholars, approaching genocide as a metaphysical problem leads to new problems with the notion of intent.

³⁸ Verdeja, “Debating Definitions,” 34.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 35.

While it may be convenient to take the position that acts of genocide emerge from the minds of deranged and/or evil individuals who then brainwash, coerce, blackmail, or otherwise force others to participate, if there is an underlying metaphysics at work in genocidal thought and practice then responsibility for genocide does not rest solely on the shoulders of a single mastermind, but also on the principles which ground the particular cultural values of the perpetrator group. This suggests that changing individuals will not ever truly eliminate the potential for genocide—rather the principles that ground and justify behaviors that lead to genocide need to be altered.

This does not mean that an examination of intent is useless for developing a theory of genocide or for thinking about genocide prevention. Examining documented intent from past genocides may help us to determine particular patterns in genocidal violence that can lead to the development of new prevention methods capable of halting even the potential for genocide. Analyzing intent can also make us aware of some of the shortcomings of liberal Western ethics, which frequently attempts to pin blame on individuals rather than look at the collective, relational aspects of ethics and responsibility. This dissertation treats intent as something useful in this capacity with the understanding that there may never be clear intent documented by perpetrators. Because of this, following Verdeja's lead, I will give more weight to the actions and behaviors of the perpetrators rather than to the *mens rea* component of the definition.

IV. Acts and Scope

The second part of the UN definition consists of the *actus rea*, the acts of genocide. In *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe*, Lemkin describes a much broader range of

actions than the UN definition. He states that genocide aims at the destruction of the “essential foundations of the life of national groups.” This includes mass murder, forced assimilation due to the “imposition of the national pattern of the oppressor” via the dissolution of the occupied peoples’ political parties and the establishment of those belonging to the oppressor, the disruption of religious life, and the creation of an atmosphere of moral debasement among the targeted group. The UN definition, on the other hand, limits the actions of genocide to physical and biological harms, excluding acts that disrupt the cultural wellbeing of a community and the members’ quality of life. Thus, factors that may indirectly lead to the demise of a group such as forced relocation or environmental destruction are not considered crimes of genocide though they may be treated as other types of crimes against humanity. Causing mental harm to members of a group is the only potentially nonphysical act of violence listed, but the convention leaves the meaning of “mental harm” open to interpretation.

According to Schabas, the UN opted to leave acts of cultural genocide out of the official definition because the member nations found that acts of cultural destruction were too broadly construed and that without a specific, precise, and restricted list of acts, genocide could be interpreted differently by different countries.⁴⁰ Lang states that there is good reason to focus on acts of biological and physical destruction over cultural destruction: “Where life itself remains, as in cultural genocide or ethnocide, there remains always the possibility of individual and then group revival—but this is surely not the case with physical extermination.”⁴¹ By restricting the acts of genocide to the physical and

⁴⁰ Schabas, *Genocide*, 153.

⁴¹ Lang, “Concept of Genocide,” 8.

biological, genocide can be defined in its “least ambiguous form.”⁴² Though the list of genocidal acts is quite narrow, some scholars like Joseph P. Gone would prefer to limit it further still to help bring the legal definition more in line with popular understandings of genocide. According to Gone, an act should only be deemed genocide if it involves mass killing. By restricting genocide in this way, Gone believes that this will ensure genocide is understood as the crime of crimes.⁴³

Gone, however, tends to be an exception among genocide scholars who generally argue that the definition is too narrow and should include other acts that could lead to a group’s destruction. These acts include ethnic cleansing (the removal of people from their homeland or place of residence), cultural genocide or ethnocide (destruction of cultural traditions and institutions), gendercide (singling out a sex/gender for destruction), ecocide (environmental destruction), urbanicide (destruction of cityscapes and urban life), and mass rape. May argues that the above acts should be considered genocide as long as they display sufficient evidence of intent to destroy a group. For example, if the purpose of removing a population from their homeland or nation is part of a project of destroying a group, then ethnic cleansing should be considered an act of genocide. Similarly, Debra Bergoffen argues that mass rape should be considered an act of genocide because of the way it humiliates members of a group, disrupting family life, potentially leading to the public shaming and exile of the victims, thereby destroying communities.⁴⁴ Both May and Bergoffen interpret “destroy, in whole or in part” broadly to include nonphysical means of destruction.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Gone, “Colonial Genocide.”

⁴⁴ Bergoffen, *Contesting the Politics*.

Other scholars like Gary Clayton Anderson advocate adhering to a strict interpretation of the UN definition when evaluating whether or not episodes of mass violence are genocidal. Anderson argues that the colonization of North America involved ethnic cleansing rather than genocide because the US and Canadian governments did not make a concerted, organized effort to annihilate the indigenous peoples or engage in widespread mass killing. Like Gone, Anderson argues that applying the term genocide to the actions of the US government toward Native Americans “does much to demean the meaning of the term and obscures rather than clarifies how we should view many (probably most) actions toward American Indians.”⁴⁵ Anderson and others seem to limit legitimate acts of genocide to paradigmatic cases of genocide like the Holocaust, arguing that without systematic killing and death camps, violence of one group against another should not be thought of as genocide.

As these last examples show, debates about which acts constitute genocide are typically bound up with issues of scope. According to the UN definition, genocide involves the intent to destroy a group in whole or in *part*. The Rome Statute elaborates further, stating that the elements of each act involve bringing death or harm to one or more persons.⁴⁶ Genocide is a rare crime where not succeeding (failing to destroy the group) can still result in the perpetrator’s conviction. This has led to confusion over how many people in a group need to be killed, sterilized, kidnapped (if children), or suffer serious bodily harm; how many people need to carry out these atrocities; and how organized and intentional the acts must be. As we saw with Anderson and Gone, some scholars argue that the acts must be deliberate, organized and systematic, carried out by a

⁴⁵ Anderson, *Ethnic Cleansing*, 13.

⁴⁶ ICC, Rome Statute.

government or other authoritative power, and take the lives of large numbers of people. Other authors like May and Verdeja hold that genocide involves patterns of behavior that may or may not be systematically organized, but that when taken together reveal a clear cohesion around the task of destroying a group. As long as some form of intent to destroy a group exists, acts outside the scope of the definition should be included. However, they also seem to agree that for an act to be considered genocide more than one person of the victim group must be harmed.

For practical legal purposes the definition of genocide may need to consist primarily of physical and biological acts of destruction and may need to distinguish between acts that directly destroy a group such as mass killing or sterilization and those that indirectly destroy a group like ecocide. It may also need to clearly show, especially in the case of individual deaths, that the acts were carried out within the context of other similar acts, such that the scope of genocide must be pervasive rather than an isolated hate crime. Or, perhaps critics of the definition are right that the definition needs some revisions. Many of the debates outlined above take place in relation to the legal efficacy or legal application of the UN Convention. For many writers, the definitional debates highlight what is at stake in claiming that a crime is genocide insofar as such a crime can be brought to court and the perpetrators tried and convicted. However, this dissertation leaves legal questions aside, instead focusing on the ontology and of genocide and the logic of genocidal thought and activity.

Thus, from the perspective of this thesis, I will use the term “genocide” in a way that more closely aligns with the historical definition presented by Lemkin, so that it includes acts like ethnic cleansing, social death, and colonial genocide. Genocide, here,

will refer to acts done that aim at eliminating a group insofar as the acts are part of a pattern of similar acts and behaviors on behalf of one group against another, through which the members of the victim group are categorized by an inherent, essential nature. In this respect, I recognize the need to give genocide a strict definition while acknowledging the ambiguity of intent and that the destruction of groups and their members may not always involve direct physical or biological violence. This does not mean, however, that I will not at times raise questions about the efficacy of the current legal definition of genocide, especially in chapter seven where I deal with the topic of ecocide.

V. Racism, Biology, and Modern Genocide

Given the consideration of the above characteristics of genocide, one last question needs to be addressed: which episodes of mass violence in human history fall under the label “genocide?” According to some scholars, genocide has occurred among humans for as far back as we have historical records.⁴⁷ Others argue that genocide is a more recent development that is characteristic of the twentieth century.⁴⁸ There are definitive implications that arise based on where one stands on this point, especially when it comes to considering whether or not genocide is a problem that can be prevented and what types of factors contribute to genocidal activities. The time period in which genocides started occurring might also say something about the ideological and metaphysical commitments of the era, or might be indicative of other large social, economic, and political changes occurring in the world or, in contrast, suggest that there is something stable about human

⁴⁷ Chiro, *Why Not Kill Them All?*; Kiernan, *Blood and Soil*; Naimark, *Genocide*.

⁴⁸ Bauman, *Modernity*.

psychology and behavior that makes humans prone to genocidal violence. Such deliberations also raise questions about which episodes of mass violence count as genocide and whether or not the countries in which these events took place are responsible for reparations or other forms of restitution.

In this dissertation I am predominantly concerned with the relationship between genocide and “modernity.” Though we can identify episodes of mass violence occurring thousands of years ago, I argue along with scholars like Rowan Savage, Zygmunt Bauman, and Hannah Arendt, that genocide as we know it today is influenced by values that are rooted in Europe’s colonial and imperial past, which further developed in the context of the European Enlightenment and subsequent eras. In particular, I am concerned with the concept of “the human” which was operative during this time and since and how it came to be used in genocidal episodes and later in facilitating genocide prevention. I argue along with many other scholars, that race-thinking, the racialization of human groups, and racism has an important ideological role to play in modern genocides that did not factor into instances of mass killing prior to the colonization of the Americas.⁴⁹ Racism, humanism, and the natural sciences intersect in modern genocide. I argue that what makes race-thinking such an important aspect of colonial and modern genocide is that it organizes human groups according to “natural,” biological, and logical factors, creating a hierarchical relationship between humans, subhumans, animals, and other life forms.

Most genocide scholars will agree that though episodes of mass, and at times exterminatory, violence have occurred throughout human history, in the modern era, particularly the twentieth century, there is something distinctive about genocidal violence

⁴⁹ Arendt, *Origins of Totalitarianism.*; Kiernan, *Blood and Soil.*; Hannaford, *Race.*

that sets it apart from earlier examples.⁵⁰ Ben Kiernan and Robert Gellately claim that modern genocides are characterized by a change in scope, efficiency, and political power. Rather than massacres occurring in specific locations at certain times, modern genocide (especially in the twentieth century) often happens in the context of total war, targets whole populations, and may be a part of continental military strategy. Mass murder has also become more efficient through technological advances in production, heavy weaponry, communication, and transit, all of which allow perpetrators to coordinate and carry out genocidal violence quickly and systemically. Finally, in the modern era, this violence becomes state-sanctioned—a weapon of the state for conquest, territorial expansion, economic growth, and the elimination of undesirable or superfluous peoples. This is due to a shift in political power to totalitarian and bureaucratic regimes that highly control and regulate the trajectory of the nation while diffusing responsibility, action, and intent across institutional systems.

Zygmunt Bauman highlights this last point as integral to the practice of genocide in modernity. Following Theodore Adorno and Max Horkheimer’s line of argumentation in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Bauman claims that modernity is characterized by hyper-rationalization, bureaucratization, and instrumentalization, all of which serve modernity’s “modality of being”—“it’s endemic unfinishedness; by its orientation toward a state of affairs not yet in existence.”⁵¹ With the development of the modern sciences, rationality becomes the order of the day. As an unfinished project, modernity reflects a belief in continuous progress toward transcendence of the current state of affairs and of human

⁵⁰ Chiro, *Why Not Kill Them All?*; Kiernan, *Blood and Soil*; Levene, “Empires, Native Peoples.”; Weitz, “Modernity of Genocides.”

⁵¹ Bauman, *Modernity*, 229.

nature. This push toward future greatness is accompanied by an emphasis on rational thought that obliterates moral feeling. By diverting moral sentiment through rational argumentation, heinous acts appear necessary for the good of humankind. They become even more acceptable when within bureaucratic and instrumental frameworks that defuse responsibility for those actions and create a hierarchy of experts whose decrees are passed down the ranks to the people who ultimately carry out the acts of violence. Furthermore, the structure of bureaucracy and its expectations for its participants lead to a situation in which “moral concerns of the functionary are drawn back from focusing on the plight of the objects of action. They are forcefully shifted in another direction—the job to be done and the excellence with which it is performed.”⁵² To succeed in modern society, one must not question the morality of one’s actions; one must prove one’s capacity to follow orders with proficiency. The bureaucratic structure invites the instrumentalization and dehumanization of the group targeted for extermination by destroying the possibility of meaningful relationships through the production of social distance. Modern society makes it possible for “human action [to] be effective at a distance,” and “[w]ith the growth of distance, responsibility for the other shrivels.”⁵³ As these forces work in concert, it becomes easier and easier to justify the elimination of unwanted, “polluting,” and “degenerate” peoples in an effort to take humanity a step closer to its transcendent destiny.

The justification for dehumanization and instrumentalization of these latter categories of people is connected to another factor: race-thinking as the dominant ideology of the modern era. According to Ivan Hannaford in *Race: The History of an*

⁵² Ibid., 158.

⁵³ Ibid., 192-3.

Idea in the West, race-thinking is a relatively new development in Western society that coincided with a naturalistic and logical turn in accounting for human difference as well as the European encounter with new and unexpected human communities in the Americas and Africa. In trying to devise explanations for human difference according to nature, the philosophers, scientists, and privateers of the era, set the stage for the emergence of a fully-developed concept of race that would establish the “true” relationship between different human groups and humans and other animals.⁵⁴ Such concepts and frameworks would be put to use in new ways as the natural sciences such as anthropology, biology, and natural history developed. Prior to this period, however, the concept of race was absent from European thought. For example, Aristotle distinguishes between barbarians and non-barbarians in *Politics*.⁵⁵ The difference is not based on the race or ethnicity of the group, but according to their political life (or lack thereof). Humans could be barbarians or civilized—the difference came down to whether or not they lived according to nature like nonhuman animals or whether they were able to leave their private lives behind and enter the public, political realm. Almost two thousand years later, Bartolome de Las Casas would use Aristotle’s barbarian/civilized distinction to argue that the Indians in South America were not animals, but barbarians—humans who spoke a foreign tongue and did not participate in the best form of civilization (in this case, a Christian one).⁵⁶ In the latter years of the Roman Empire through the Middle Ages, race was still absent from European thought. From a Judeo-Christian perspective (and later an Islamic one), different groups of humans were believers, heretics, or infidels. Humans,

⁵⁴ Hannaford, *Race*, 183.

⁵⁵ Aristotle, “Politics.”

⁵⁶ Las Casas, *Defense of the Indians*.

regardless of how they looked or where they came from, were all believed to be descended from the same original ancestors, Adam and Eve. As Augustine states, “But whoever is anywhere born a man, that is, a rational mortal animal, no matter what unusual appearance he presents in color, movement, sound, not how particular he is in some power, part or quality of his nature, no Christian can doubt that he springs from one protoplast.”⁵⁷ Early Medieval scholars rationalized that the differences in human appearance and culture could be explained by tracing the history of those groups to the different sons of Noah and the fall of the Tower of Babel, which caused the variety of languages.

The concept of races and the notion that humans were perhaps not all of the same species began to emerge in the sixteenth century with the colonization of the Americas. Hannaford identifies several scholars as progenitors of race-thinking including Jean Bodin, François Hotman, and George Best, all of whom attempted to explain human difference and the origins of different groups of humans based on natural causes or natural laws. As a result, non-white peoples were “marked, not with an artificial badge and hideous raiment like the Jew, but with a natural badge of pigmentation understood to be caused by a natural infection brought about by an unnatural act...”⁵⁸ In other words, phenotypical differences were used to indicate supposedly congenital traits that visibly showed the inferiority of certain groups compared to others. In *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Hannah Arendt traces the development of race thinking and racism to the genocides of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries—but especially with the appearance of Darwinism—the concept of race

⁵⁷ Quoted in Hannaford, *Race*, 95.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 167.

becomes linked to both biology and the notion of progress, leading to the “convincing conclusion that man is related not only to man but to animal life, that the existence of lower races shows clearly that gradual differences alone separate man and beast and that a powerful struggle for existence dominates all living things.”⁵⁹ Not only were physical differences posited, but race thinking and biology were used to justify social differences. The shift toward using nature and biology to explain differences between humans allowed racists to ground their hierarchical vision of humanity in what appeared to be the objective laws of nature and fact. Humans were no longer made in the image of God, but were just another form of animal species. For Arendt, the danger of this obsession with group origins is that “no matter how exalted the claim for one’s own people, peoples are transformed into animal species so that a Russian appears as different from a German as a wolf is from a fox. A ‘divine people’ lives in a world in which it is the born persecutor of all other weaker species, or the born victim of all other stronger species. Only the rules of the animal kingdom can possibly apply to its political destinies.”⁶⁰

Though many of the characteristics discussed above are attributable to genocides of the nineteenth century and later, in this dissertation, I follow other scholars like A. Dirk Moses, Patrick Wolfe, and Lorenzo Veracini, in arguing that the genocides that accompanied the early stages of the conquest of the Americas exhibit a certain continuity with more contemporary genocides insofar as they share in the same archive of tropes, stereotypes, and imagery that appeared in Germany, Bosnia, and Cambodia.⁶¹

⁵⁹ Arendt, *Origins*, 178.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 234-5.

⁶¹ Veracini, “Colonialism and Genocides.”; Moses, “Empire, Colony, Genocide.”; Wolfe, “Settler Colonialism.”

Furthermore, it is during the early stages of the conquest that race-thinking began to emerge in Western thought. According to Anibal Quijano, modernity is characterized by the intersection of race and capital. Like Hannaford, Quijano argues that race-thinking and racism were inventions of the sixteenth century, spurred on by the encounters the colonially-enterprising Spanish had with the strange indigenous peoples of South America who defied their expectations in comportment, appearance, and social and political life to such an extent that they were deemed sub- or nonhuman species.⁶² In adopting a biological justification for who deserves moral consideration and who has the right to live, the relationship between human groups as well as the relationship between humans and other animals changed. Nature now dictated who was superior to whom, who had rights over whom, and who deserved to live and to die. The biological turn helped to explain human differences in terms of differences between species so that dehumanization, the belief that some humans are subhuman or nonhuman animals, became a biological “fact” and effective tool for demonstrating ontological and moral inferiority. In this respect modern genocides are characterized by an interest in the natural and biological differences between human groups and humans and other animals. Advances in technology, communication, and transportation were not the only changes that characterize modern genocide; racism and the application of the biological and natural sciences to political life made dehumanization a part of genocidal violence like never before.

VI. Conclusion

⁶² Quijano, “Coloniality of Power.”

Though the United Nations defines genocide narrowly as a set of physical acts directed intentionally toward an ethnic, racial, religious, or national group, I use the term genocide to refer to a wider range of eliminatory acts including ethnic cleansing, ecocide, and social death, which fall outside the purview of the UN's definition. In this way, I acknowledge the legal ambitions of the UN's definition, while also acknowledging the debates and concerns raised by other scholars regarding the limitations of that definition. In the following chapters, the metaphysics of genocide that I identify applies to this broader spectrum of violence.

Hints of this metaphysics already appear in the debates above. In the discussion of groups we can see how essentialism and purity inform the interpretation of the concept "group" and how these notions are used in the context of genocidal violence. Likewise, the role of racism and biology in modern genocide highlights the way in which dehumanization is bound up with practices of genocide. In seeing humans as one pole on a spectrum of animals, groups deemed unworthy of the name "human," were relegated to an inferior, less evolved position—the subhuman. Race-thinking made it possible for dehumanization to be more than metaphorical. From the standpoint of the dehumanizer, dehumanization was not taking place at all—the inferiority of non-white, non-European peoples was just a biological fact. In the next chapter I will explore in more depth the metaphysical principles that ground genocidal thinking through an analysis of the role of dehumanization in genocide. In all of the definitional debates of genocide outlined above, dehumanization has rarely been a factor. The next chapter explores how this neglect has been taken for granted even though it gives important clues to how modern genocide works and how we might prevent it.

CHAPTER III DEHUMANIZATION AND ITS ROLE IN GENOCIDE

In most genocide scholarship, dehumanization receives passing attention, as if merely noting its presence sufficiently addresses the subject. Dehumanization is frequently treated as an effect, byproduct, or description of the circumstances leading up to and occurring during genocide. This attitude toward dehumanization persists even though the phenomenon appears in every modern genocide in various ways. Sometimes dehumanization is given voice by perpetrators as in the Bosnian genocide where signs stating “No Muslims or Dogs Allowed” were posted in Sarajevo.⁶³ Other times the victims describe themselves as dehumanized like Jean Améry does in *At the Mind's Limits* as he tells about the *Muselmann*, the prisoner who had become just “a staggering corpse, a bundle of physical functions in its last convulsions.”⁶⁴

Dehumanization is considered so ubiquitous to genocide and the notion of an autonomous, dignified human subject is considered so normal, that most genocide scholars take the presence of dehumanization for granted and rarely analyze its role in the practice of genocidal violence. In fact, the problem of dehumanization more generally speaking has only recently begun to gain sustained attention. Currently social scientists including sociologists like Albert Bandura, Daniel Bar-Tal, and Rowan Savage and social psychologists like Nick Haslam have been producing the most research on the topic. Philosophers have been even later to the conversation, but books like David Livingstone Smith's *Less Than Human* and Kate Mann's *Down, Girl* are starting to take the topic more seriously. Yet, no matter how dehumanization is addressed, it is always considered,

⁶³ Haslam, “Dehumanization.”

⁶⁴ Améry, *Mind's Limits*, 9.

first and foremost, a problem for humans. The animal Other that represents the lack of humanity remains largely in the shadows.

As yet the role of dehumanization in genocide has not received enough attention. I argue that dehumanization is a necessary condition of genocide and that through an analysis of genocidal dehumanization, we can discern patterns in modern genocidal practice that reveal a metaphysics of genocide. In what follows I argue that dehumanization and genocide share a logic that can be traced to three key metaphysical principles: essentialism, purity, and human exceptionalism. As we saw in the previous chapter, according to the UN's definition of genocide, genocide requires *intent* to destroy a group as such—that is someone who deliberately chooses to carry out a project of elimination. This suggests that genocidal practice emerges from the mind of an evil individual or small group of individuals who then brainwash or coerce others to participate. As a result, for the most part, current literature on genocide and genocide prevention has focused on patterns of behavior in individuals and at state levels that might indicate immanent genocide or genocidal violence. But if there is an underlying metaphysics at work in genocidal thought and practice, then responsibility for genocide does not rest solely on the shoulders of a single mastermind, but also on the principles which ground the particular values of the perpetrator group. This suggests that changing individuals or their economic, political, or material circumstances will not ever truly eliminate the potential for genocide. Rather, the principles that ground and justify behaviors that lead to genocide need to be altered. As such, I argue that preventing dehumanization, which appears in every modern genocide, needs to be part of the effort to prevent genocide.

I. Defining Dehumanization

The adjective “dehumanizing” is used in all sorts of media to describe acts, behaviors, or language that are degrading to human life or dignity. Though the word “dehumanization” is frequently associated with genocide, slavery, sexism, capitalism, and other forms of oppression and violence, there are no consistently agreed upon definitions. Generally speaking to dehumanize means to treat another as less than human, but this definition comes with a surprising amount of conceptual cloudiness due in part to the fact that the term dehumanization often gets conflated with a number of other related concepts including objectification, instrumentalization, and derivatization. In addition to this, what is human or properly human so-called is not always immediately evident.

Social psychologist Nick Haslam attempts to clarify the concept of dehumanization by addressing that which dehumanization denigrates: humanness.⁶⁵ According to Haslam dehumanization involves either the denial of uniquely human characteristics or the denial of characteristics attributed to human nature. Uniquely human characteristics refer to properties that distinguish humans from other creatures.⁶⁶ They include refined emotions, higher-order cognition, imagination, moral sensibilities, and prosocial values. These characteristics reflect sociability and culture. When these characteristics are denied, dehumanization typically takes the form of animalization as these qualities are often perceived as absent in all other animal life.⁶⁷ Human nature characteristics are non-comparative properties that typically appear in humans and are

⁶⁵ Haslam, “Dehumanization.”

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 256.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 258.

associated with human nature but are not necessarily unique to humans.⁶⁸ When human nature characteristics, which reflect the continuity between humans and the natural world, like agency, soul, biological attributes, and normative characteristics are denied, the primary form that dehumanization takes is mechanization.⁶⁹ In other words, machines are seen as artificial and unnatural, so when other humans are perceived as behaving in unnatural ways, they are compared to machines. Though dehumanization involves comparisons with various types of other-than-human beings, Haslam notes sometimes the context affects the form dehumanization takes. For example, mechanization is most common in work or medical settings while animalization appears most frequently in religious, social, and cultural conflicts including ethnic cleansing, genocide, and slavery.

Though Haslam argues that there are two forms of humanness and two corresponding forms of dehumanization, these are not as different as they first appear because the distinction between animal and machine in the history of Western thought is fuzzy. Descartes, for example, believed that animals were sophisticated automatons.⁷⁰ Other philosophers like Aristotle, Kant, and Heidegger portrayed animals as limited agents, lacking rational intelligence, free will, and morals, trapped in the “disinhibiting ring” of their biological mechanisms and instincts.⁷¹ Western society in general has taken the view that most animals, like machines, are instruments for human productivity and products for consumption. Machines and animals also share the unfortunate position of being the defining Other to the human One. Kelly Oliver points out that this type of

⁶⁸ Ibid., 256.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 258.

⁷⁰ Descartes, *Discourses*.

⁷¹ Aristotle, *De Anima*.; Kant, *Anthropology*.; Heidegger, *Fundamental Concepts*.

relational definition is constantly occurring as humankind struggles to understand and define the boundaries of its own identity, going as far as to say that “the concepts of subjectivity, humanity, politics, and ethics continue to be defined by the double movement of assimilating and then disavowing the animal, animality, and animals.”⁷² Just as the animal has been a constant presence against which the human abuts and butts heads, the machine has also played an ambivalent Other in the human quest for self-understanding. Machines have been understood as artifice, as signs of human mastery, creativity, and uniqueness, but they have also been the site of fear and feelings of the uncanny. As Donna Haraway notes, machines have often been regarded as caricatures and mockeries of human autonomy and creativity.⁷³ Both animal and machine have been used to mark the sacred limits of the human, resulting in a tense ambivalence or outright hostility toward them. The similarity between our disregard for many animals (especially food producers) and machines surfaces in dehumanization where both are relegated as nonhuman, inferior to humans, and unworthy of many of the moral considerations granted to other humans. As such, mechanization and animalization are continuous with one another. From this it follows that the distinction between uniquely human and human nature characteristics is meaningless.

In “Paradoxes of Dehumanization,” philosopher David Livingstone Smith organizes the wide range of usages of the term dehumanization into eight “loosely connected meanings,” which include:

1. Subjecting others to indignities, or, in a more Kantian, vein treating them merely as means
2. Verbally likening others to nonhuman animals or inanimate objects

⁷² Oliver, *Animal Lessons*, 4.

⁷³ Haraway, *Manifestly Haraway*, 11.

3. Denying the subjectivity, individuality, agency, or distinctively human attributes of others
4. Denying that others undergo mental states
5. Treating others in such a way as to erode, obstruct, or extinguish some of their distinctively human attributes
6. Conceiving of others as inanimate objects
7. Conceiving of others as less human than members of one's ingroup
8. Conceiving of others as subhuman creatures⁷⁴

Though dehumanization has many different meanings, for Smith, not just any form of violence or derogatory speech directed at one person by another can be considered dehumanization. Smith argues that in order to avoid conflating these different meanings, we need to emphasize that there is only one form of dehumanization properly speaking: *conceiving of* others as subhuman creatures. For Smith, the other concepts of dehumanization are often consequences of the last form, and that “any of these consequences might be indicative of dehumanization...but none of them is constitutive of it. So the fact that one person refers to another as an animal or treats another in a manner normally reserved for nonhuman animals does not on its own show that she dehumanizes a person.”⁷⁵ In fact, cruel or violent treatment cannot properly be considered dehumanization either because “this puts the cart before the horse. Doing violence to people doesn't make them subhuman, but conceiving of people as subhuman often makes them objects of violence and victims of degradation.”⁷⁶

Smith makes this distinction because he believes certain forms of violence require the perpetrator *to recognize* the humanity of the other and because depersonalizing another or using another as a means to an end might not always be wrong or harmful. For

⁷⁴ Smith, “Paradoxes,” 418-9.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁷⁶ Smith, *Less Than Human*, 28.

example, he argues that sexual objectification is not dehumanization even though it involves the depersonalization and commodification of another human being and the treatment of the other as a mere means to another's end. Rather, "treating someone as only a means to a sexual end is not the same as regarding them as subhuman, for one can fail to acknowledge a person's subjectivity without denying the existence of that subjectivity, just as one might not believe that it is raining without believing that it is *not* raining."⁷⁷ Likewise, a surgeon might fail to acknowledge a patient's subjectivity while that surgeon is the middle of an operation, perhaps viewing the patient's body like a machine. In both cases, failure to acknowledge another's personhood does not entail believing that the other is not human. Thus, dehumanization, for Smith, requires that the Other be *thought of* as something like another species, another kind of being entirely. For Smith, dehumanization is an *epistemological* problem. It entails misrecognition, misunderstanding, or mistaken beliefs—that is, faulty knowledge or knowledge-gathering processes. In other words, dehumanization is not *doing* but *thinking*. It is about regarding another as a subhuman creature, making it, for Smith, a predominantly psychological problem rather than a metaphysical problem.

Smith, Haslam, and other social psychologists have largely overlooked the contributions that decolonial and feminist scholars have brought to bear on the discussion of dehumanization.⁷⁸ Though Smith acknowledges that feminist philosophers have led the way in contemporary discussions of dehumanization, he quickly dismisses their contributions, saying the objectification of women is "fundamentally different from the form of dehumanization that I explore in this book," is "produced by a different

⁷⁷ His italics. Ibid., 27.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

concatenation of forces,” and, thus, requires a “somewhat different set of conceptual tools” for analysis.⁷⁹ If Smith had read these authors more carefully, however, he would have realized that the same epistemological and metaphysical forces are also at work in the dehumanization of women and that there is a long history of equating women with animals and nonhuman nature as well as objects. In addition to this oversight, Smith misses another important contribution provided by decolonial and feminist scholars. Whereas Smith argues that dehumanization is a purely epistemological problem that involves a failure to recognize that the other is human, decolonial and feminist scholars have realized that misrecognition is only one aspect of the problem. The real issue with dehumanization is its transformative power—its power to create a reality in which some groups of humans are actually less than. This applies to all eight of the types of dehumanization that he identifies.

In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Franz Fanon describes the colonial world as one divided into two: the colonists and the native people. This divide represents not only two different ways of living or two different classes of people; it represents the coexistence of different species that, at first glance, look like one. Colonialism is characterized by a division of the world that begins “with the fact of belonging to or not belonging to a given race, a given species.”⁸⁰ Fanon explicitly connects this attitude within the colonial context to dehumanization, stating, “At times this Manicheism goes to its logical conclusion and dehumanizes the native, or to speak plainly, it turns him into an

⁷⁹ Ibid., 5-6.

⁸⁰ Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, 40.

animal.”⁸¹ For Fanon, to dehumanize is to turn another into an animal. This involves consistently referring to and thinking of Natives in zoological and bestial terms while frequently alluding to the animal or vegetable worlds. Aimé Césaire makes a similar claim in *Discourse on Colonialism*. Like Fanon, he argues that colonization is ultimately a project of dehumanization, but unlike Fanon, Césaire argues that colonization ultimately dehumanizes both colonizer and colonized: “colonial activity, colonial enterprise, colonial conquest, which is based on contempt for the native and justified by that contempt, inevitably tends to change him who undertakes it; that the colonizer, who in order to ease his conscience gets into the habit of seeing the other man as *an animal*, accustoms himself to treating him like an animal, and tends objectively to transform himself into an animal.”⁸² Once again, dehumanization involves *treating* another human like an animal. It is an activity that has real effects on both colonizer and colonized. In *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, Albert Memmi argues that in the colonial context the colonizer rejects the humanity of the colonized. This dehumanization is accomplished in several ways. First, the natives are depersonalized, treated as an anonymous collectivity rather than as a group of individuals. Second, they are deprived of freedom and the right to choose who they wish to be. Through these denials, the colonized native is objectified, turned into a thing to be used, discarded, or ignored as the colonizer sees fit. Like Fanon and Césaire, Memmi also connects dehumanization to treating humans like animals, stating that “[o]ne does not have a serious obligation to an animal or an object.”⁸³

⁸¹ Ibid., 42.

⁸² Césaire, *Discourse*, 41.

⁸³ Memmi, *Colonizer and Colonized*, 86.

One of the most thorough accounts of dehumanization provided within decolonial literature appears within Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Freire argues that oppression (within and outside of the colonial context) is marked by dehumanization. According to Freire, dehumanization is the "distortion of the vocation of becoming more fully human."⁸⁴ According to Freire, human life is distinguished from other forms of life by its propensity for freedom and its ontologically processual and unfixed nature. Humans are in a constant state of becoming and are not confined by their relation to nature as other animal life is. Thus, colonization and other forms of oppression, which try to silo humans into categories, which deny their freedom, and which prevent them from communicating, thinking, and making meaning ultimately dehumanize the people involved. Like Césaire, Freire argues that colonization and oppression dehumanize both oppressor and oppressed by turning humans into things and animals, thereby limiting human potential.

What characterizes the discussions of dehumanization by each of these authors is the emphasis on the transformative power of dehumanization. Dehumanization may involve the use of animalizing language or tropes as Fanon describes or it may involve the denial of the colonized person's individuality as Memmi describes, but in each case the affect is ontological. The colonized or the oppressed are not just treated like or talked about as if they are another species, they become another species.⁸⁵ Freire is explicit when he argues that denying education to the oppressed or using a banking method of

⁸⁴ Freire, *Pedagogy*, 44.

⁸⁵ For a description of what I take to be occurring here, consider Ian Hacking's article "Making Up People," which describes a set of methods, which when taken together, arrange beings into new categories. As these categorizes become normalized, they take on kind of naturalism so that they appear to have been discovered rather than constructed.

education that stifles thought imposes limits on how aware humans can be of their activity and the world in which they are situated. When denied the freedom to think and change, they become animals, who “live out their lives on an atemporal, flat, uniform ‘prop.’”⁸⁶ Thus, according to these authors, dehumanization is not just a denial of humanity, but a transformation of human beings into nonhuman animals and things.

The notion that what distinguishes humans from other animals is their capacity to transcend “animal” life and find new forms of meaning and value in life beyond the biological is a theme that emerges in feminist approaches to dehumanization as well. In *The Second Sex* Simone de Beauvoir argues that what distinguishes women’s condition from men’s is that they lack the freedom and autonomy to escape their biological functions and participate in the meaning-making of the world in the way that men do. Men have consistently presented barriers to women’s freedom and denied their capacity to transcend their biological functions. As such, “the female, more than the male, is prey to the species...motherhood [has] left woman riveted to her body like the animal.”⁸⁷ Given this, for de Beauvoir, dehumanization involves limiting human freedom and the continued treatment of certain groups of humans—especially women—as mere animals.

Other feminist scholars like Linda LeMoncheck, Andrea Dworkin, Martha Nussbaum, and Rae Langton have also explored the issue of dehumanization as it pertains to women. In *Dehumanizing Women*, LeMoncheck argues that sexual objectification occurs “when women are regarded as inanimate objects, bodies, or animals, where their status as the moral equals of persons has been demeaned or

⁸⁶ Freire, *Pedagogy*, 98.

⁸⁷ de Beauvoir, *Second Sex*, 75.

degraded.”⁸⁸ To treat a person like an object or nonhuman animal involves disregarding the feelings, desires, or interests that a person has. According to LeMoncheck, humans have distinctive capacities that they do not share with objects or are unlikely to share with other animals including the capacity for sentient life, self-consciousness, abstract thought, imagination, and deliberation.

For other feminist scholars, the problem with dehumanization is less that women are treated like nonhuman animals, but just that they are not granted full “human” status. They use the term “objectification” to describe the treatment of women by men. In “Against the Male Flood,” Andrea Dworkin discusses women’s dehumanization in terms of objectification. Objectification involves treating a human as if she were an object, commodity, or thing without personality, individuality, or integrity. Objectification happens as a result of subordination, which involves the implementation of a hierarchy between subordinator and subordinated, submission, and violence.⁸⁹ According to Dworkin, the objectification of women is justified based on their perceived biological inferiority. Ultimately, objectified persons are seen as nonhuman or less-evolved humans while the subordinator or objectifier is seen as human. Thus, to be objectified, is to be dehumanized—treated as less than human.

Martha Nussbaum and Rae Langton build on this concept of objectification, arguing that objectification involves treating a non-object like a human person as if it were an object. For Nussbaum there are seven different ways in which objectification can occur including treating a person like an instrument, denying the autonomy of the other,

⁸⁸ LeMoncheck, *Dehumanizing Women*, 11.

⁸⁹ Dworkin, “Against the Male Flood.”

claiming ownership of the other, and denying the other's subjectivity.⁹⁰ Nussbaum complicates the discussion of dehumanization because she argues that not all forms of objectification are necessarily morally wrong. Working from a Kantian notion of the adult human person in mind, Nussbaum argues that perhaps with the exception of treating others as a means to an end, denying autonomy, and denying subjectivity, there might be morally acceptable reasons, depending on the context, for objectification in the other senses of word to be allowed to stand. For example, we treat other people as a means to an end when we ask them to complete tasks for us or satisfy one of our desires. The problem arises when a person is treated solely as a tool without recognition of their agency, autonomy, and subjectivity. Nussbaum acknowledges that we often use other animals in such a way, which could be an issue, but that generally speaking treating objects as merely tools does no moral harm, whereas treating humans in such a way is morally problematic.⁹¹

Langton amends Nussbaum's list of ways to objectify a person with the following additions: reduction to body, reduction to appearance, and silence. Her approach to objectification differs from Nussbaum's insofar as she argues that objectification involves an epistemological and ontological component in addition to the ethical issues which Nussbaum addresses. According to Langton, women are excluded epistemically in two main ways. First, they are not considered knowers because they are deprived of the same epistemological resources as men. They are also subjects of knowledge, treated as inherently mysterious by men. Other ways that women experience epistemic exclusion

⁹⁰ Nussbaum, "Objectification," 257. The full list includes: instrumentality, denial of autonomy, inertness, fungibility, violability, ownership, and denial of subjectivity.

⁹¹ Ibid.

include lack of credibility, application of “spurious universality,” and discrediting of their knowledge.⁹² Drawing on Catherine McKinnon’s work, Langton agrees that men, in their place of power over women, claim to be knowers and, as knowers, see themselves in the neutral, objective position. This, in turn, creates the conditions for the validation of their objectification of women and other forms of knowledge.⁹³

By delving into men’s assumed “aperspectivity” in greater detail, Langton argues that claims to such positions lead to cases where belief does not conform to the world, but the world conforms to belief.⁹⁴ For Langton, objectification is about how the world conforms to the mind. It is a process or a doing in which the social world is shaped by the desires, beliefs, and perceptions of the objectifiers. Objectification is a means by which those in power create the world to fit their desires and beliefs. Objectification is a projection of those beliefs and desires accompanied by the force to make them reality. In this way, for Langton, dehumanization once again involves a transformative component. It is not just that dehumanizers passively perceive others as objects or less than human; rather, because dehumanizers are in positions of political, material, and epistemic power, they can alter reality to fit their perceptions. This leads Langton to propose a list of epistemic attitudes of objectification. These include treating someone as an object for the satisfaction of a desire, forcing someone to have a property one desires, and believing that someone has that property, and behaving as if someone has that property by nature.⁹⁵

⁹² Langton, *Sexual Solipsism*, 275.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 277-8.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 286.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 261.

Following Langton's insights regarding the connection between epistemic power and the experience of reality, if we accept that dehumanizing claims are not just epistemological (that is, about what some person or group of persons believes about another person or group of persons) but that these claims are also ontological insofar as the claim reflects the actual state of reality or has the force to create a reality, then Smith's argument that only the last of the eight definitions above is the actual meaning of dehumanization does not hold up. In each of the eight definitions, the person(s) who holds that belief is making a corresponding assertion about reality that will ultimately become the basis for action—such as denying rights, privileges, access, etc. to the dehumanized. Regardless of how severe the form dehumanization takes, any act taken on the basis of any of those definitions leads to the creation of a state in which that reality comes into existence. Thus, it would be more accurate to say that dehumanization, broadly speaking, is any belief, statement, or act that renders one group of people inferior to another on the basis of the belief that the group deemed inferior is lacking a characteristic(s) regarded as essential to being human.

II. The Role of Dehumanization in Genocide

According to Gregory Stanton, president of the non-profit organization *Genocide Watch*, dehumanization is one of the ten stages of genocide. At this stage, "One group denies the humanity of the other group. Members of it [the other group] are equated with animals, vermin, insects, or diseases."⁹⁶ This stage of genocide is closely connected to two other stages: classification and symbolization. In classification, societies and the

⁹⁶ Stanton, "Ten Stages."

groups within them are separated into “us” and “them” whereas in symbolization groups that have been classified as Other are associated with particular symbols or names to mark their differences. For Stanton, none of these three stages alone or together guarantees that genocide will occur; nevertheless, genocide does not happen without them.⁹⁷ In this section, I will consider four roles dehumanization takes in genocide—overcoming moral resistance, motivation, legitimization, and performance—arguing along with Stanton that dehumanization is a necessary though not sufficient condition for genocide.

a. Overcoming Moral Resistance

One prominent explanation for the role of dehumanization in genocide is that dehumanization helps overcome normal moral resistance toward the violence required for genocide or other mass atrocities. In “Violence without Moral Restraint,” social psychologist Herbert C. Kelman argues that dehumanization is a factor in “reducing the strength of restraining forces against violence” in “normal” people.⁹⁸ According to Kelman, genocidal violence is different from other forms of violence because it occurs outside of the conditions with which violence is normally accepted or morally justified such as in self-defense. In this respect dehumanization contributes to genocidal violence because it weakens the moral restraints average people have against violence, allowing them to legitimately participate in sanctioned massacres. Building off Kelman’s work, social psychologist Albert Bandura argues that dehumanization is a set of

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Kelman, “Violence,” 25.

“disengagement practices” that allows perpetrators of mass violence to justify their actions and make the violence morally acceptable. As Bandura explains, “It is easier to brutalize people when they are viewed as low animal forms.”⁹⁹ Not only does dehumanization weaken moral restraints and justify actions, it also enables perpetrators to conduct genocidal violence without distress, guilt, or shame. Accordingly, “[t]he process of dehumanization is an essential ingredient in the perpetration of inhumanities.”¹⁰⁰

Scholars Daniel Chirot and Clark McCauley argue in their book *Why Not Kill Them All?* that dehumanization helps people overcome their horror when they engage in or witness mass slaughter firsthand. Drawing on the notion of essentialism, Chirot and McCauley state that in dehumanization, a group of people attributes an essence that is different from their own to another group. As a result, the out-group appears to the in-group as homogeneous; that is, all members of the out-group possess the same (negative) attribute(s). When this occurs, the logic of essences dictates that the in-group and out-group are inherently different. Thus, if the in-group identifies themselves as human, the other group, who “is seen as having a different essence from ourselves is not quite human, and such a group can be used, abused, and eliminated as if it were another species of animal.”¹⁰¹ As Chirot and McCauley conclude, because genocide is, by definition, killing based on membership within a group, essentialism and dehumanization are necessary and crucial for genocidal acts to be carried out.

⁹⁹ Bandura, “Moral Disengagement,” 200.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Chirot, *Why Not Kill Them All?*, 84.

Other authors like Smith, James Waller, and Helen Fein share similar sentiments regarding the role of dehumanization in genocide.¹⁰² According to Smith, dehumanizing thinking taps into the biological structure of the human mind and our in-born tendencies to conceptualize the world in terms of categories. Dehumanization plays on the typical ways humans organize groups according to “us” and “them” so that humans see the relationship between those two groups as threatening, impure, and dangerous.¹⁰³ As with Chirot and McCauley, Smith says these sentiments can be attributed to a belief in essential differences between the in- and out-groups. Through dehumanization, the out-group loses its moral standing. As Smith explains, “Demoting a population to subhuman status excludes them from the universe of moral obligation. Whatever responsibilities we have toward nonhuman animals, they are not the same as those we have toward members of our own species. So, if human-looking creatures are not really people, then we don’t have to treat them as people.”¹⁰⁴ Likewise, Waller holds that dehumanization creates psychological and moral distance between groups in order to make extreme violence more acceptable.¹⁰⁵ However, Waller adds that essentializing and dehumanizing discourse and actions imply that the “victims deserve or even require their victimization.”¹⁰⁶ In this respect, in addition to overcoming usual moral sentiments against violence, dehumanization provides justification for genocidal violence by

¹⁰² Fein, *Accounting for Genocide.*; Smith, *Less Than Human.*; Waller, *Becoming Evil.*

¹⁰³ Given the decolonial critique I will be making in later chapters, it is worth noting here that Smith tacitly assumes (2011, 2016) that categorization functions the same across all human individuals and groups. He often over-privileges the role of biology and Western modes of thinking.

¹⁰⁴ Smith, *Less Than Human*, 159.

¹⁰⁵ Waller, *Becoming Evil.*

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid*, 249.

claiming that the victims brought such violence onto themselves due to their inherent inferiority and subhumanity. This sentiment is echoed by Fein, who also claims that excluding others from one's circle of moral responsibility is a necessary condition for carrying out acts of genocide. Dehumanization accomplishes this because when people are assumed to belong to a different species there are "no limits inhibiting the magnitude of permissible crime."¹⁰⁷

In sum, according to these writers, ordinary humans do not seek out violence, but they are more likely to extend moral consideration to those whom they perceive to be like them. Sameness is seen as a positive quality, while difference becomes a reason to mistrust, hate, or fear another. Dehumanization helps to overcome internal and normative prohibitions against extreme violence by exaggerating perceived differences between groups of people. If those differences are perceived as fundamental to the nature of a group, then dehumanization can assist in fostering a change in normal moral attitudes that can eventually lead people to participate in genocide.

b. Legitimization

A second role that dehumanization takes in genocide is legitimization. Dehumanization provides reasons or justifications for why genocidal actions are acceptable for resolving problems between groups. This reasoning may be used to convince a range of audiences including outsiders, bystanders, and the perpetrators that this was a morally acceptable course of action. Sociologist Rowan Savage argues that this is one of the main purposes of genocidal dehumanization.

¹⁰⁷ Fein, *Accounting for Genocide*, 30.

Savage agrees that dehumanization functions to demarcate those who will be morally included and those who will be morally excluded. However, unlike many of the authors above, he does not believe that dehumanization helps to overcome innate resistances to violence. Rather, Savage holds individuals and societies have a shifting relationship to violence based on their particular circumstances, ideologies, and goals. This distinction is important because, even though dehumanizing language and acts can be traced far back into the history of many cultures, the relationship between dehumanization and genocide is tied to the rise of the modern era, specifically modern nation states.¹⁰⁸ In “modernity,” the emergence of the nation-state and the emergence of human rights coincide. The ideologies accompanying these social and political changes eventually intermingle with the rise of the biological sciences, such as the theory of evolution, creating the conditions for biological notions of race, supported by the homogeneity of national identity. According to Savage, in the context of modernity, the nation-state made it easier for individuals and groups to think in terms of an us/them dichotomy because the identity of the group was tied to a particular territory. At the same time, rules around legitimate violence were also changing. First, there arose a distinction between combatants and noncombatants.¹⁰⁹ Legitimate mass killings could only be conducted against enemy soldiers for military purposes. Yet, the nation-state model made it possible to draw and maintain borders beyond which undesirable people could be expelled. Advances in technology also made it possible for those expulsions to be successfully carried out either through forced removal or liquidation. The expectation that

¹⁰⁸ See Smith and Kiernan for discussions of ancient examples of dehumanization and mass murder. Kiernan, *Blood and Soil.*; Smith, *Less Than Human.*

¹⁰⁹ Savage, “Modern Genocidal Dehumanization,” 152.

killing be done for legitimate military purposes often ran counter to the desire to protect and privilege citizens of the nation-state. This meant that “the newly conceivable desire to carry out genocidal actions as a solution to a perceived problem was frustrated by the fact that violent action of this kind was now defined as illegitimate.”¹¹⁰ Thus, in order to carry out genocidal agendas, a justification for the violence was needed.

According to Savage, dehumanization is a necessary component of modern genocide insofar as it strategically resolves problems that genocide poses for perpetrators. Legitimizing dehumanization always occurs during genocide.¹¹¹ It alters the *meaning* of violence so that it is already considered legitimate by redefining the identity of the out-group so that they are no longer human.¹¹² In this respect, dehumanization legitimizes killing that would otherwise be unacceptable “through the creation of systems of meaning that re-label both victims themselves, and actions taken toward them.”¹¹³ With the help of pseudo-biological reasoning, groups are relabeled based on their relation to the dominant population of the nation-state to be categorically Other and other-than-human. Once they are seen as nonhuman animals, diseases, or units, the moral restrictions that limit violence against other humans no longer apply.

For example, in his facetiously titled essay “The Noble Red Man,” Mark Twain characterizes Native Americans as dirty pests—leeches on the good will of white settlers—who live little better than nonhuman animals. He writes, “All history and honest observation will show that the Red Man is a skulking coward and a windy braggart, who

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 153.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 156.

¹¹² Ibid., 153.

¹¹³ Ibid.

strikes without warning--usually from an ambush or under cover of night, and nearly always bringing a force of about five or six to one against his enemy; kills helpless women and little children, and massacres the men in their beds; and then brags about it as long as he lives.”¹¹⁴ By portraying Native Americans as evil, uncivilized, and harmful to the society that settlers are trying to establish, Twain provides legitimization to those who already have other reasons to kill Native Americans (such as for their land) with seemingly legitimate moral reasons for killing them. Thus, Twain is able to make the claim that a Native American is “nothing but a poor, filthy, naked scurvy vagabond, whom to exterminate were a charity to the Creator’s worthier insects and reptiles which he oppresses.”¹¹⁵ Such propaganda, which involves likening people to vermin, diseases, and parasites (which are all viewed as unclean and dangerous to human life) validates the hatred, disgust, or fear that one group feels toward another while acting as a device for fear-mongering.

c. Motivation

In addition to legitimization, Savage argues that dehumanization also, at times, functions as a form of motivation. Whereas legitimization is concerned with the moral acceptability of certain acts, motivation helps to explain why certain acts needed to take place. In motivational dehumanization, the out-group is portrayed as a threat that needs to be exterminated for the purposes of self-defense. This is precisely the type of argument that Adolf Hitler uses against the Jews in *Mein Kampf*. For example, he writes that the

¹¹⁴ Twain, “Noble Red Man.”

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

Jew “is and remains the typical parasite, a sponger who like a noxious bacillus keeps spreading as soon as a favorable medium invites him. And the effect of his existence is also like that of spongers: wherever he appears, the host people dies out after a shorter or longer period.”¹¹⁶ A few pages later, he likens Jews to vampires or leeches, saying, that the Jew is “[a] true blood-sucker that attaches himself to the body of the unhappy people and cannot be picked off until the princes themselves again need money and with their own exalted hand tap off the blood he has sucked from them.”¹¹⁷ With reasoning like this, Hitler argues that the Jews take over whichever society they enter, slowly killing off that society through their financial control. By using dehumanizing imagery and portraying the Jews as a threat to the lives of their neighbors, Hitler’s words can tap into visceral and easily comprehensible ideas and fears that could compel people to participate in actions that could culminate in genocide.

Dehumanization can also motivate genocidal violence by priming groups to treat other groups as morally or ontologically inferior. In a series of studies social psychologists Kimberly Costello, Gordon Hodson, Cara MacInnis, Brock Bastian, and Steve Loughnan found that manipulating people’s perception of the distinction between humans and other animals can either exacerbate dehumanization or decrease it.¹¹⁸ In one study Costello and Hodson record the results of testing whether or not educating people about animal-human similarity could reduce prejudice towards immigrants in Canada.¹¹⁹ They created four scenarios in which participants were asked a series of questions about

¹¹⁶ Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 305.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 310.

¹¹⁸ Hodson, “(Over)Valuing ‘Humanness.’”; Bastian, “Closing the Human-Animal Divide.”; Hodson, “Human Cost of Devaluing Animals.”; Costello, “Exploring the Roots of Dehumanization.”

¹¹⁹ Costello, “Exploring the Roots of Dehumanization.”

immigrants after watching a short video on animals. In one scenario, the movie depicted ways that animals were like humans. In another, humans were shown to be like animals. In the final two videos, the differences between humans and animals were emphasized, but in one of them human superiority was emphasized. They found that showing how animals were like humans increased moral concern for immigrants while showing how humans were like animals exacerbated prejudice. Simply showing that humans and animals were different had little effect on the participants' prejudices. In this study and the others conducted by these researchers, they found that priming the participants—that is, presenting them with information—affected their responses. Comparing humans to animals, a common method of dehumanization, resulted in increased levels of prejudice toward those perceived as outsiders. According to these researchers, this sort of priming is effective because it relies on already established myths about human-animal difference: “One such myth concerns the largely universal view that humans are superior to animals, making animal needs subservient to human needs...Put simply, the importance of humans over animals lays the foundation for the perception that human outgroups are themselves less human.”¹²⁰

When it comes to genocidal violence, priming through propaganda and other media, can help motivate violence by playing up these tropes and myths about human-animal difference that most people assume are true. Such priming motivates violence by feeding misinformation, playing up fears, and highlighting threats. For example, the Nazi propaganda film *Jud Süß*, spliced shots of rats running through dirty gutters with Jewish men, who were frail, weak, and dirty, praying in the ghettos. In this respect, viewers were primed to dehumanize Jews by associating them with vermin, evoking in viewers

¹²⁰ Hodson, “(Over)Valuing ‘Humanness.’”

emotions like disgust and horror. Because exterminating rats was already permissible, showing that Jews and rats were equivalent made exterminating Jews an intuitive extension of that thought.

d. Performance

In addition to the roles of genocidal dehumanization described above, dehumanization is also fundamental to modern genocide because it characterizes the activity of genocide. In “Modern Genocidal Dehumanization,” Savage repeatedly talks about dehumanization as a “discursive strategy,” that is, a way of manipulating language, meanings, and symbols in order to construct a coherent narrative that legitimizes genocidal action.¹²¹ As Savage explains, “With the right narrative, what was once unthinkable becomes first thinkable and then acceptable; what was once ‘empty’ rhetoric becomes a specific blueprint for action.”¹²²

Though I agree with Savage that altering the meaning of violence through construction of a coherent narrative and through deployment of language is needed if dehumanization is going to take root enough for it to motivate or legitimize genocidal behavior, I would add that dehumanization does not just create a narrative, but a reality. It is not simply a language game, a set of utterances or beliefs, but an activity that produces the state of affairs that the perpetrators wish to find. In this respect dehumanization is a performance. By performance, I mean something akin to philosopher Thomas Norton-Smith’s notion of performativity in his book *The Dance of Person and Place*. Though

¹²¹ Savage, “Modern Genocidal Dehumanization,” 144, 149.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 156.

Norton-Smith is drawing on a Native American theory of performativity with the objective of explaining how Native American worlds are created, his description of performativity provides an accurate and useful theory for thinking about how relationships and reality become constituted in other contexts as well. Norton-Smith claims that “*performing with a symbol* empowers the symbol, transforms the participants, [and] categorizes and order experiences.”¹²³ This performance helps to construct a world. According to Norton-Smith, “performances have the power to categorize and order, or recategorize and reorder—in short *create* and *recreate*...the action, procedure, or performance is the principle vehicle of meaning and the way by which the world is made.”¹²⁴ In other words, the act of doing sets up a particular relationship that organizes the world or reinforces an already established way of organizing the world. This, in turn, creates and recreates a reality in which the system of categorization is real. One of the key aspects of performativity is that it (re)establishes social and moral relationships. In the Native context, “the performance is the vehicle for traditional knowledge and moral values...[it] strengthens tribal bonds and ties to other human and nonhuman persons in the world.”¹²⁵ This is similar to Thomas Kühne’s point in *Belonging and Genocide* that engaging in exclusive practices toward certain groups helped to strengthen communal bonds within a group. Performance, whether for good or harm, leads to the creation of a world in which certain relationships are developed or severed.

¹²³ Norton-Smith, *Dance of Person*, 95.

¹²⁴ His italics. *Ibid.*, 96.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 100.

This is not entirely unlike Judith Butler's notion of performativity. In "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution" she makes a similar claim about gender reality: "Gender reality is performative, which means, quite simply, that it is only real insofar as it is performed."¹²⁶ Like Norton-Smith, she claims that such performances organize and order the world—in this case into binary genders and particular modes of expressing those genders. Performance, for Butler, involves repetition, "which is at once a reenactment and reexperiencing of a set of meanings already socially established; it is the mundane and ritualized form of their legitimation."¹²⁷ And also like Norton-Smith's account of performativity, Butler implies that performances establish social and moral relationships. This is because performances are not private, but public. As public, they appear in the world and change and are changed by the world in their on-going activity. Performing according to expected pre-established gender norms may have the effect of putting others at ease while deviating from those norms may result in fraught, tense, or punitive relationships. For both Norton-Smith and Butler, performance is creative action; it institutes a reality that did not necessarily pre-exist the performance.

It is my contention that something similar is happening with genocidal dehumanization. Dehumanization is not just a matter of *conceiving* another as less than human (as Smith puts it) or word-play like name-calling. It is an imposition of a particular metaphysical understanding of the world and the beings that inhabit it. Dehumanization involves (re)creating and (re)establishing relationships of a particular kind as well as altering conditions in such a way that those relationships appear normal and natural. When dehumanization is carried out successfully, it makes a world or reality,

¹²⁶ Butler, "Performative Acts," 104.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 103.

which in turn confirms for the perpetrators the belief or justifications for dehumanization in the first place. For the most part, this involves creating situations in which the world becomes such that some types of beings are ontologically and morally superior to others.

Dehumanizing practices cover a wide range of activities, some subtle and some overt. An overt example is the transportation of Jewish deportees and prisoners in cattle cars. Treating them as animal freight was not merely symbolic; it also put them in conditions in which they were forced to violate European social norms. During transportation, which sometimes took days at a time, prisoners were rarely allowed to leave the trains. On most occasions they were not provided with bathroom stops or even buckets for waste, compelling people to defecate and urinate where they stood or in public. As Olga Lengyel reports regarding her experiences, there were times when the prisoners were let off the cars and forced to empty their bowels on the train tracks in front of onlookers.¹²⁸ Such acts served to humiliate the prisoners as well as confirm to the bystanders that the Jews were actually nonhuman animals because they were behaving the way they would expect of nonhuman animals. During the Bosnian genocide, Serbs forced Muslim men to expose themselves, engage in sexual intercourse with one another before an audience, and even bite off one another's genitalia. Even though the Serbs were forcing the Muslim men into these acts, the fact that the men did them confirmed to the Serbs that the Muslims were no better than dogs.¹²⁹ Other practices like name calling, hunting, and dogging are all performative acts meant to put the targeted group into its

¹²⁸ Lengyel, *Five Chimneys*.

¹²⁹ Rieff, "Letter from Bosnia."

ontological and moral place.¹³⁰ Such activities do not just change narratives or discourses; they create a reality and set of relationships that fits the dehumanizer's beliefs.

Dehumanization has four functions within modern genocide, though only two of those functions—legitimization and performance—are universal occurrences in modern genocide. Legitimization and performance provide the necessary justification, grounding, relationships, and world needed in order for genocide to be carried out. In this respect, dehumanization is a necessary condition for genocide.

III. Possible Counter-Arguments

Before I move on, I want to briefly address some counter-arguments to the claim that dehumanization is necessary for genocide. One of the most frequently cited reasons for claiming that dehumanization is not necessary for genocide is that there are numerous examples in which perpetrators do not literally believe that their victims are not human.¹³¹ Not only is the humanity of the victim inescapable, but the acknowledgment of it is part of what makes the violence being done so heinous and so effective. Many of the critiques of theories of dehumanization stem from authors who are not discussing genocide. Of the ones who do, psychologist Johannes Lang and sociologists E.N. Anderson and Barbara A. Anderson offer the strongest lines of reasoning.

¹³⁰ Dogging is the practice using dogs to kill and consume human targets. For a study of this practice, see *Dogs of the Conquest* by Varner and Varner.

¹³¹ Anderson, *Warning Signs.*; Appiah, *Experiments in Ethics.*; Cavell, *Claim of Reason.*; Gopnik, "Headless Horsemen."; Lang, "Questioning Dehumanization."; Manne, *Down Girl.*

In “Questioning Dehumanization,” Lang argues that dehumanization implies the denial of the victim’s subjectivity and, thus, the disintegration of the social connection between perpetrators and victims.¹³² Lang posits that when dehumanization occurs, the only thing remaining between the two groups is a void.¹³³ However, various cases point to perpetrators struggling with their feelings for and towards the victims as in the case of Rudolph Höss, commandant of Auschwitz, who was moved by the courage shown by some of the Jewish victims before they were gassed. Most importantly, for Lang, too much emphasis on the role of dehumanization in genocide interferes with a clear understanding of the dynamics of power at work in genocide and how these dynamics are reflected in behavior. Though dehumanization can and does occur some of the time, it cannot occur all of the time because sometimes the subjectivity of the victim imbues the violence with particular meaning. As Lang explains, “The desire to humiliate, the desire to exercise power, and the desire to have sex [rape] all depend on the acknowledgment of a subjectivity—a thinking, feeling presence—in the other person.”¹³⁴ In addition, as an exercise of power, genocidal violence can be used to help personalize the identity of the perpetrator. This would also require a relationship between the two groups so that “[w]hat might look like the dehumanization of the other is instead a way to exert power over another human being *without* ending the social relationship: is an opportunity to sustain domination over the victims before (or even without) killing them.”¹³⁵

¹³² Lang, “Questioning Dehumanization,” 225.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 228.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 236. In *Neither Man nor Beast*, Carol Adams provides empirical evidence of animals being sexually assaulted, connecting assault on animals and women’s domination.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 240.

E.N. Anderson and Barbara A. Anderson share some of these views, though they offer a less compelling argument. In their book *Warning Signs of Genocide*, they use Smith's definition of dehumanization, which involves conceiving of others as subhuman creatures. This form of dehumanization entails thinking of other humans as animals and diseases. Anderson and Anderson claim that dehumanization cannot be necessary in genocide because dehumanizing rhetoric is just a "pretext to torture and abuse of a sort that no one ever wastes on rats, cockroaches, or pigs."¹³⁶ In order to carry out torture and abuse, one must be able to empathize with the victim, to know what will hurt and humiliate the Other the most. Consequently, the victims of genocide are not dehumanized because they are not actually believed to be nonhuman animals. Rather animalizing language incites fear, disgust, and hatred, creating distance between groups and solidifying barriers between them. Though Anderson and Anderson admit that dehumanization can occur in genocide, they do not believe it is necessary.

Both Lang and Anderson and Anderson fail to recognize several important aspects of dehumanization. First, Lang argues that torture of other humans involves sustaining social relationships. This suggests that social relationships cannot and do not exist between humans and other animals, which, as will be made clear in later chapters, is a distinctively Western outlook. Second, they suggest that torture, rape, and humiliation cannot be used against nonhuman animals. However, various studies show that there is a strong link between animal abuse and violence toward other humans. Abusing nonhuman animals can provide some humans with a sense of power.¹³⁷ Third, their understanding of

¹³⁶ Anderson, *Warning Signs*, 60.

¹³⁷ Linzy, *Animal Abuse*.; Levitt, *Animal Maltreatment*.

dehumanization suggests that dehumanization occurs at the level of individual cognition—that it is a matter of psychology rather than cultural norms and metaphysical presuppositions. As mentioned earlier, aside from the leaders of the perpetrators (i.e. Adolf Hitler, Ratko Mladic, or Jean-Paul Akayesu) who perhaps left written or spoken statements that give insight into their beliefs, it is impossible to know what the majority of people who commit genocide (soldiers, neighbors, bystanders) actually think about their victims. In the testimony by Rudolph Höss that Lang cites above, Höss claimed that Nazi soldiers would often talk to him about their anxiety around the killing, looking for reassurance.¹³⁸ Such actions suggested to Lang that whatever dehumanizing rhetoric might be going around, the soldiers themselves did not necessarily think that their victims were not human. However, studies have shown that workers in meat processing factories and factory farms also exhibit high levels of depression and anxiety.¹³⁹ This suggests that the problem is not necessarily that humans were being killed, but that the regular proximity to ongoing violence might have a negative impact on human emotional and mental well-being.

Furthermore, the testimony of survivors who regard themselves as victims of dehumanization suggests that something else is going on besides mind-games for lowering moral inhibitions against violence against other humans. One survivor of the Bosnian genocide related the following about her experience: “Until yesterday, you had been a person. You had your life and family. All of a sudden you walk around a city in which you feel strange, reading signs with messages like ‘Muslims and dogs cannot go

¹³⁸ Lang, “Questioning Dehumanization,” 232.

¹³⁹ McKenna, *Livestock.*; Pachirat, *Every Twelve Seconds.*

into busses.’ It really makes you believe that you are not an individual human being. You feel like an animal.”¹⁴⁰ One famous example of the experience of becoming a nonhuman animal is related by Primo Levi on his experience in Auschwitz:

Then for the first miserable time we become aware that our language lacks words to express this offence [sic], the demolition of a man...It is not possible to sink lower than this; no human condition is more miserable than this, nor could it conceivably be so. Nothing belongs to us anymore; they have taken away our clothes, our shoes, even our hair; if we speak, they will not listen to us, and if they listen, they will not understand. They will even take away our name.¹⁴¹

Levi describes how the Nazis stripped away the things that make one a member of a human community. The acts to which the victims have been subjected make it the case that the prisoners are no longer human for all social, political, and ethical purposes. In these ways they are given the same ontological and moral standing as nonhuman animals have in Western cultures. These examples suggest that what the perpetrator actually thinks about what their victims are does not matter. What matters is the way in which language and action construct through performance a social space that delineates who has moral worth and who does not, who can be killed and who can be allowed to live.

Lang argues that too much emphasis on dehumanization in genocide interferes with understanding the particular power dynamics occurring. In this, Lang misses the point that dehumanization is enactment of power and also an enactment of a particular set of ideological and metaphysical beliefs that impose on the world and the beings in it a particular set of relationships. In *HumAnimal: Race, Law, Language*, Kalpana Sheshadri rebuts an argument similar to Lang’s about slavery in the American south. She argues that there are consequences for understanding racist beliefs and practices when the

¹⁴⁰ Weine, *History Is a Nightmare*, 42.

¹⁴¹ Levi, *Survival in Auschwitz*, 15.

premise that perpetrators make a distinction between their victims and animals is deployed. She explains,

First of all, such a premise leads one to lament the ascription of impurity to the slave, while necessarily leaving intact the association of humanness with a certain purity/propriety as well as the general structure of hierarchical thinking. The moral implication is that the analogy with the animal, as an inferior life form, is always to be abhorred. Second, to establish as a logical premise the social fact that the slaveowner tacitly acknowledges the humanness of his slaves is necessarily to avoid or ignore as problematic all those ways in which the slave is treated and regarded exactly as the slaveowner and slave trader regard and treat livestock. What remains untouched here in the examination of belief is the practice and production of inhumanity.¹⁴²

In other words, dismissing the importance of dehumanization from genocide by saying that perpetrators do not literally believe that their victims are nonhuman animals is to ascribe to and promote concepts of purity, humanness, and moral reasoning that make dehumanization and genocide possible in the first place. Lang and Anderson and Anderson arrive at their positions from the assumption that “the human” is real and that it is indeed superior to “the animal.” Apparently, the human is so superior that a special kind of violence is reserved for other humans. This bias toward humans will become clearer in the next chapter as I examine those principles, particularly the principle of human exceptionalism, which holds that the ontological and moral difference between humans and nonhuman animals is real.

¹⁴² Sheshadri, *HumAnimal*, 9-10.

CHAPTER IV THE METAPHYSICS OF DEHUMANIZATION AND GENOCIDE

If we accept that dehumanization provides legitimization for genocide and that it is an activity that creates a reality and not merely a set of discursive practices or beliefs, then this necessitates answering the questions: what kind of reality does it create? What sorts of assumptions at work in genocidal dehumanization lead to a reality where this violence is legitimate? According to David Livingstone Smith, dehumanization involves conceiving of others who appear to be human on the outside as less than human on the inside. Such beliefs are grounded on set of five metaphysical commitments.¹⁴³ These metaphysical commitments reveal precisely the kind of world (re)created by dehumanization. The list below is adapted from Smith's article "Paradoxes of Dehumanization" with some minor modifications.

The first of these metaphysical commitments is that there is a distinction between appearance and reality. In other words, what our senses tell us about the world may not reflect the actual state of things. This is tied to the second metaphysical commitment which posits that beings can be separated into natural kinds based on their essential natures. For example, "[t]o be human, one must possess a human essence. A human-looking being that lacks this essence is not human."¹⁴⁴ The third metaphysical assumption entails that there is a hierarchy of natural kinds in which humans occupy a higher rank than nonhuman animals and other organic beings. Following from the first three principles, we arrive at the remaining two metaphysical commitments: fourth, humans have human essences while subhumans have subhuman essences and, fifth, the hierarchy

¹⁴³ Smith refers to these as "folk-metaphysical commitments." I will return to this issue later on, but for the sake of clarity, here I am referring to them as unqualified metaphysical commitments.

¹⁴⁴ Smith, "Paradoxes of Dehumanization," 421.

of natural kinds is also a moral hierarchy.¹⁴⁵ These five principles form the basis of dehumanizing thought and action. They make it possible to justify dehumanization to one's self and others while giving insight into the understanding of reality that legitimizes genocide. As metaphysical principles, they do not merely reflect an individual's beliefs; they reflect a foundational cultural worldview.

If dehumanization is necessary for the practice of genocide insofar as it provides the justification for genocidal action while creating a reality in which dehumanization and genocide are acceptable, then it is reasonable to deduce that genocidal thinking is characterized by a similar set of metaphysical principles. These principles are essentialism, purity, and human exceptionalism. Essentialism and purity have been frequently recognized as problems connected to genocidal thought. Most genocide scholars recognize that genocidal thinking involves the creation of us/them relationships, which exacerbate differences and become justifications for exclusion and extermination.¹⁴⁶ Human exceptionalism, on the other hand, has received very little attention even when dehumanization is part of the conversation. In this chapter I will review these three principles and show how they enable dehumanizing and genocidal logics.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 421-2. The exact wording of Smith's list appears as follows:

1. It is possible for a being to appear to be human without being human.
2. To be human, one must possess a human essence. A human-looking being that lacks this essence is not human.
3. There is a hierarchy of natural kinds on which humans occupy a higher rank than nonhuman animals.
4. To be a member of a subhuman kind one must have the essence of that kind.
5. The cosmic hierarchy is a moral hierarchy.

¹⁴⁶ Chirot, *Why Not Kill Them All?*; Kiernan, *Blood and Soil.*; Kühne, *Belonging and Genocide.*; Moshman, "Us and Them."; Waller, *Becoming Evil.*; Weitz, *Century of Genocide.*

I. Essentialism

Essentialism: A commitment to a rendering of reality and the beings and states that constitute it such that those beings can be separated into natural kinds according to fixed, unchanging essences.

When it comes to dehumanizing and genocidal logic, essentialist thinking entails believing that the nature of a thing is determined by a fixed, unalterable core property that it shares only with others of its own kind. An essence, according to Aristotle, “is what something is.”¹⁴⁷ In other words, an essence defines one type of being from another. It is a being’s primary substance. Members of the same kind are perceived as having the same essence.¹⁴⁸ Essences are considered to be simple and unchanging. They adhere to the principle of identity, which states that each thing is identical with itself. In other words, essences are what they are. As simple, unchanging, and defining characteristics, essences delineate sharp boundaries between natural kinds, which means beings that possess different essences are fundamentally different. Beings cannot have more than one essence. All other characteristics attributed to a being are considered accidental.¹⁴⁹

Essences also provide grounds for making inductive inferences about members of natural kinds.¹⁵⁰ Essences are presumed to cause the attribute typically displayed by individual members of a given natural kind.¹⁵¹ If essences cause attributes, then it is

¹⁴⁷ Aristotle, “Metaphysics,” book 7.4, 1030a.4

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 1030a.11-2.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 1029a-30a.

¹⁵⁰ Smith, “Dehumanization,” 816.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

possible to infer certain behaviors or characteristics based on what type of essence a being has (stereotyping). This means that members of natural kinds are inherently predictable insofar as they share an essence with other members of the kind. However, if a distinction between appearance and reality is presupposed (as is often the case in essentialist thinking), “a thing possessing the essence of a certain kind does not *necessitate* its displaying of the attributes that are typical of that kind.”¹⁵² This might even be the case for many members of a kind.

For example, the one-drop rule asserted that even if a person displayed many of the physiological, behavioral, and cultural characteristics of a European person, that person would still be considered Black if they had a single Black ancestor several generations removed. In other words, even if an individual only exhibits a limited number of traits associated with that natural kind, it still possesses the essence of that kind in full rather than in part. The one-drop rule example also speaks to another assumption about essences. For living beings, essences are passed down from parent to offspring. Essences are inherited and innate; one cannot choose one’s essence.¹⁵³ This meant, for example, that even when Jews had assimilated completely into German culture and had even converted to Christianity and given up the identity of Jew for themselves, they could still be considered Jews by the Nazis.

When dehumanization occurs, beings that appear to be human are considered to be nonhuman or subhuman creatures. This is possible when differences between groups of humans are not attributed to cultural or social influences but to innate essences. Because essentialism entails that beings are defined by their possession of a single

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

primary essence, which is either there or not and does not exist in degrees, one group of humanoids can take another to be inherently Other. For example, even if Jews display characteristics typically associated with humanness, according to Nazi propaganda these behaviors are accidental to their underlying essence, which is something subhuman. Germans, on the other hand, possess the essence of humanness; it is accidental if they share traits with Jews.¹⁵⁴ In justifying an essential, radical separation between themselves and the Other, one group of humans can claim a human essence for themselves while arguing that the Other lacks that essence and is, therefore, not human. In this respect, the logic of dehumanization parallels the logic that governs the delineation of groups in genocide. Similarly, genocide is a crime directed at groups as such that consists establishing and holding onto one's identity by excluding others that might compromise that identity.¹⁵⁵ In genocide, members of groups are perceived as unable to transcend, transform, or distance themselves from their group because no matter how they appear or behave, they will always have an inhering essence that determines their true nature.

II. Purity

Purity: Adherence to a naturalized logic that either excludes the possibility of middle terms and interstitial beings or treats such terms and beings as monstrous, deviant, or polluting.

¹⁵⁴ Himmler, "Die Untermenschen."

¹⁵⁵ Moshman, "Us and Them."

The notion of purity builds upon the concept of essences. In addition to adhering to the law of identity, the principle of purity also relies on the logical principle of the excluded middle. The law of the excluded middle states that everything is or it is not. There can be no third or middle terms. In genocidal dehumanization, the essence of one group is taken to be the negation of the essence of another group. The two terms are treated as a binaries or opposites. One cannot exist in the time and space of one without supplanting the other. As such, purity construes the us/them relationship as one of radical difference and mutual exclusion. The / in this relationship is taken to be a literal dividing line that separates the two groups. Mixing them would violate the law of the excluded middle, leading to impurity, to a corruption of essence. This is particularly frightening and threatening to the in-group, whose identity rests upon having a distinct and intact essence (identity). Should beings be perceived as possessing more than one primary essence at once or possessing a mixture of two or more essences, they are regarded as monsters, deviants, and pollutants.¹⁵⁶ Such beings are dangerous to the in-group because they could corrupt the purity of that group's identity. Likewise, they may invoke greater fear because their place in the cosmic and moral hierarchy is uncertain.¹⁵⁷

For example, in Cambodia, the Khmer Rouge regime referred to its victims as microbes, "pests buried within," and "traitors 'boring in.'"¹⁵⁸ These terms spoke of a threat that would eat away at and corrupt the identity of the group that controlled the regime. The campaign of ethnic cleansing that characterized the Bosnian genocide was

¹⁵⁶ Douglas, *Purity and Danger*.

¹⁵⁷ Smith, "Paradoxes of Dehumanization."

¹⁵⁸ Kiernan, "Twentieth Century Genocides."

spurred by similar motivations—removing Muslims from Serbian territory would ensure that the Serbian population would remain pure and uncorrupted.¹⁵⁹ As Norman A. Naimark notes, in the genocidal context “‘cleansing’ has a dual meaning; one purges the native community of foreign bodies, and one purges one’s own people of alien elements.”¹⁶⁰

While the desire for purity and the fear of corruption often spur removal and extermination of unwanted peoples during genocide, the imposition of binary thinking can lead one group to believe that if their essence is pure, the Other’s is inherently dirty. Such claims add support to the view that the victims deserved what they got and that violating them did not count because it was in their nature to be violated. For example, Andrea Smith argues that sexual violence against Native Americans was used as a colonial tool of conquest in the United States for the “the constant purification and elimination of racialized enemies within the state [to ensure] the growth of the national body.”¹⁶¹ Sexual violence was justified through propaganda that depicted the native peoples as sexually perverse, polluted with sin, dirty, violent, and thus, already inherently “rapable.”¹⁶²

III. Human Exceptionalism

Human Exceptionalism: A commitment to a strict moral and ontological hierarchy in which humans outrank other beings, especially animals.

¹⁵⁹ Kiernan, *Blood and Soil*.

¹⁶⁰ Naimark, *Fires of Hatred*, 4.

¹⁶¹ Smith, *Conquest*, 8-9.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 12.

According to the principle of purity, two groups that contain different essences are separate and should remain separate. Their relationship is one of dichotomy. A dichotomy refers to a simple difference or distinction between two things. However, the principle of human exceptionalism reconfigures this relationship from a simple dichotomy into a dualism. A dualism is, according to feminist logician Val Plumwood, “a particular way of dividing the world which results from a certain kind of denied dependency on a subordinated other...dualism can be seen as an alienated form of differentiation, in which power construes and constructs difference in terms of an inferior and alien realm.”¹⁶³ Whereas dichotomy is simply making a division or distinction, dualism treats the division as absolute and as part of the natural order of things. It uses the patterns of difference rendered by dichotomies to establish hierarchies in which the dualized other is systematically constructed as Other. In dualistic thinking each term of a relationship (*p* and *not-p* or the in-group and out-group) is treated as a self-identical entity that possesses an essential, unchanging nature. The two terms are then related to one another not just in terms of being different, but so that one side of the relation always represents a lack or absence of some positive quality that exists in the other. In other words, dualisms like culture/nature, male/female, savage/civilized, and human/animal treat differences as inherent and fixed where the second term in the relationship is the representation of the absence of the essence of the first term. The relation of hierarchy between the two terms is key, constructing a logic of domination. As Plumwood explains,

A dualism is an intense, established and developed cultural expression of such a hierarchical relationship, constructing central cultural concepts and identities so as to make equality and mutuality literally unthinkable.

¹⁶³ Plumwood, “Politics of Reason,” 19.

Dualism is a relation of separation and domination inscribed and naturalized in culture and characterized by radical exclusion, distancing and opposition between orders construed as systematically higher and lower, as inferior and superior, ruler and ruled, center and periphery. It treats the division as part of the natures of beings construed as not merely different but as belonging to radically different orders or kinds, and hence as not open to change.¹⁶⁴

Though dualisms reflect constructed cultural concepts, they are so embedded within culture that they are mistakenly taken to be natural. The “naturalness” of the terms of the relation is then used to justify and explain domination, oppression, and violence.

Plumwood identifies five characteristics of dualism that contribute to this function: backgrounding, radical exclusion, relational definition, objectification, and homogenization. Through backgrounding, the Other is deemed inessential, their contributions and reality treated as unimportant and not worth noticing. The view of the positive value, the “master,” is considered universal, and alternative perspectives are not considered or even imagined.¹⁶⁵ Despite this, the master requires the Other to be the boundary against which the identity of the master is defined. In this relational definition, the Other is perceived as a lack or negativity.¹⁶⁶ Yet, because the master does not want to admit any kind of dependency on the Other, the master polarizes the relationship by downplaying similarities while maximizing and magnifying differences, resulting in radical exclusion.¹⁶⁷ Radical exclusion, in turn, reinforces essentialist approaches to the Other, specifically via objectification (treating the Other as an object or instrument for one’s use rather than as an independent agent with its own goals and purposes) and

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 23.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 23-4.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 26-7.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 24-6.

homogenization (ignoring differences that exist within those relegated to a lesser status).¹⁶⁸

Though dualism is the structure of the logic of the principle of human exceptionalism, the content of that structure is equally important. According to the principle of human exceptionalism, the particular dualism at work is human/animal. The human essence is seen as superior to essences associated with animals and other natural beings. In the history of Western thought “the animal” has been used to define and denote the limits of “the human.” But the relationship is not one simply of radical exclusion. As Kelly Oliver points out, “It is not just that the *animal* and *animality* remain the constitutive outside of the concepts *human* and *humanity* or that the animal and animality are the abjected other against which what is properly human and humanity are defined and maintained...despite the explicit message of [many philosophical] texts—that humans are radically distinct from animals—animals function to teach man how to be human.”¹⁶⁹ In other words, the concept of the human depends on the concept of the animal for its coherence. This is precisely what happens in dehumanization.

As we have seen in the discussion of dehumanization in the previous chapter, for the most part scholars doing research on dehumanization and genocide take for granted that dehumanization involves treating humans the way humans frequently treat other animals, and that treating humans in this manner is a moral wrong. As noted earlier, Kalpana Sheshadri sees this as a way of maintaining the purity of the human and its place

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 27-30.

¹⁶⁹ Oliver, *Animal Lessons*, 20-1.

in higher up in the a hierarchy.¹⁷⁰ Texts on genocide and dehumanization abound with examples of one group of humans insulting another group of humans by referring to them according to various animal names like cockroaches, vermin, rats, dogs, apes, and pigs. Why is it assumed that readers of these texts will share the understanding that calling someone a snake is a violation of a person's dignity? For example, Smith explains that the function of dehumanization is to make it morally acceptable to kill. If one group is not recognized as human then they are no longer within the realm of moral obligation. As he puts it: "It's wrong to kill a person, but permissible to exterminate a rat."¹⁷¹ Though examples of nonhuman animals being used to justify human extermination abound within their studies of dehumanization and genocide, authors like Smith, Helen Fein, James Waller, Ben Kiernan, and Nick Haslam never seriously consider why this pattern exists and what the abundance of nonhuman animal metaphors and actual violence towards nonhuman animals might be able to tell us about the nature of dehumanization and genocidal violence.

Here, I would like to take a moment to consider the role of nonhuman animals in dehumanization and genocide. Broadly speaking, in dehumanization the inferiority of the out-group is tied to the (supposed) inherent biological, cognitive, moral, and spiritual deficiencies of nonhuman animals. Various qualities including rationality, language, higher-order emotions, laughter, tool use, the ability to make moral judgments, recognition of one's own mortality, and free will (among others) have been used to define

¹⁷⁰ Sheshadri, *HumAnimal*.

¹⁷¹ Smith, *Less Than Human*, 15.

human life over and against the lives of other animals.¹⁷² The Great Chain of Being, for example, is a cosmological ordering of the world that places God at the principle, humans after angels, and nonhuman animals and demons on the rungs below.¹⁷³ Contemporary Western society continues to take human and animal difference for granted despite new scientific studies that call into question our traditional assumptions about the differences in human and nonhuman animal nature. For example, elephants mourn their dead, rats can laugh, great apes can use sign language to communicate with humans, and many nonhuman animals experience a wide range of emotions and emotional relationships.¹⁷⁴ Though the traditional lines that have been used to separate human life from animal life seem more like suggestions or figments of our imagination, invoking animal inferiority still remains a powerful tool of dehumanization. In a recent example, on Wednesday May 16, 2018 US President Donald Trump said of undocumented immigrants, “These aren’t people, these are animals, and we’re taking them out of the country at a level and at a rate that’s never happened before.”¹⁷⁵ The claim, which provoked anger and outrage for some while fueling fear and a desire for purity for others, did not garner attention for how the concept of “animals” was once again deployed for this effect.

In genocidal dehumanization four types of nonhuman animal metaphors are frequently deployed to characterize the out-group: pests, predators, prey, and companion animals. The animals selected for comparison are chosen based on cultural narratives about which nonhuman animals deserve respect and which do not, often illustrating

¹⁷² Aristotle, “On the Soul.”; Aquinas, *On Human Nature.*; Descartes, *Discourse.*; Kant, *Anthropology.*

¹⁷³ Lovejoy, *Great Chain of Being.*

¹⁷⁴ Some examples of current research include: Bekoff, *Emotional Lives of Animals.*; de Waal, *Are We Smart Enough.*; de Waal, *Mama’s Last Hug.*; Godfrey-Smith, *Other Minds.*; King, *How Animals Grieve.*

¹⁷⁵ Quoted in Davis, “Trump Calls.”

humans' general ambivalence about who or what deserves moral consideration. Pests include bacteria, parasites, and creatures considered to be vermin such as rats or cockroaches. Pests and other "unclean" animals invoke disgust and fear of contamination, violating a moral sense of cleanliness and purity.¹⁷⁶ For example, during WWII, Jews were frequently compared to rats, parasites, and disease. In Rwanda, Tutsis were compared to cockroaches. In Cambodia, the Khmer Rouge claimed that "Buddhist monks do nothing but eat and sleep and have exploited the population for more than 2,000 years. They are leeches sucking the people's blood."¹⁷⁷

Predator animals invoke feelings of dread, fear, and danger. Since predators evoke existential horror, people animalized in this way are frequently associated with evil, cannibalism, and demons. Such characterizations incite desires to preempt possible harm by enacting self-defensive violence.¹⁷⁸ Such sentiments were transmitted via the designation of Indigenous peoples as "bloodthirsty savages" and cannibals who had no control over their actions or respect for fellow humans. As Gustav Jahoda explains, at times Europeans who encountered aboriginal peoples in Australia and the Americas would attribute to them animal-like senses, believing that "American Indians are as sensitive as bloodhounds; savages, like dogs, live in a world of smells, and their dislike of another person depends on their odour."¹⁷⁹ The comparison with predatory animals also accompanied beliefs about sexual promiscuity and deviance. As anthropologist Anthony Pagden illustrates, the Conquistadors believed that Indians "could not clearly distinguish

¹⁷⁶ Savage, "Disease Incarnate."

¹⁷⁷ Quoted in Naimark, *Genocide*, 102.

¹⁷⁸ Smith, *Less Than Human*, 256.

¹⁷⁹ Jahoda, *Images of Savages*, 89.

between the rigid and self-defining categories into which the natural world was divided. The Indian could not see that the other human beings were not, for him, a natural food any more than he could see that animals or creatures of the same sex were not his natural mates.”¹⁸⁰

When dehumanized peoples are compared to prey animals, they may be treated by the dehumanizers as objects of conquest, trophies, and sources of recreation.¹⁸¹ The forced marches Native Americans endured in the southeastern and western parts of US involved European settlers herding Native people like cattle to new lands. Massacres, like the one at Wounded Knee, were often accompanied by scalping, skinning, and the removal of genitalia and other appendages as trophies as if the troops carrying out the massacre were on a hunting expedition.¹⁸² Survivors and victims of genocide also tend to describe their experience of dehumanization as though they were prey. One survivor of the Bosnian genocide who had been trapped in Sarajevo during the three year siege against it reported that she “felt like a bird in a cage” while another survivor reported that “they [the Chetniks] want to destroy our identity. They treated us like cattle.”¹⁸³

The ambivalence toward nonhuman animals is most evident when dehumanization involves comparisons to companion animals. Companion animals, which are often cared for and treated like family, will, in most circumstances, fall within the bounds of moral consideration. However, while loving a pet dog may be deemed socially acceptable in some cultures, calling someone a dog is almost always considered an insult.

¹⁸⁰ Quoted in *ibid.*, 102.

¹⁸¹ Smith, *Less Than Human*, 259.

¹⁸² Smith, *Conquest.*; Stannard, *American Holocaust*.

¹⁸³ Weine, *History Is a Nightmare*, 46, 56.

Sawela Sulimann, a survivor of the Darfur genocide reported that before being gang raped her attackers said to her, “Black girl, you are too dark. You are like a dog. We want to make a light baby.”¹⁸⁴ Similarly, another Darfur survivor stated that before she was raped by militiamen they said, “Dog, you have sex with me...The government gave me permission to rape you. This is not your land anymore, *abid*, go.”¹⁸⁵

While specific comparisons to nonhuman animals abound, genocidal dehumanization often involves comparing the targeted group to a generic animal-being or beast. These metaphors most strikingly illustrate the dualistic relationship between “the human” and the “the animal” as they homogenize a broad and varied category of creatures into a single indistinguishable block for the sole purpose of defining what the human is and is not. For example, during the colonization of the Americas, historian Francis Parkman commented in regards to the Oglala Sioux that “an impassible gulf lies between the white man and his red brethren...[A]fter breathing the prairie air for a few months or weeks, he begins to look upon them as a troublesome and dangerous species of wild beast.”¹⁸⁶ Similarly, during Stalin’s reign in the Soviet Union, the peasant class (known as the kulaks) was slated for ethnic cleansing. One propaganda slogan declared, “We will exile the kulak by the thousands and when necessary—shoot the kulak breed.”¹⁸⁷ The writer Maxim Gorky called the kulaks “half-animals.”¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁴ Wax, “We Want to Make.”

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁶ Quoted in Roberts, *Mark of the Beast*, 54.

¹⁸⁷ Quoted in Naimark, *Genocide*, 87.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

As these examples attest, the distinction between human and nonhuman animals has an important role to play within genocide. As noted above, various scholars believe that seeing another as a member of a different species provides grounds for moral exclusions. Daniel Goldhagen explains that when a group is dehumanized they are believed to “inherently lack qualities fundamental to being human in the sense of deserving moral respect, rights, and protection. Such beings are said to lack human capacities or powers, and as a definitional matter, do not need to be treated as humans.”¹⁸⁹ According to Smith, “Thinking of a person as a member of the same species as yourself, as sharing the same essence, automatically evokes a sense of oneness with them. You perceive them as a fellow member of the human community. By conceiving of a person in this way, you conceive of them as a member of your in-group, and this triggers inhibitions against harming them.”¹⁹⁰ In other words, if an individual or group is conceived of as (or is put in a situation in which it becomes that they are) lacking a human essence, human capacities, human characteristics, and instead are conceived of as having a nonhuman animal essence, then that individual or group is rendered killable.

A clear example of these three metaphysical principles at work in the context of genocide appears in Heinrich Himmler’s 1935 pamphlet *Die Untermenschen*, a piece of anti-Jewish propaganda. Himmler writes,

Just as the night rises against the day, the light and dark are in eternal conflict. So too, is the subhuman the greatest enemy of the dominant species on earth, mankind. The subhuman is a biological creature, crafted by nature, which has hands, legs, eyes and mouth, even the semblance of a brain. Nevertheless, this terrible creature is only a partial human being.

¹⁸⁹ Goldhagen, *Worse than War*, 319.

¹⁹⁰ Smith, *Less Than Human*, 26.

Although it has features similar to a human, the subhuman is lower on the spiritual and psychological scale than any animal. Inside of this creature lies wild and unrestrained passions: an incessant need to destroy, filled with the most primitive desires, chaos and coldhearted villainy...¹⁹¹

Not all of those, who appear human are in fact so. Woe to him who forgets it!

In this passage, Himmler embraces the concept of essentialism. Differences between categories cannot be determined by purely visual clues alone—the underlying essence of the being is what ultimately determines its group and ontological and moral status. Second, the adulteration of human and nonhuman is considered terrible and impure, characterizing its inferiority. Finally, there exists a “natural” biological hierarchy in which humans are at the top followed by nonhuman animals, and then, in this schema, subhumans, who presumably lack even the positive characteristics of other animals. The naturalness and biological nature of the subhuman is not denied; rather, it is organized in relation to other known categories with established meanings (humans>animals). This hierarchy is correlated with moral status so that the lower on the hierarchy one is situated, the more villainous, destructive, and terrible one becomes. The establishment of these categories and their moral characteristics help create a particular rational framework and then function within it, making certain actions and beliefs reasonable and morally acceptable because they echo a logic that has been normalized and naturalized. In other words, in this narrative, the logic of dehumanization leads to the conclusion that extermination is necessary. Genocide becomes the only rational solution given the metaphysics and logic at work.

¹⁹¹ Himmler, “Die Untermensch.”

IV. Conclusion

To summarize, I have argued that dehumanization is a necessary condition for genocide insofar as it fulfills multiple functions within genocide including reducing resistance to violence, motivating violence, legitimizing violence, and characterizing the performance of genocidal violence. Dehumanization, broadly speaking, is any belief, statement, or act that renders one group of people inferior to another on the basis of the belief that the group deemed inferior is lacking a characteristic(s) essential to being human. It is the way in which genocide is performed.

I have argued that dehumanization is not simply an epistemological issue in which one conceives or believes another to be a subhuman creature. Rather, dehumanization is also a metaphysical issue. The ability to conceive of someone as nonhuman is predicated on the understanding that the world is a particular way and that it is governed by particular principles. These principles, which appear in dehumanization, are essentialism, purity, and human exceptionalism. As practice and performance, dehumanization instantiates a reality that fits the laws of this metaphysics. Furthermore, if genocidal dehumanization is a performance—“a stylized act of repetitions—” rather than a set of beliefs, it would undermine the notion that essences pre-exist.¹⁹²

Essentialism entails a commitment to a rendering of reality and the beings and states that constitute it such that those beings can be separated into natural kinds according to fixed, unchanging essences. In genocide, individuals are classified according to their group membership. Membership in that group is taken to be necessary rather than accidental. In other words, members of the group cannot choose to be members or not; they are born into it. Purity involves adherence to a naturalized logic that either excludes

¹⁹² Butler, “Performative Acts.”

the possibility of middle terms and interstitial beings or treats such terms and beings as monstrous, deviant, or polluting. In genocide acts like ethnic cleansing, extermination, and forced assimilation are frequently accompanied by the belief that one's group identity is at stake if the two groups and the essences are allowed to mingle.¹⁹³ Maintaining purity of biology, ideology, culture, etc. becomes a strong motivating factor behind genocide. Finally, human exceptionalism holds that there is a strict moral and ontological hierarchy in which humans outrank other beings, especially animals. If the human is defined as that which is not animal, then the axis that supports dehumanizing logic is the belief that nonhuman animals are ontologically and morally other. This otherness, when taken as negation, threatens the purity and integrity of the human essence. If, as I claim, dehumanization is a necessary condition for genocide, then human exceptionalism is also a ground for justifying and rationalizing genocide.

As we saw, genocide is defined as an act that targets groups as such and that these groups are determined by an inhering and unchangeable essence. The logic of genocide operates in accordance with this belief in essential differences, making it possible for perpetrators to rationalize and justify the claim that the Other is radically unlike themselves, outside the parameters of normal moral obligation, and hence killable. Dehumanization functions the same way. Just as group-think or racialism does not necessarily lead to extreme forms of exclusion, dehumanization also does not necessarily lead to extreme forms of violence. But when it does, dehumanizing rhetoric, actions, narratives, and ideologies also depend on an essentialist metaphysics. Dehumanization adds shape and rationalization to genocidal violence by taking presupposed ontological

¹⁹³ Moshman, "Us and Them."

assumptions about the differences between humans and animals and mapping them onto the differences in human populations. According to Berel Lang, it is through this essentializing dehumanization “that the uniqueness of genocide is located.”¹⁹⁴ Lang argues that physical destruction of the out-group is a way of asserting the principle that nonhumans should not be treated as humans are, “leav[ing] no doubt either about the principle or about its application in a particular context.”¹⁹⁵ Furthermore, dehumanization is a *conscious act*, a deliberate decision made on the part of the perpetrating community that affirms that they know their actions are wrong. Lang explains, “There is one step of deliberation required in order to view apparent individuals, persons, only in terms of a generic essence; there is a second step of deliberation presupposed in the claim that the generic essence constitutes an imminent danger; there is a third step of deliberation in the claim that a warrant for extermination is implied by the generic essence and as the desirable one among possible preferences.”¹⁹⁶ In this respect, in dehumanization the assumptions people have about who counts as a person, who deserves moral consideration, and who is guaranteed rights are used to justify violence and the particular methods used for carrying it out. Because dehumanization is integral to the structure of genocide, preventing genocide necessarily entails that we address the problem of dehumanization and the metaphysical principles that enable it.

In the following chapters I will explore what the implications this metaphysics, especially the principle of human exceptionalism, has on thinking about methods for preventing dehumanization and genocide. In chapter five I consider “rehumanization” as

¹⁹⁴ Lang, “Concept of Genocide,” 13.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 14.

a response to dehumanization, arguing that rehumanization continues to traffic in a problematic notion of “the human” and “the animal,” reinforcing the metaphysics of dehumanization and genocide rather than challenging them. In chapter six, I make a parallel argument regarding human rights, which has been the primary form of discourse in regards to genocide prevention. Human rights, which also rely on a human/animal dualism, may address certain political, economic, and ethical inequalities experienced between humans, but as long as they leave violence toward nonhuman animals unconsidered, the danger of an ethics and politics based on purity continues to remain. In chapter seven, I draw on Native American philosophy to argue that until violence against animals and other nonhuman beings is taken seriously as genocide rather than as something separate such as ecocide, responses to genocide will remain colonial and will continue to function within the parameters of the metaphysical principles of essentialism, purity, and human exceptionalism. Ultimately, if we want to prevent genocide and dehumanization, these metaphysical principles must be abandoned in favor of ones that actually reflect the reality that there are no essential natures, there is no purity, and that “humans” and “animals” are not fundamentally different.

CHAPTER V RESPONDING TO DEHUMANIZATION THROUGH RE-HUMANIZATION

If dehumanization is a necessary condition for genocide, then preventing dehumanization should be part of an effort to prevent genocide. However, because dehumanization has been largely treated as ancillary to the practice of genocide and has been a generally neglected topic in philosophy on the whole, discussions of how to limit or respond to dehumanization are scarce. Most of these discussions are occurring in social psychology where, as we have seen, dehumanization is considered to be a problem that has roots in the cognitive structure of the human brain. This approach to thinking about dehumanization suggests that until the brain itself changes dehumanization might always be a problem for human beings. However, humans may be prone to categorizing things in the world according to kinds, but the methods and ways of categorization can vary greatly between different cultures and groups. This suggests that dividing beings according to fixed essences, emphasizing purity, and positing fundamental differences between human animals and other animals is just one way of organizing the world. If there are other ways, then perhaps altering the principles by which we organize the world can help overcome dehumanization.¹⁹⁷

One of the most common ways of responding to dehumanization is to rehumanize the other. Rehumanization involves restoring what has supposedly been lost through the process of dehumanization. In this chapter I address three different philosophies of rehumanization that are responses to mass violence and mass oppression. The first is an argument made by Bartolomé de Las Casas, a Spanish explorer of the Dominican Order who advocated for the rights of the Indigenous peoples of South America. Following Las

¹⁹⁷ In chapters seven and eight, I will introduce an alternative way of organizing the world according to a Native American worldview.

Casas, I turn to the work of Emmanuel Levinas, a Jewish philosopher and survivor of World War II. Finally, I engage with the work of a contemporary philosopher, Rianna Oelefson, whose work responds directly to current dehumanization literature in sociology, psychology, and philosophy. Through my analysis of these approaches, I show how these philosophies, each of which advocates rehumanization as a response to dehumanization, remain trapped within the logic of genocidal dehumanization.¹⁹⁸ Though these philosophers try to resist essentialism and purity in their responses to dehumanization, they each fall back on the human/animal dualism and human exceptionalism. This compromises their philosophical positions and their ability to successfully demonstrate that philosophies of rehumanization can resolve the problems of dehumanization. Rather than using rehumanization as the response to dehumanization, in the final section I argue along with philosophers Ann Cahill and Kelly Oliver that we need an ethics based in difference and relationality which ultimately requires the rejection

¹⁹⁸ Though I focus on these three authors in the dissertation, in my article “Countering Genocidal Dehumanization,” I offer a similar analysis of Brazilian scholar Paulo Freire’s work. In his book *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire resists the notion of an essential human identity, claiming becoming human is an “ontological vocation,” an on-going process of becoming that does not fit into one particular mold—that of the oppressor. For Freire, dehumanization, which occurs through oppression, stifles the potentiality of human being and becoming, whereas rehumanization through emancipatory education allows humans to flourish. However, Freire falls back on old tropes about the differences between humans and other animals, denying that animals participate in this same process ontology. For Freire, animals, unlike humans, do not reflect on their actions, cannot set objectives for themselves, and do not transform themselves or the world around them (97). Nonhuman animals are merely hardwired to respond to stimuli in the environment. Thus, for Freire, “As a result, animals do not ‘animalize’ their configuration in order to animalize themselves---nor do they ‘deanimalize’ themselves. Even in the forest, they remain ‘beings-in-themselves,’ as animal-like there as in the zoo.” By denying that nonhuman animals have the capacity for change, reflection, and praxis, Freire essentializes both humans and other animals, undermines his adherence to process ontology, and reinforces the human/animal dualism. This is especially problematic for his claim that rehumanization is the correct response to dehumanization because he only ends up reaffirming a boundary between humans and animals that will continue to make it possible for one group of humans to locate another on the other side of that boundary, denying their humanity. Freire’s philosophy cannot deal with situations in which the oppressors already believe the oppressed are animals or in situations where oppression includes extermination. Though Freire has many important contributions to make regarding efforts to overcome oppression, it is important to attend to how nonhuman animals are used in the dehumanizing process and how they facilitate a humanist discourse that continues to perpetuate the very logic on which dehumanization rests.

of the three metaphysical principles on which de- and rehumanization relies: essentialism, purity, and human exceptionalism.

I. Indians, Barbarians, and Animals

The European encounter with the Indigenous peoples of the Americas precipitated a centuries-long series of deadly events that culminated in the destruction and murder of ninety-eight percent of the 147 million people living in the “new world” prior to the arrival of the Europeans.¹⁹⁹ Though some of this death could be attributed to disease and traditional warfare, thanks to the records and writings of colonizers, merchants, explorers, and other travelers we also know that many of these deaths were due to the settlers’ wholesale slaughter and enslavement of the peoples they encountered. While it is likely the case that as individuals many of the privateers, mercenaries, soldiers, and explorers who made the journey to the Americas (particularly Central and South America) needed little justification beyond their own greed to kill and enslave the native peoples they met, the complicity of their leadership and the failure of the Spanish crown to hold their representatives accountable or to protect the indigenous inhabitants speaks to a deeper philosophical justification—that the native peoples might look human, but were actually some other type of creature.

This view was given voice by Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda, a chaplain for King Charles V of Spain and his official chronicler. In his work *The Second Democrates; Or, the Just Causes of the War against the Indians*, Sepúlveda argues that the Indians are natural slaves and the Spaniards their natural masters. The Indians, he argues, are

¹⁹⁹ Stannard, *American Holocaust*, 11.

“hommunculi in whom hardly a vestige of humanity remains. They were ‘like pigs with their eyes always fixed on the ground.’ Their brutish behavior, absence of any recognizable culture, their cowardice...their supposed cannibalism and their paganism, all clearly indicated that God had intended them to be slaves...”²⁰⁰ As natural slaves the Indians did not deserve the same moral or political consideration granted to proper humans. Thus, their slaughter and enslavement was justified.

In contrast to Sepúlveda’s views were those of the Catholic priest Bartolomé de Las Casas. Unlike Sepúlveda, Las Casas had traveled to South America on multiple occasions. The first of his trips was in 1502. He lived in South America for a time as a cleric, monk, and eventually priest of the Dominican Order. During his early years in the Americas he owned slaves and participated in the *encomienda* system, a form of indentured servitude that was imposed upon the native peoples. In 1522 he had a “conversion” experience that sparked him to become one of the most vociferous advocates for the lives, rights, and well-being of Indigenous peoples. Not only did Las Casas write multiple histories detailing the destruction that he witnessed the Spanish bring to indigenous communities, he wrote treatises that defended their dignity and called for the Spanish government to provide protections for them. One of his most famous arguments is a rebuttal to Sepúlveda’s attacks on the Indians’ humanity. In *In Defense of the Indians*, Las Casas engages in a thorough refutation of Sepúlveda’s argument. This treatise, as well as his other works, was written for the rulers and people of Spain and Europe in addition to an ecclesiastic audience. One of the primary aims of his works was to convey to his readers that the Indians are human, civilized in their own way,

²⁰⁰ Pagden, introduction to *A Short Account*, xxviii.

undeserving of the violence brought to bear upon them, and capable of being brought into the “sheepfold” of Christ. Generally speaking, Las Casas aims to (re)humanize the indigenous peoples of South America as a means of convincing the Spanish and Catholic authorities to intervene on behalf of the Indians against the Conquistadors.

Las Casas’ defense rests on a metaphysics that is based on Catholic theology. This metaphysic holds that a single god created the universe and everything in it. This god, as a good, all-powerful and perfect being, created nature such that it emulates that perfection. This perfection is most readily apparent in the world through the use of reason in creatures capable of rationality. As part of this cosmology, Las Casas believes in a hierarchy of creatures in which god is at the pinnacle and those with reason are closer to god. According to Las Casas, this means that after god come the angels “because they are all entirely intellectual beings” then the humans who have the capacity for reason but can stray from it due to the distraction of the body and sense, and finally the nonhuman animals, which lack reason and are controlled by their passions and baser natures.²⁰¹ Las Casas claims that war against the Indians is unjust on four grounds. First, the Indians are humans, not barbarians or natural slaves. Second, the Indians have not deliberately committed crimes against natural or divine law, but have done so only accidentally. Third, despite reports of human sacrifice and cannibalism among the native peoples, the majority of Indians are innocent and do not deserve to die to save a few. Finally, using war as a means of spreading the word of Christ goes against the gospel and will more likely drive people away from Christianity rather than toward it. The foundational premise of his argument that the war against the Indians is unjust is his argument that the

²⁰¹ Las Casas, *Defense of the Indians*, 37.

native peoples are human and, thus, are capable of becoming Christians. As such, the mission of the Spanish is not to conquer but to convert.

To begin his defense, Las Casas makes the case that the indigenous peoples of the Americas are indeed rational human beings, not nonhuman animals or natural slaves. Drawing on Aristotle's *Politics* and *Ethics*, Las Casas distinguishes between four types of barbarians. The first kind of barbarian behaves without reason, is wild, uncontrolled, and compelled by the passions. Because they let their passions dictate their actions rather than using reasons, such barbarians behave like animals. As Las Casas explains, "...barbarian in the loose and broad sense of the word means any cruel, inhuman, and merciless man acting against human reason out of anger or native disposition, so that, putting aside decency, meekness, and human moderation, he becomes hard, severe, quarrelsome, unbearable, cruel, and plunges blindly into crimes that only the wildest beasts of the forest would commit."²⁰² The first type of barbarian is one who is "completely forgetful of reason and virtue."²⁰³ The second type of barbarians is so-called because they lack culture, written language, and learning. Such people are not barbarians in the strict literal sense, but are made to be barbarians by circumstance. Unlike the previous type, these barbarians do not fail to act according to reason nor are they driven solely by the passions. Their barbarism stems out of ignorance. According to Las Casas, "a people can be called barbarians and still be wise, courageous, prudent, and lead a settled life."²⁰⁴ What characterizes barbarians of this kind is a more imperfect form of culture, language,

²⁰² Las Casas, *Defense of the Indians*, 28-9.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, 29.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 31.

and political life. The proper and strict meaning of “barbarian” can be applied to the third type. These barbarians lack more than culture and control over their passions. They are “those who, either because of their evil and wicked character or the barrenness of the region in which they live, are cruel, savage, sottish, stupid, and strangers to reason. They are not governed by law or right, do not cultivate friendships, and have no state or politically organized community. Rather, they are without ruler, laws, and institutions.”²⁰⁵ In addition to these failures, barbarians of the third type do not make contracts or engage in commerce. To an even greater extent than the first kind of barbarian, people of this type live like nonhuman animals. The final kind of barbarian is the one who does not acknowledge Christ. Such barbarians suffer from vice, which over time makes them more animal-like and effeminate. Initiation into the Christian mysteries is the proposed remedy for this form of barbarism.

Each of these types of barbarian can only be understood in the context of what they are not and what they are like. Las Casas does not devote much space to describing the characteristics of angels and nonhuman animals, but he discusses at length the qualities that belong to humans, typically in opposition to nonhuman animal life. In addition to the capacity for reason these traits include having culture and community, mastery of language and the language arts, docility, the capacity for friendship, the ability to learn, and engagement in politics and economics. When humans fail to exhibit these traits they become barbarians. None of the barbarians is properly human in the strictest sense for each strays from right reason, which, when followed, leads to belief in the Christian god. The first type of barbarian is controlled by the passions; the second reasons poorly, which leads to tyranny and imperfection in human society; the third

²⁰⁵ Ibid., 32.

seems to lack reason entirely, making it antithetical to human nature entirely; and the fourth is prone to vice until reason leads to the acceptance of Christ. In each case failure to live according to reason is a form of corruption that turns humans into other animals.

The problem of corruption speaks to the first two metaphysical principles associated with dehumanization: essentialism and purity. One way of reading Las Casas' defense is to see its overarching purpose to be the purification of the souls of the Indians. The vast majority of *Defense* is directed toward convincing his readers that the Indians can and should be converted not just for their sakes but for the sakes of the Spanish as well. The notion of salvation rests on the premise that accepting Christ will cleanse people of their sins and draw them away from the pollution caused by their vices. The confluence of faith and reason leads to purity of the soul. However, this purity is put at risk by the corrupting influence of the body. As Las Casas explains, "spiritual things, the goods of reason, and things intellectual" are "far removed from the senses."²⁰⁶ But because humans "are reared in the midst of goods of the body and sense, the source of corrupt behavior," they "are plunged into sinful conduct."²⁰⁷ In this way Las Casas sets up a mind/body dualism in which the mind is superior to the body. The mind should control the passions which come from our relation to material goods and the senses.

There are two effects of this belief that I would like to note. First, the notion that there can be purity through the right use of reason (divinely given) speaks to a kind of essentialism. Second, what makes humans different from other animals is a particular capacity that was implanted into them by God. All humans, no matter how barbaric they

²⁰⁶ Ibid., 36.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

are, have, in some measure, this capacity. Even the third type of barbarian who is in every other way a nonhuman animal might still be saved. Las Casas differs from Aristotle on this point, stating, “The Philosopher [Aristotle] adds that it is lawful to catch or hunt barbarians of this type like wild beasts so that they might be led to the right way of life...but...barbarians must not be compelled harshly in the manner described by the Philosopher, but are to be gently persuaded and lovingly drawn to accept the best way of life” for “though these peoples may be completely barbaric, they are nevertheless created in God’s image.”²⁰⁸ As God’s creatures, endowed with a rational nature, humans possess an essence different from other creatures that allows them to “stand above all other animals.”²⁰⁹ It should be noted that Las Casas is not as clear as he could be about this point because elsewhere he argues that there are some barbarians of the third type that are so depraved that they are “mistakes of nature or freaks in a rational nature.”²¹⁰ Las Casas reasons that if such freaks of nature appeared more than rarely it would belie God’s goodness, perfection, and power. Thus, even should such creatures appear in the world, whole populations of native peoples cannot be said to be of this sort.

Once human life is properly defined in contrast to nonhuman animal life, Las Casas can make the case that the Indians are not animals, barbarians in the strict sense of the word, or natural slaves any more than other groups of people. His argument sets out to humanize the Indians by pointing out all the ways that they are cultured, civilized, and capable of reason and learning. Humanness is measured by how like the Indians are to Europeans. Las Casas’ method of humanization relies on a denial of the value of the

²⁰⁸ Ibid., 38-9.

²⁰⁹ Ibid., 35.

²¹⁰ Ibid.

human body and human animality. Bodily differences, physical needs, material considerations, and bodily expression have no place in this cosmology. The only thing that matters is that which is universal to human life: the capacity for reason and belief in god. As such, Las Casas' goals end up subsuming difference under the same rather than accepting the breadth of human diversity.

This is not to say that Las Casas was not in many ways ahead of his time on the issue of Indigenous rights. For one, the fact that he does not care about the body means that appearances such as skin color and gender do not determine one's membership in the human species.²¹¹ Second, in *Defense* he offers numerous arguments that could be interpreted as defense of native sovereignty in which he claims that the indigenous peoples have a right to practice their own cultures and govern themselves as they see fit. In fact, war cannot even be justified in order to prevent people from worshipping idols. Even these practices must be tolerated by Christians until the Indians can be taught gently about the errors of their ways. Even so, Las Casas' open-minded attitude toward the lives of American Indians and his argument that they are just as human (if not more so!) than the Spanish, is belied by his reliance on the principles of essentialism, purity, and human exceptionalism. His critical attitude toward the body and animality means that his philosophy continues to function within the metaphysics of dehumanization and genocide.

In fact, according to Raphael Lemkin's definition of genocide (and to a lesser extent the UN definition), a conversion campaign, which Las Casas advocates as part of

²¹¹ He does however cite studies available during his lifetime that theorized that people who lived in colder climates and further from the equator were less capable of good reasoning than those who lived closer. But such claims were not based on the appearances of certain peoples but on their geographical location. If appearance factored in, it might only indicate from where in the world such individuals originated.

the process of making barbarians into proper humans, can be a weapon wielded in the destruction of a group. Though killing may not be involved in his approach, he still intentionally aims toward the destruction of other religious groups as such. And as for those people who are taught the Gospel but refuse its teaching—they are dogs, and just war may be made against them.²¹²

II. A Limit to Infinity

In *Modernity and the Holocaust*, Zygmunt Bauman argues that one of the side effects of the development of bureaucratic and modern society is the growth of social distance between people. This increased social distance turns morality, especially responsibility for others, into an abstract concept that is a step removed from moral actors. At times Bauman describes this increase in social distance and erosion of responsibility for one's neighbors as a kind of depersonalization and dehumanization. Not only does the modern social system turn individuals into stereotypes, but it also turns them into "mere agents of knowledge," valued for their technical know-how and expertise rather than their personality, moral integrity, or humanity.²¹³ As the social production of distance increases and moral responsibility is substituted more and more for technical expertise, there is a corresponding increase in "indifference to the plight of the Other."²¹⁴ For Bauman, this form of social organization is symptomatic of the pre-Holocaust era and contributed to the breakdown of relationships that bound people together and made them feel responsible for one another. In "effacing the face" of the

²¹² Las Casas, *Defense of the Indians*, 81.

²¹³ Bauman, *Modernity*, 196.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 198.

other, the hyper-rational, bureaucratic, techno-centric aspects of modernity dehumanized and depersonalized the individuals who made up society, making it easier for them to follow morally questionable orders and to carry out directly or indirectly projects of extermination.

As a solution to this social distance, Bauman invokes the ethical philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas. According to Bauman, Levinas' philosophy of moral responsibility—of responsibility as the primary relation between two people—restores the face of the Other. It is a philosophy that relies on recognizing the other not as an abstract stereotype, but as an individual who limits the self and calls the self to an awareness of the self's responsibility. Bauman sees in Levinas' ethics a solution to the problem of depersonalization and dehumanization. Where modernity seeks to turn individuals into faceless masses, Levinas seeks to bring the face of the other into focus before us. As we will see below, this appears to be a compelling way of thinking about rehumanization. It seems to recognize the particularity of the Other, respecting and building on the difference that exists between self and Other. But both Bauman and Levinas take a questionable stance toward nonhuman animals and animality, which undermines the project. To illustrate this, I draw on the work of Jacques Derrida and Giorgio Agamben, who, though they are working through different kinds of philosophical projects, at times take a similar interest in the limits between the human and the animal, especially in regards to ethics after genocide.

In response to an interview on whether or not one can disobey or misrecognize the commandment of the face—“thou shalt not kill”—Levinas said, “The essential problem is: can we speak of an absolute commandment after Auschwitz? Can we speak of

morality after the failure of morality?”²¹⁵ As a Jewish scholar and prisoner of war who survived a two year detainment by the Germans during WWII, we can read Levinas’ body of philosophical work as an ongoing effort to respond to these questions. Ultimately, he rejects traditional approaches to ethics based on unity, common ideals, and sameness in favor of an ethics that emphasizes alterity, discourse, and difference. For Levinas, philosophy’s idealization of oneness is part of the logic behind the failure of ethics. We can see this in his narratives of the self-centered, solipsistic consciousness that awakens to the social and ethical worth through an encounter with another human being. In *Time and the Other*, Levinas uses the metaphor of light to represent the traditional pursuit of knowledge in philosophy which aims to master the world. He says, “[K]nowledge does not surmount solitude. By themselves, reason and light consummate the solitude of a being as a being, and accomplish its destiny to be the sole and unique point of reference for everything. By encompassing everything within its universality, reason finds itself once again in solitude...its element—light—renders us master of the exterior world.”²¹⁶ In other words, reason is an expression of solitude insofar as it attempts to universalize, encompass, and master. Levinas calls the result a totality. In the preface to *Totality and Infinity* Levinas describes one of the problems with the concept of totality: “Individuals are reduced to bearers of forces that command them unbeknown to themselves. The meaning of individuals...is derived from the totality.”²¹⁷ A totality might be understood as a form of objectification or essentialism that fixes the identity of an

²¹⁵ Wright, “Paradox of Morality,” 176.

²¹⁶ Levinas, *Totality*, 65.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 21.

individual or group based on certain forces, relations, or characteristics that can supposedly be classified according to certain logical principles. Levinas' concerns stem from his own experiences and the experiences of the Jewish people during WWII and are especially clear in his description of violence, which he says "does not consist so much in injuring and annihilating persons as in interrupting their continuity, making them play roles in which they no longer recognize themselves, making them betray not only commitments but their own substance, making them carry out actions that will destroy every possibility for action."²¹⁸ Traditional ethics, which posits a stable, unchanging center, calls for care on the basis of likeness, which means violence emerges when the stable, unchanging center of a different group is rendered unlike and also unfit for care.

To move away from this dialectic of like and unlike, Levinas introduces the concept of infinity as a counter to the totalities of Western philosophy. The experience of infinity comes from the realization that one cannot master the future or death. These two experiences of the unknown always escape our grasp and always contain an element of mystery no matter how much we prepare for them. For Levinas, this alterity within ourselves only becomes manifest to us through our relation with another human being, for it is through human history that we understand time. It is also through our relation with another human being that the solipsistic consciousness becomes social and ethical. In *Time and the Other* and *Totality and Infinity* this relationship develops first between two lovers, then between the father and son, and finally through the face-to-face encounter with "the weak, the poor, the widow, and the orphan." Infinity refers to "a surplus always exterior to the totality" and is produced through the relation with the face

²¹⁸ Ibid.

of the Other.²¹⁹ The face helps us break with and transcend totality in several ways. First, the spatial relation of the face-to-face encounter is preferred to the side-by-side encounter because it defies the social ideal of fusion and collectivity in which each individual faces a common ideal to become a “we.” Instead we remove the middle term for an I-you relationship. Second, the face speaks and through speech can resist me and call me to respond. Through language the Other resists “what is necessarily plastic in manifestation...above and beyond the manifested and purely phenomenal form.”²²⁰ Through speech I am invited into a relation with the Other. Third, the vulnerability and nudity of the Other is revealed through the eyes of the Other. It is through this defenselessness that I receive the commandment “thou shall not kill.” Through these movements Levinas imagines the opening for a new heteronomous approach to ethics.

Despite the call for recognition and respect for the alterity of the Other that cannot be grasped or known in its entirety, Levinas still falls into the trap of one of the key assumptions and totalities constituted within Western philosophy: humanism. Levinas frequently uses the term “human” in his writing, explicitly stating that “a human being is the sole being which I am unable to encounter without expressing this very encounter to him”²²¹ or that “the other thus presents itself as human Other.”²²² In the same interview that he remarks on the difficulty of speaking of morality after Auschwitz, Levinas says that even though we do not want an animal to suffer needlessly, the human face is completely different from that of the animal. It is only by transposing human suffering on

²¹⁹ Ibid., 22.

²²⁰ Ibid., 200.

²²¹ Levinas, “Is Ontology Fundamental?” 7.

²²² Levinas, “Transcendence,” 12.

the animal that we recognize its face. Only as humans do we have the ability to choose to act irrationally and against our own vital interests in order to help the Other.²²³ We might excuse this exclusion of “the animal” due to the fact that Levinas’ ethics are a response to the atrocities committed by humans against other humans. However, this humanism prompts several questions: Who or what belongs in this category? How do we determine who the members of the category are? Do we have any ethical obligation to anything or anyone that does not fit within it? As in the other philosophies of rehumanization that we have seen so far, as long as these projects are reliant upon a human/animal dualism, they cannot break out of the metaphysics of dehumanization and genocide.

In *Humanism of the Other*, Levinas defends humanism on the grounds that it is the best method for preventing humans from becoming mere objects or instruments. For Levinas, meaning is given to us in the moral transcendence of the other person. However, by supporting humanism, Levinas also ends up supporting a totality. By examining the ways in which he excludes nonhuman animals, we can see what constitutes this totality, in which ways this totality ignores the complexity of other animal lives by relying on certain philosophical presuppositions, and how it can trouble his ethical project as a whole by potentially excluding certain groups of people who cannot meet the criteria of what it means to be a human being. In making claims about how humans and other animals differ, Levinas does not just exclude nonhuman animals from his ethical project, but creates the potential for the exclusion of certain human groups as well.

I will focus on three aspects of Levinas’ exclusion of nonhuman animals. First, “the animal” has no relation to death, which means that it cannot choose to defy its own vital instincts for the sake of another. Second, the animal has no face and thus cannot

²²³ Wright, “Paradox of Morality.”

gaze at me in order to beseech me through eyes that reveal its suffering, vulnerability, and nudity. Third, the animal cannot speak and cannot respond even though language is the way in which Levinas claims the Other can defy me and rupture the plastic image and totality imposed by my gaze. Levinas is able to make the first of these claims by differentiating between the way in which nonhuman animals and humans exist in the world. In *Time and the Other*, Levinas describes how the mystery of the future and death leads us to our first experience of alterity that only becomes fully realized in an encounter with another person. Time only has meaning in relation to human history. By specifying that this history is “human,” Levinas implies that nonhuman animals do not have a history, live immediately in the present, and have no anticipation of the future. Living solely in the present, “the animal” remains in the solipsistic stage of consciousness from which the human being eventually emerges and, thus, never becomes ethical. This means that the animal remains bound to vital necessity whereas the human can act against the good of its own survival for the sake of the other. Levinas explains, “To be in the world is precisely to be freed from the last implications of the instinct to exist.”²²⁴ Humans do not eat and breathe for the sake of living but through a primordial enjoyment of the earth and elements. Not so for animals: “A being is something that is attached to being, to its own being...the being of animals is a struggle for life. A struggle for life without ethics. With the appearance of the human...there is something more important than my life, and that is the life of the other.”²²⁵ Because the animal cares only for its own preservation and the fulfillment of its own vital necessities without any sense of the future or the inability that accompanies death, it cannot live ethically. Though we only need to consider how

²²⁴ Levinas, *Existence*, 36.

²²⁵ Wright, “Paradox of Morality,” 172.

elephants mourn their dead, how dolphins can commit suicide, and how some cats and dogs risk their lives to travel great distances to return to their human families to see how this oversimplifies animal life, this argument also implies that to be truly human one must be able and willing to sacrifice one's own needs for the sake of others. However, in extreme situations like genocide, this difference seems insufficient.

In *Survival in Auschwitz*, Primo Levi writes of his experience in the labor camps of Auschwitz. He describes the camps as great machines designed to reduce humans to beasts by turning people into hopeless, mindless creatures that labor until they are too tired to labor any longer and are finally put to death. Though many prisoners did lose their will to survive in the camps, even those who did not could not spare the energy or resources to think beyond their own vital necessities. These needs were met by stealing anything and everything as soon as someone let one's guard down, by planning where and when to get in line for food to get the choicest selection, by scraping the bottom of every bowl, and by looking for every opportunity to conserve energy. Levi says, "Here the struggle to survive is without respite, because everyone is desperately and ferociously alone. If [someone] vacillates, someone will knock him aside...and if someone, by a miracle of savage patience and cunning, finds a new method of avoiding the hardest work, a new art which yields him an ounce of bread, he will try to keep his method secret."²²⁶ As the prisoners are reduced to these "animal" states, they lose track of time and also their relation toward death, the future, and history. The prisoners do not mourn one another, nor do they plan for their futures. Future and past have ceased to exist; only survival in the present remains. Based on the description of the prisoners here, one could

²²⁶ Levi, *Survival*, 62.

argue that according to Levinas' philosophy, they are not truly human, but it would still be difficult to imagine excluding them from an ethical framework. However, things get more complicated and less certain for his ethics when we turn to his second and third modes of exclusion.

The second way Levinas excludes the animal is by claiming that it lacks a complete face. According to Levinas, it is by looking the Other in the eye and seeing her nudity and vulnerability that the self encounters the "infinite resistance to murder."²²⁷ But in the case of the animal, "the phenomena of the face is not in its purest form" and "the human face is completely different and only afterwards do we discover the face of the animal."²²⁸ In *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, Jacques Derrida argues that Levinas' refusal to admit that nonhuman animals have faces also means that there is no commandment that stops me from taking animal lives. If we claim that it is through the face that we recognize our ethical obligations, then by denying nonhuman animals a face, we also deny them all of the "traits, rights, duties, affections, or possibilities recognized in the face of the other."²²⁹ Derrida notes that Levinas specifically uses the language of nudity to describe the defenselessness of the other's gaze as well as the self's relation to and responsibility for the other without applying it to the animal, despite the fact that we often think of nonhuman animals as naked. Nor does Levinas seriously consider the possibility of the animal gaze or differences among animals. All nonhuman animals are lumped into one broad category. As Derrida points out through his description of feeling

²²⁷ Levinas, *Totality*, 199.

²²⁸ Wright, "Paradox of Morality," 172.

²²⁹ Derrida, *Animal*, 106.

shame before the gaze of his cat, this argument does not capture the complexity of human relationships with other animals. According to Derrida, if we claim that the animal does not recognize its own nakedness, are we not also saying that the animal is not naked, yet the being that clothes itself is? And if that is the case, what is it that he feels when the cat looks at him—shame for forgetting his nudity like an animal or shame at being looked at while naked like a human? In either case, Derrida concludes that through this gaze “nothing can ever rob me of the certainty that what we have here is an existence that refuses to be conceptualized. And a mortal existence, for from the moment that it has a name, its name survives it. It signs its potential disappearance.”²³⁰ In other words, through this experience of shame, Derrida not only feels the gaze of the cat, but recognizes it as something that is not an “exemplar of a species called ‘cat,’” but a particular being. Though Derrida demonstrates how Levinas seems to fall back on Cartesian notions of animality, we also cannot ignore the implications this has for our conception of the human. When Levinas claims that the animal has no face, it also means that when we look into the face of another human being, we should encounter that commandment “thou shalt not kill” and feel an obligation to respond to that commandment. In disobeying this commandment, one commits murder. As Levinas says, “The being that expresses itself imposes itself, but does so by precisely appealing to me with its destitution and nudity—its hunger—without my being able to defy that appeal... The face opens the primordial discourse whose first word is obligation, which

²³⁰ Ibid., 9.

no ‘interiority’ permits avoiding.”²³¹ To mis-recognize or refuse to respond to this commandment and obligation would be tantamount to saying that one is not truly human.

Yet, how does one account for this when faced with the situation in the death camp? In *Remnants of Auschwitz*, Giorgio Agamben examines one of the most horrifying aspects of life in the Nazi camps—the *Muselmann*. Named for the slow, stooped, and swaying gaits that were reminiscent of a praying Muslim, the term *Muselmann* was used to designate a certain category of people in the camps who had been so crushed by the hardships of camp life that they had all but ceased living. Piecing together various accounts of first-hand experiences of the camps, Agamben describes the *Muselmänner*, using the words of the survivors, as no longer truly living beings, but “walking corpses,” “living dead,” “mummy-men,” “immobile skeletons,” “shadows,” and “faceless presences.” As this last description suggests, the members of this group had ceased to have a face for both the German officers of the camp, but for the other prisoners as well. As Levi puts it in his account of them, they are “an anonymous mass, continually renewed and always identical, of non-men who march and labor in silence, the divine spark dead within them, already too empty to really suffer. One hesitates to call them living; one hesitates to call their death death.”²³² Their facelessness and their anonymity contribute to the meaninglessness of both their short lives in the camp and the abrupt deaths that follow. Or, as Agamben describes, men do not die in the camps, but are produced as corpses.²³³ Agamben takes the analysis of facelessness even further by

²³¹ Levinas, *Totality*, 200-1.

²³² Levi, *Survival*, 63.

²³³ Agamben, *Remnants*, 75.

examining the shame of the survivors and their refusal to look into the faces of the *Muselmänner*. Just as Derrida describes the conundrum of feeling shame before the gaze of his cat and not knowing if it is because he is a beast who has accepted his nakedness or because he is a human who recognizes his own nudity, the camp survivor feels a similar conflict. Agamben focuses on the shame that Levi feels when the Russians liberate Auschwitz—though Levi cannot come to terms with his shame in his writing, we are left with the impression that his shame is not so different from Derrida’s. Is he a beast for seeing only the lost cause and the animal in the *Muselmann*, or is he human because he is aware of his own nudity and vulnerability before the eyes of the liberators and those who did not survive? But it is not only the camp survivors who cannot seem to look into the face of the *Muselmänner*, but the liberators as well. Agamben briefly describes a short film made during the liberation of the camps that blatantly shows piles of corpses, but then, as if by accident, alights on a group of *Muselmänner*, and realizing where it is pointing, quickly turns away. Brought face-to-face with the *Muselmann*, Levinas’ ethics seem inadequate for “the *Muselmann* is not only or not so much a limit between life and death; rather, he marks the threshold between the human and the inhuman.”²³⁴ By Levinas’ account, these “walking corpses” may have even sunk below the level of the animal insofar as they barely make an effort to meet the needs of their own survival. Furthermore, the prisoners around them who still struggle to survive would also fail to exhibit the characteristics of a human due to their deliberate mis-recognition of and refusal to look into the eyes and face of the other. From a Levinasian standpoint, the *Muselmänner* are, par excellence, the beings whose deaths are no longer murder.

²³⁴ Ibid., 55.

Finally, Levinas excludes the animal by emphasizing the importance of speech and the ability to respond. As mentioned above, through speech the Other “surmount[s] what is necessarily plastic in manifestation” and “can sovereignly say *no* to me.”²³⁵ Speech and language both emerge through difference but also accomplish the task of breaking up unities. Levinas opposes speech to vision insofar as speech interrupts vision’s attempts to possess, group, and master. He says, “In discourse the divergence that inevitably opens between the Other as my theme and the Other as my interlocutor, emancipated from the theme that seemed a moment to hold him, forthwith contest the meaning I ascribe to my interlocutor. The formal structure of language thereby announces the ethical inviolability of the Other.”²³⁶ Because of the animal’s inability to speak and thus break out of the totality which humans have created for it, it remains a “for-me” of the consciousness that enjoys the elements and labors in the world. This mode of exclusion relies heavily on certain commonly held opinions about the animal in Western philosophy such as the Cartesian belief that animals are mere automatons programmed to reflexively respond to certain stimuli in particular ways, the Hobbesian claim that what distinguishes humans from animals is the ability to speak, and many other configurations of this argument. According to Derrida, it is this very lack of speech and the ability to respond that legitimizes the killing of nonhuman animals. If the animal has no face, no eyes with which to express itself, and no words with which to resist then it loses all possibility of saying “Here I am,” which is the condition for responsibility. He says,

Because “Here I am” as responsibility implies this self-presentation, this *autotelic*, autodiectic, autobiographical movement, exposing oneself

²³⁵ Levinas, *Totality*, 199-200.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*, 105.

before the law; and second, *because* “Here I am” as responsibility implies the possibility of “responding,” of answering for oneself in the response to the appeal or command of the other...the animal according to Levinas seems deprived of all possibility, in fact, of all power of saying, “Here I am” and of responding, hence of all responsibility.²³⁷

Derrida goes on to compare the animal’s inability to respond with the unresponsiveness of a corpse for just as the corpse cannot respond in death, the animal, though alive cannot respond and thus in some sense is already dead or is no different from being dead. So while an animal should not suffer needlessly, in Levinas’ words, an animal can still die without it being called murder. What then might we say about humans who cannot respond? Derrida points out the irony of this when Levinas is unable to respond to the question of whether or not animals have faces. Yet, this also holds human beings to a certain standard regarding language, speech, and responsibility as well.²³⁸

Returning to Levi’s account of the Holocaust, once again we must consider the limitations of Levinas’ ethics. Throughout *Survival in Auschwitz*, Levi presents us with various ways in which language fails in the camps. At the start of the book, Levi first calls our attention to the inadequacy of language for describing the “offence [sic], the demolition of man” that the Nazis imposed on the prisoners.²³⁹ Then, as a newcomer to Auschwitz, he describes the obstacle of not knowing the German language, of the confusion of languages spoken by the prisoners so that one seems surrounded by a perpetual Babel that makes communication nearly impossible, and the reticence and silence of the other prisoners. What would Levinas make of this place where “no one

²³⁷ Derrida, *Animal*, 111.

²³⁸ In *Totality* Levinas claims that one mode of response is the refusal to respond. However, this assumes human beings have other modes of expression such as a gaze and face, both of which animals lack for him.

²³⁹ Levi, *Survival*, 15.

speaks willingly,” where “where have to learn...never to ask questions, always to pretend to understand,” and where “if we speak, they will not listen to us, and if they listen, they will not understand?”²⁴⁰ In the concentration camps, the power of speech was rendered impotent. Though the prisoners were thwarted from communicating with the German officers and had trouble speaking amongst themselves, the true victims of language’s failure were the *Muselmänner*. In one striking passage, Levi tells us, “But with the musselmans, [sic] the men in decay, it is not even worth speaking, because one knows already that they will complain and will speak about what they used to eat at home.”²⁴¹ One does not speak with the *Muselmann* because the *Muselmann* does not listen and always replies the same. In *The Animal*, Derrida discusses how the animal’s perceived lack of response or repetitiveness of response has allowed us to dismiss the question of how a nonhuman animal can look us in the face and allow us to ignore the vulnerability, dignity, and nudity of the animal. From Descartes to Levinas, “You can speak to an animal...but it doesn’t reply, not really, not ever.”²⁴² In reiterating the same answers over and over, in lacking the ability to respond, and in responding but not being heard, the *Muselmann* and the prisoner are unable to resist and rupture the totalities to which they have been sentenced. Through their loss of speech they have been pushed out of the human realm and into the animal and beyond. Once again, it is unclear as to who is the least human in this situation. Is it the Nazis who have rendered all language but their own meaningless, the prisoners who still retain a spark of determination but who refuse to

²⁴⁰ Levi, *Survival*, 15, 17, 20.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 62.

²⁴² Derrida, *Animal*, 8.

speak and listen to one another, or is it the *Muselmänner* who lack both speech and the ability to respond meaningfully? And if none of these groups can be heard or respond to the other, then how can an ethics that relies on the differences expressed through discourse function in this situation? Agamben expresses a similar concern:

Simply to deny the *Muselmann's* humanity would be to accept the verdict of the SS and to repeat their gesture. The *Muselmann* has, instead, moved to a zone of the human where not only help but also dignity and self-respect have become useless. But if there is a zone of the human in which these concepts make no sense, then they are not genuine ethical concepts, for no ethics can claim to exclude a part of humanity, no matter how unpleasant or difficult that humanity is to see.²⁴³

For Agamben, the *Muselmann* represents the limit between the human and the nonhuman. It is a being for whom the concepts of dignity and respect lose their meaning and at whom we reach the limits of traditional ethics.

In all three of these modes of animal exclusion, Levinas does not just make claims about where animals belong in our ethical relations, but also provides a framework for how we can define and recognize other human beings (that is, humanize and rehumanize). In doing so, he makes use of and reiterates two totalities that have long histories in the Western tradition and which have been used to justify discrimination, oppression, exploitation, and genocide. As we have seen in Levi's firsthand account and Agamben's analysis of the *Muselmann*, when faced with these extreme situations, Levinas' ethics of difference remains too fixed and too narrow to account for the range of human and nonhuman animal experiences. For if we claim that there is a category called human and this category is sacred insofar as it has a face that carries with it the commandment "thou shalt not kill," then by denying certain groups access to this form of categorization through processes of dehumanization, they lose their inviolability. As

²⁴³ Agamben, *Remnants*, 63-4.

noted above, because the animal supposedly has no face and no speech with which to tell us it suffers and demand a response from us, the animal can be killed. As long as this distinction remains, the possibility of dehumanization remains as well.

III. The Human as a Normative Concept

In her article “De- and Rehumanization in the Wake of Atrocities” philosopher Rianna Oelefson argues that the proper response to the dehumanization that occurs during atrocities like genocide is rehumanization. According to Oelefson atrocities dehumanize both the perpetrators and victims by eroding the perception that others are worthy of the same moral consideration as one’s self. Dehumanization involves perceiving and treating others as lacking autonomy, freedom, and the capacity for change.²⁴⁴ Dehumanization treats the other as “one-dimensional,” with fixed immutable features and traits. During episodes of mass atrocity or conflict, these characteristics and perceived differences are projected onto groups of people, creating deeper and more lasting rifts between them. According to Oelefson, rehumanization can heal these social rifts. She explains, “The rehumanization process enables the self to realize that all these categories—victims, perpetrators, bystanders, and beneficiaries—are flawed human beings and that one group does not map onto any of these categories.”²⁴⁵ For Oelefson, rehumanization involves activating the imaginative capacities of human beings in order to appreciate the perspectives of others. As a form of epistemic “world-traveling,” rehumanization can

²⁴⁴ Oelefson, “De- and Rehumanization,” 180.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 181.

“make people realize that the other ‘is just like me in many respects,’ even if there are many differences.”²⁴⁶

Philosophies like this one only address one of the metaphysical aspects of dehumanization—essentialism. Oelefson calls out stereotyping as one of the key harms of dehumanization because stereotypes treat the other as a member of a fixed block or group, denying the possibility of variability and change. The issue of purity gets dealt with indirectly as well. In recognizing that others are not static, one must implicitly recognize that the lack of fixed categories leads to messiness, overlap, change, and adulteration. But philosophies of rehumanization like this one often fail to address the third metaphysical principle of dehumanization—human exceptionalism. In fact, human/animal difference is held up as a key element of what makes rehumanization an effective response to dehumanization.

Oelefson attempts to skirt this issue by avoiding the question of “the animal” and human/animal difference. In making her case for rehumanization she claims, like David Livingstone Smith and many of the other scholars addressed in the previous chapters, that dehumanization is an epistemological problem. Dehumanization involves *perceiving* that the other is less worthy of moral consideration, *not* that people who experience dehumanization are made to become nonhuman beings.²⁴⁷ She does not uphold the position I take in the previous chapters that dehumanization actually creates a reality and types of beings. “Human,” she says, is not a descriptive term, it is a normative term. In other words, human does not describe species-membership; it “prescribes standards in

²⁴⁶ Ibid., 184.

²⁴⁷ Ibid., 179.

terms of how one ought to act towards one designated as human.”²⁴⁸ In calling “the human” normative, Oeiefson claims that there is no pre-given content to the category called human. As an empty category it can be filled with any content and that content could perhaps change over time depending on context. At first this way of defining the human seems to evade the problem of human exceptionalism because the concept human does not refer to a natural kind. So according to this definition, to be human is to receive treatment worthy of the kind of creature we call human. But this is a tautology. How does one know if one is treating someone like a human—that is, worthy of the respect she deserves—if one does not already know which characteristics distinguish the human from other beings? If human is a normative term, then this suggests that “the human” is a constructed concept. If it is a constructed concept then the problem with dehumanization is not just that it involves the perception of certain people as human—it is part of a process of creating human and nonhuman beings. The normative notion of the human just underlines its arbitrary nature. Oeiefson overlooks the fact that those in power can wield the human as a normative concept in order to define which beings belong and which do not.

Oeiefson’s approach to de- and rehumanization has another problem. Like other scholars who have written on dehumanization and objectification including Catherine McKinnon, Martha Nussbaum, and Rae Langton, Oeiefson adheres to a modern, Enlightenment notion of personhood that values the disembodied, autonomous subject without consideration for the inter-subjective aspects of life and identity. Like Nussbaum and Langton, Oeiefson states that autonomy, freedom, and the capacity for change are the characteristics that get denied during dehumanization. Not only have these traits been

²⁴⁸ Ibid.

largely denied of nonhuman animals in the history of Western thought (for example, Descartes' claim that a cat's cry is no different from the squeak of a carriage wheel), her focus on autonomy and freedom relies on characteristics that have been taken to be universal to human life, essential for being human despite the fact that all humans lack true autonomy and freedom and some like small children or the severely disabled may depend entirely on the care of others. However, these characteristics can be attributed to other creatures and perhaps even non-living beings such as rivers, land, and even inanimate objects.²⁴⁹

Giving Oelefson's argument the benefit of the doubt, perhaps she would be willing to concede that when these characteristics are denied in other animals and beings, they are also dehumanized. "Dehumanization" would then be decoupled from the human and would generically mean *to treat a being with less moral consideration than it deserves*. As such, any being treated in this way would be dehumanized. For example, claiming a swath of forest as a form of property or resource could be considered a violation of the autonomy and freedom of the forest. It would certainly disrespect the lives of the trees, other plants, land, and animals that live there and show a lack of moral consideration for their well-being, thriving, and agency. But what Oelefson means is that dehumanization involves denying treatment that befits the type of creature that it is.²⁵⁰ In this case, if humans have determined that certain creatures deserve different treatment that befits the type of creature that they are, then we run into the problem of how to

²⁴⁹ For example, Native American philosophies, as we will see in chapters seven and eight, hold that nonhuman animals and environmental features possess purposiveness, agency, and autonomy. Similarly, political theorist Jane Bennet argues in *Vibrant Matter* that objects like plastic garbage and abandoned items have a kind of subjectivity and agency that functions independently of human purpose and use.

²⁵⁰ Oelefson, "De- and Rehumanization," 179.

determine what type of treatment is befitting of those creatures without doing so in an anthropocentric way that privileges human perceptions of moral good and imposes them on other beings. Thus, instead of avoiding the problem of the human, Oeelfson's notion of rehumanization still assumes that we can tell when a being is a human and also know that humans are inherently worthy of a special moral consideration. Oeelfson's work betrays an anthropocentric bias in another way: the types of atrocity she considers in her article are only considered to affect human lives. Genocide, ethnic cleansing, slavery, and apartheid are framed as evil given their impact on human autonomy and dignity. The lives and treatment of other animals receives no consideration. If they did, perhaps Oeelfson would claim that practices like factory farming "dehumanize" cows, pigs, and chickens, but if Oeelfson ascribes to the view that other animals lack or have less autonomy, freedom, and personality (as many philosophers do), then her philosophy of rehumanization continues to operate according to the metaphysical principle that humans are essentially different from and superior to other animal life. To effectively avoid an implicit assumption of this metaphysical difference, Oeelfson and other philosophers who call for rehumanization should stop using the concept of the human entirely in favor of more inclusive terminology that does not refer back to a category that is associated with a biological kind. For example, rather than discussing dehumanization and rehumanization, the issue could be reframed using terms like depersonalization and repersonalization, which are a step removed from the history of human exceptionalism (even though personhood has long been considered within the Western canon to belong to human beings alone). As we will see in chapter seven, this is the way that Native American

scholars talk about our ethical obligations to various beings both human and other-than-human.

IV. Embodiment, Inter-subjectivity, and an Ethics of Difference

As we saw in the previous chapters, David Livingstone Smith quickly dismisses conversations about objectification in feminist literature as describing a different kind of phenomenon than dehumanization, which involves perceiving the other to be a subhuman creature. In his haste to talk about dehumanization properly speaking he ignores the history in Western thought that has equated women with animals and nature.²⁵¹ While women have been inconsistently treated as subhuman, philosophers as far back as the pre-Socratics, have argued that women lack rationality, emotional stability, and purpose outside of their function as mothers and caregivers.²⁵² Many of the qualities attributed to women have also been attributed to other animals and nature. Primary among these is dependence, passivity, and irrationality. In her book *Dehumanizing Women*, Linda LeMoncheck argues that sexual objectification—treating a woman as an object of sexual desire and use without regard for her sexual autonomy—and dehumanization go hand-in-hand. Not only are women treated as instruments for the sexual gratification of men, their status as object is correlated to their lack of characteristics that have long been considered properly human.²⁵³ Even when women are recognized as members of the same species, their perceived diminished versions of so-called properly human qualities render them

²⁵¹ Adams, *Sexual Politics of Meat.*; Merchant, *Death of Nature.*; Plumwood, *Feminism and Mastery.*

²⁵² Lloyd, *Man of Reason.* Nye, *Words of Power.*

²⁵³ LeMoncheck, *Dehumanizing Women.*

less than fully human. Women are thus not just objects, but subhuman. Thus, objectification is continuous with dehumanization, not a different kind of phenomenon.

In *Overcoming Objectification*, Ann Cahill critiques feminist theories about and responses to objectification on the grounds that objectification does not capture the complexity of what happens in sexual encounters and the sexual gaze. Philosophers who have dealt with the issue of objectification, including LeMoncheck, Nussbaum, Langton, and McKinnon, have always begun their arguments about the harm of objectification with the assumption that treating a person like an object is inherently a moral wrong. Cahill questions this assumption on the grounds that humans are not just disembodied minds, but material beings. We are both subject and object. She asks, “If materiality is central to identity, then how can being treated as a ‘thing’ be necessarily degrading? If intersubjectivity is similarly central to identity, then why is being the passive recipient of an active gaze necessarily dehumanizing?”²⁵⁴ In asking these questions Cahill calls attention to the multiplicitous aspects of human (and all) life, and that these different aspects of being lead to different types of interactions which can, depending on the situation, be harmful, neutral, or beneficial. The concerns she raises here can also be applied to concerns about dehumanization, which involve treating the Other not just as an object but as subhuman or animal.

Just as humans are objects insofar as they are bodies, humans are also animals insofar as they are living, embodied beings. Most dehumanization scholars, Smith included, assume that treating humans like nonhuman animals is a moral wrong. Yet, being animal is also central to human identity. Like other animals, humans engage in and center their lives on activities of nourishment, reproduction, and survival. And as often as

²⁵⁴ Cahill, *Overcoming Objectification*, ix.

they may wish to deny it, they rely on the land, water, air, and other life (human and otherwise) for sustenance. Denying that animality, deeming it as secondary to human life could be seen as itself a form of degradation in that it delegitimizes the very condition of human existence.

A second critique that Cahill levels against philosophies of objectification is that they are overly concerned with an interior worth and dignity that privileges the autonomy, independence, and freedom of the subject. In concentrating on these qualities as central to human dignity, they sideline the intersubjective aspects of life. Too often, these qualities are seen as add-ons to life that distinguish persons from non-persons. For example, humans and animals are the same except that humans have added features that make them persons of a certain kind. However, humans do not exist in complete autonomy from one another; they are shaped and constituted by their interactions with others, which is part of both being a body and an animal. In fact, agency, autonomy, and personhood have meaning only insofar as they are matters of relations. As Cahill explains,

For embodied subjects (unlike the independent being defined by the capacity for reason, exemplified perhaps most evocatively by the solitary Descartes) always bear the marks of interactions with other bodies. Human bodies cannot come into existence without being cared for by other bodies; human language cannot develop without interactions; bodily comportment and gestures, without which human subjects cannot act, are absorbed from exchanges of all sorts. And so the embodied subject is more properly termed an ‘intersubject,’ a term that, while not constructing persons as wholly determined by their environs or other persons, nevertheless notes that personhood and subjectivity cannot arise except within the context of relations.²⁵⁵

²⁵⁵ Ibid., 23.

For Cahill, recognizing the embodied and intersubjective elements of human life is the first step toward rejecting a universalizing and solipsistic concept of the human that tries to absorb everything into the realm of the same. Recognizing embodiment as central to human experience simultaneously creates a common ground for human experience (all humans have bodies) and also brings to the fore the inherent difference between human individuals—we all experience our bodies differently.²⁵⁶ I would also add that recognizing the animality of human life serves a similar function in that it helps to bridge the ontological divide in Western thought that suggests that human life is opposed to and superior to animal life due to its unique qualities. Recognizing human animality not only serves as a commonality between human beings but can also form a basis for connections between human life and other-than-human lives. As Cahill explains,

To claim that the human subject is necessarily embodied is to reject a metaphysics that consistently privileges the non-material over the material, the universal over the particular, the eternal over the temporal. It is to recognize that all human experiences are situated by flesh, and that the desire to deny, marginalize, or dismiss that fact has been a crucial element in many systems of inequality. It is also to recognize that the ways in which materiality has been constructed—as passive, inert, waiting for the animating force of a soul or a mind to give it shape and meaning—is itself problematic.²⁵⁷

Likewise, to claim that the human subject is necessarily animal is to reject a metaphysics that consistently privileges the human over the animal. And efforts to dismiss human animality have also led to many systems of inequality, the least of which subjects other animals to regular and cavalier violence that is treated as necessary for the good of human life.

²⁵⁶ Ibid., 29.

²⁵⁷ Ibid., 22.

For Cahill, the failure to recognize human embodiment leads to a vilification of the body and sexuality. The same can be said of our failure to recognize human animality. By rejecting that part of human life as inferior and something to overcome rather than something to embrace, we set up a situation in which all of nonhuman animal life is similarly degraded. Cahill argues that the term “objectification” is problematic because the philosophers who use it to critique sexual encounters between women and men implicitly accept that being reduced to a body is morally wrong, thus vilifying the body itself. Scholars who write about dehumanization behave similarly. Nick Haslam, Bauman, and Leo Kuper all imply within their critiques that the lives of other animals really are inferior to the lives of human beings (and if not inferior, fundamentally different and unrelatable). Even Smith, who engages in a comparison between humans and chimpanzees does little to counter the notion that human life is characterized by something additional to and unique from other animal lives. Humans and chimps might be related, but humans are, for Smith, still the more evolved group with more developed mental, emotional, and social capacities.

To rectify some of these problems, Cahill proposes that instead of talking about sexual objectification, we use the term “derivatization.”

To derivatize is to portray, render, understand, or approach a being solely or primarily as the reflection, projection, or expression of another being’s identity, desires, fears, etc. The derivatized subject becomes reducible in all relevant ways to the derivatizing subject’s existence—other elements of her...being or subjectivity are disregarded, ignored, or undervalued. Should the derivatized subject dare to demonstrate aspects of her subjectivity that fall outside of the derivatizer’s being—assuming such a demonstration can even be perceived...she will be perceived as arrogant, treasonous, and dangerously rebellious.²⁵⁸

²⁵⁸ Ibid., 32.

Though Cahill uses derivatization to describe certain types of human interactions, this concept can be extended to interactions between humans and other-than-human beings. Just as the sex worker becomes an extension and fulfillment of the desires of the person who uses her, wolves come to embody, represent, and fulfill human fears. Both sex workers and wolves are treated without regard for their particularity, intersubjectivity, and independence from the other; instead, they are receptacles of another's passions and needs. Derivatization can occur in different ways. In some cases it may involve depersonalizing the other, but in other situations the Other might still be allowed to or be expected to demonstrate certain qualities associated with personhood. Ultimately, derivatization is characterized by a reduction of difference to the same, an absorption of the other into the self that fails to recognize the other as an Other.

The antidote to derivatization for Cahill is the development of an ethics that puts difference at the center. Cahill turns to Luce Irigaray's notion of sexual difference as a model for thinking about an ethics of difference that could resist the totalizing tendencies of derivatization. Irigaray, Cahill explains, treats sexual difference as an "ontological fact...a factor that underlies and suffuses our being."²⁵⁹ While Irigaray's philosophy faces critiques that it is essentialist, Cahill believes Irigaray homes in on a key element of human experience—that humanness is not singular. This is in marked contrast to a liberal perspective (a la Kant), which "wrongly consider[s] women to be less than human."²⁶⁰ The notion that some groups of people are less human than others can be traced back to an idealization of the same, a desire for purity and similarity instead of difference and

²⁵⁹ Ibid., 36.

²⁶⁰ Ibid. 37.

diversity. Cahill, following Irigaray, asserts that “difference is fundamental to human existence,” which means recognizing “that no one person, nor even one group of persons, can represent the whole of humanity.”²⁶¹ By analogy, we can say that this insight might extend not just to human life but to life (and non-life) generally speaking. Difference is fundamental to being in the world. When humans assert their own superiority, whether through evolution or divine right, they imply their own singularity in the face of animal difference. But just as no one sex, race, or group can represent all of humanity, neither can humanity represent the “best” that life or existence has to offer. Dehumanization, like derivatization, functions according to the assumption that categories are singular and can be divided according to fixed essences. As long as these ontological notions persist, then one group can assert itself as the “real” human while everything else is relegated to the equally totalizing category of the subhuman.

An ethics of difference entails recognizing this fundamental ontological difference that pervades the life of our species and existence itself. This does not mean that individuals have nothing in common. For Cahill, our shared experience as embodied beings can perhaps serve to level the hierarchy and create a deeper appreciation and respect for difference. Though all humans and other animals are embodied they all experience their bodies differently. Thus embodiment becomes both a source of commonality as well as a source of difference. The encounter with the other makes one aware of one’s own limits, and this recognition is the first step toward resisting derivatization and dehumanization. In *Animal Lessons* and “Animal Ethics,” Kelly Oliver also calls for a “true” ethics of difference that moves beyond the human/animal, male/female binaries to an ethics that relies on multiplicity. According to Oliver, the

²⁶¹ Ibid.

binary is prone to becoming an opposition “because it easily leads to giving priority to one pole of the binary over the other...insofar as dualism and binaries of all sorts have become hierarchies that privilege one over the other.”²⁶² In the history of philosophy, humanity has defined itself in opposition to the animal other and has used this opposition to justify the oppression of certain groups of people. As long as humans are made the measure of all things, humanism leaves traditional concepts of “human” and “animal” and the values associated with them intact. In many ways, Oliver’s ethics echoes that of Levinas. She writes, “Rather than consider the ways in which animals are like us...we need to develop an ethics that can extend our obligations even to those who are not like us...an ethics of sameness is not enough.”²⁶³ Oliver calls for an explosion of the categories human, animal, male, and female, arguing that such categories do not account for the wide variety and vast variations of human, animal, and sexual difference even among members of the these groups. Instead, we need to focus on the relationships between humans and other animals. Oliver does not offer a clear plan on how we are to go about exploding these categories, but she does offer us a brief description of what the ensuing ethics of difference and relationality might look like. She says,

Perhaps difference ‘worthy of its name’ would designate differences that multiply themselves through innumerable means so that they cannot devolve into opposition or fixity or calculation of any kind. This incalculable multiplicity would not be the simple addition of new types to the old in a series of one-plus-one-plus-one; they would be neither interchangeable nor equivalent. Rather, they would require a new lexicon that would mark and remark their differences without degenerating into calculable systems of hierarchy and domination.²⁶⁴

²⁶² Oliver, *Animal Lessons*, 139.

²⁶³ Oliver, “Animal Ethics,” 268.

²⁶⁴ Oliver, *Animal Lessons*, 151.

Thus, Oliver claims we need a non-mathematical ethics, an ethics that is not based on sameness and discrete substitutable units, an ethics that rejects hierarchies between humans and between humans and nonhumans, and an ethics that employs a new way of speaking about and structuring the world. Yet this account leaves open two significant questions. First, what would it take—what needs to change—to make such an ethics possible? Second, what would an ethics like this look like in action? In chapter eight, I will explore the idea of an ethics that is rooted in the recognition of ontological difference in greater depth, imagining, through the work of Native American scholars, how normative principles might be derived from such an ontological commitment.

Though derivatization and dehumanization are not entirely the same—dehumanization involves treating or perceiving another as subhuman whereas derivatization leaves room to recognize the humanity of the other while denying that person’s subjectivity—the term “dehumanization” remains caught up in the language and history of human exceptionalism. It presumes by its own designation that humanity is a unitary concept and that being treated like a nonhuman is evidently a moral wrong. This means that “dehumanization” is not a useful concept because in order to secure that which is properly human it must deny animality. But animality, like embodiment, can be a source of both commonality and difference not just within the human species but across species. Ultimately, we should stop using the word “dehumanization” to describe immoral treatment of other humans or infringements on their dignity. First of all, as we saw in chapter three, “dehumanization” is vague and functions as an umbrella term for a variety of related, but different concepts. Second, it implies in its very name human exceptionalism. Adopting words like derivatization or depersonalization not only provide

more conceptual clarity, but they can be extended to the treatment of other animals, objects, and nonhuman nature.

It is tempting to respond to the problem of dehumanization with rehumanization by saying that we just need to be more inclusive with the concept of “the human.” As long as we overcome sexual, racial, and other superficial and phenotypical biological differences, we will recognize that we are all essentially the same beneath the skin. However, the concept of rehumanization only works if we rely on an ontological taxonomy that separates the mind from the body and the human from the animal, placing the mind and the human above the body and the animal. Rehumanization entails restoring humans to their rightful ontological and moral status. As we have seen, each of the approaches above, no matter how they try to account for human difference, ultimately fail to carry out their projects because they continue to rely on a human/animal dualism that pits a universal notion of the human against a universal notion of the animal. These universal categories do not leave room for ontological difference; instead they rely on the idea that human existence transcends natural life, and that recognizing and restoring this transcendence is paramount to any ethical response to dehumanization. In the next chapter, we will see that these same problems can be applied to the issue of human rights, which is the primary framework currently in use for responding to genocide.

CHAPTER VI
HUMAN RIGHTS, ANIMAL RIGHTS, AND DEHUMANIZATION

It is a fact that, at least since the seventeenth century what is called humanism has always been obliged to lean on certain conceptions of man borrowed from religion, science, or politics. Humanism serves to color and to justify the conceptions of man to which it is, after all, obliged to take recourse.

Michel Foucault, "What Is Enlightenment?"²⁶⁵

Political scholar and activist Michael Ignatieff opens his book *Human Rights as Politics and Idolatry* with a scene from Primo Levi's *Survival in Auschwitz* in which Levi is being interviewed by Dr. Pannwitz, the head of the chemical department at Auschwitz, for a position at the chemical labs that would spare him from the hard labor to which many of the other prisoners were subjected. Reflecting on the interview, Levi recounts the encounter between him and Pannwitz:

That look was not one between two men; and if I had known how completely to explain the nature of that look, which came as if across the glass window of an aquarium between two beings who live in different worlds, I would also have explained the essence of the great insanity of the third Germany.²⁶⁶

Three elements in this scene stand out. First, Levi is describing a scene of what is recognizably dehumanization occurring within the context of the most paradigmatic case of genocide: the Holocaust. The relationship Levi describes between the two of them is one in which a human, the Nazi doctor, is regarding a curious animal specimen, the Jewish prisoner. Levi's wording indicates that he feels or perceives himself to be treated as a non-equal, as less than the Nazi scientist sitting across from him. He perceives himself as being animalized.

²⁶⁵ Foucault, "What Is Enlightenment?" 43-44.

²⁶⁶ Levi, *Survival*, 74.

Second, in his interpretation of this vignette, Ignatieff recognizes that this dehumanization is occurring, saying, “Here was a scientist, trained in the traditions of European rational inquiry, turning a meeting between two human beings into an encounter between different species.”²⁶⁷ But then Ignatieff goes on, revealing that he interprets this instance of dehumanization as an epistemological problem: “Progress may be a contested concept, but we make progress to the degree that we act on the moral intuition that Dr. Pannwitz was wrong: our species is one, and each of the individuals who compose it is entitled to equal moral consideration.”²⁶⁸ Ignatieff and Levi both interpret this moment of dehumanization as a moment of insanity, of a failure to rationalize properly. The “rational” scientist fails to see what is right in front of his face—another human being—and this failure to see is a moral failure because it compromises the dignity and agency of the person before him. But there is another way to interpret this story. Instead of reading Levi as saying that the insanity of the Third Reich is epistemological, we could instead interpret “the essence of the great insanity of third German [reich]” as an ontological claim. In other words, the failure to *know* or *understand* the truth of the situation—that Levi is human—is not the moral failure; rather, the moral failure, the insanity, is the moral distinction made between “the human” and “the animal.” This binary, which is at the crux of dehumanization, is “the essence” of what was wrong with the Third Reich and it is also the “essence” of what is wrong with genocide. In this respect, dehumanization is not just an epistemological problem; it is a metaphysical or ontological problem.

²⁶⁷ Ignatieff, *Human Rights*, 3-4.

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 4.

Third, neither Ignatieff nor Levi acknowledge the imaginary animal other to whom Levi is compared though the implication that being an animal other than human is denigrating and that being a member of a specific species (*homo sapiens*) entails a certain amount of moral consideration. This raises certain questions that neither writer seriously answers. Assuming that Pannwitz thought of Levi as akin to a talking rat, exotic fish, or other nonhuman animal, what would rehumanizing Levi actually change? What makes being a member of the same species morally significant? And what becomes of the imaginary animal upon whose degradation this dehumanizing experience is made possible?

This scene and Ignatieff's response to it is indicative of a common theme in dehumanization and genocide prevention literature: genocide and dehumanization are crimes against humanity and/or violations of human dignity and, as such, can be solved by appealing to common humanity and human rights and using those principles to develop effective preventive measures. This assumption is so ubiquitous that almost no genocide or dehumanization literature wonders how the animal fairs in this relationship.²⁶⁹ But, as the previous chapter and other research shows, "the exploitation and denigration of people traditionally involve viewing them *as* animals, treating them *like* animals, and justifying their 'inferior' status on the basis of their supposed animality or proximity to the animal."²⁷⁰ The coincidence of oppression and animality is not a banal metaphor or analogy, "but a central part of Western conceptions of *man*, *human*, and

²⁶⁹ Animal Studies literature, on the other hand, has returned to this problem repeatedly. See chapter one for examples.

²⁷⁰ Oliver, *Animal Lessons*, 214.

animal.”²⁷¹ Because genocide always involves dehumanization and dehumanization entails a human/animal dualism that gives moral and ontological precedence and status to humans over animals, efforts to prevent genocide cannot concern themselves solely with humans but must also account for the ways in which other animals are exploited for the purpose of either denigrating or elevating human life. This has a two-fold effect on genocide prevention. First, it means that humanist responses to genocide like Ignatieff’s, which invoke human rights, will not be sufficient. Human rights discourse, no matter how secular, broad, or minimalist it appears, relies on a notion of human dignity that is built on violence toward other animals and other nonhuman life. This violence is frequently excused away without considering how it is used to justify violence perpetuated between human beings. Second, it means that effective genocide prevention will need to consider how to prevent violence against other animals in addition to human animals. Such an endeavor entails more than expanding the concept of rights to cover more forms of life: it means fundamentally rethinking the ontological and metaphysical commitments and assumptions that make genocide and dehumanization in all its forms possible.

In this chapter I present a brief overview of current genocide prevention efforts and how these efforts are tied to a human rights framework and discourse. I argue that human rights and other humanist approaches toward prevention will ultimately fail to achieve what they set out to do because they tacitly (and sometimes overtly) function according to (or in complicity with) the same metaphysical principles that underlie dehumanization and genocide, particularly the human/animal dualism. Even non-foundationalist approaches to human rights risk falling into the trap. Whether human rights are treated as moral or legal or founded on religious or secular grounds, their

²⁷¹ Ibid., 214.

supposed universality and grounding on human dignity demonstrate that they have not escaped the logic of genocide. Drawing on the work of Jacques Derrida, I critique the non-foundationalist concept of human rights advocated by Ignatieff, Jack Donnelly, and Bertrand Ramcharan for its continued reliance on Western liberal ideals and their accompanying metaphysics, especially the principle of human exceptionalism. In the final section of the chapter I explain why extending rights to animals does not solve the issues caused by human exceptionalism. Though I hold human rights ultimately to be inadequate to the task of preventing dehumanization and genocide, I do not advocate that we stop using the framework altogether. As long as rights discourse can produce positive effects it can serve as a temporary stop-gap until a more effective solution that actually addresses the metaphysical problems at the root of dehumanization and genocide can be implemented.

I: Genocide Prevention and Human Rights

As we saw in chapter two, genocide scholarship largely regards genocide as a uniquely human problem, the worst of the crimes against humanity. Though genocide is regarded as a crime against humanity, the concept of humanity and the role of dehumanization in the practice of genocide get little attention. As such, investigations into the causes of genocide and the suggested methods of prevention focus predominantly on the problems that arise out of human political, economic, and social life and on generating respect for human life rather than in seeking out the ways in which the rejection of animality helps to facilitate genocidal thought. This means that genocide prevention is blind to the metaphysics that supports it.

From the traditional genocide studies perspective, the causes of genocide are diverse and can differ greatly depending on the context in which genocide takes place. Because there is not a single formula that genocide follows, determining which risk-factors need the most attention and developing effective preventive measures is a constantly evolving endeavor. Yet, most prevention efforts aim at mitigating these risk factors. According to political scientist Scott Straus, the causes of genocide can be organized into three categories. Macro-causes involve risk factors at the level of countries and typically involve considerations regarding political institutions, the ethnic or religious make up of populations, the size and role of the military, and the conditions of the regional environment.²⁷² At this level, the main predictors of genocide include the large-scale political or economic instability, armed conflict (often accompanied by an “adverse regime change” such as a revolution), transformative or exclusionary ideology, and prior discrimination or violence against a particular group.²⁷³ In addition to these risk-factors, some scholars have argued that deep-seated hatreds or social divisions, weak governmental capacity, authoritarianism, and economic crises can also escalate the chances of genocide.²⁷⁴ Though macro-level causes are often present prior to the onset of genocidal violence, these factors might be present for long periods of time before genocide occurs. Furthermore, not every situation in which one or several of these factors is present devolves into genocide.

Macro-level causes are more likely to lead to genocide when other short-term causes arise. Short-term causes occur in the period just before or during the early stages

²⁷² Straus, *Fundamentals*, 53.

²⁷³ *Ibid.*, 56.

²⁷⁴ Harff, “No Lessons Learned.”; Kuper, *Genocide.*; Staub, *Roots of Evil*, 1989.

of genocide, triggering or escalating violence.²⁷⁵ These factors both cause and warn that genocide might be imminent: tension and polarization between groups, apocalyptic public rhetoric, labeling civilian groups as the “enemy,” development or deployment of irregular armed groups, stockpiling weapons, emergency or discriminatory legislation, removing moderates from leadership or public office, and impunity of past crimes. While issues of this sort foment, specific events might also trigger genocide. These include high-level assassinations, coups or attempted coups, a change in conflict dynamics, crackdowns on protests, and “symbolically significant” attacks on individuals or sites.²⁷⁶ Once again, none of these factors will necessarily lead to genocide, but in most genocide one or more of these causes may be present.

Other causes of genocide exist at the micro-level, at the level of the psychology and motivations of the perpetrators. Whether the perpetrators are high-level authorities like heads of state, mid-level actors like social organizations, or low-level actors like soldiers or civilians, the actors all have their own agendas, motivations, and psychological profiles that influence the likelihood of their participation, cooperation, or complacency with regards to genocide. These motivations may include frustration-aggression, prior hatreds, obedience and identification with leaders, indoctrination, peer pressure, fear, greed and opportunity, and the power of the situation.²⁷⁷ Normocentrism, “membership in and connection to a group and its norms” is another motivating factor

²⁷⁵ Straus, *Fundamentals*, 54.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 82.

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 99.

insofar as conformity to a specific social group or culture is expected and goes unquestioned.²⁷⁸

The ideas for genocide prevention are as varied as the causes of genocide. Prior to 1948, there was almost no organized international support for genocide prevention efforts, in part because the concept of genocide was newly minted. This changed with the ratification of the United Nation's Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (CPPCG), which states that anyone found charged with genocide will be tried in court. The CPPCG also states that any party that has ratified the convention may call upon the UN to take necessary steps to suppress or prevent genocide. Despite this, the CPPCG has little to say about what steps should actually be taken. In the absence of a clear set of steps developed by the UN, scholars and policy-makers have filled the vacuum with a variety of ideas including long and short term strategies. Policies developed at the macro-level include efforts like instituting the Responsibility to Protect (R2P), which holds that each nation is responsible for the protection of their citizens, that the international community has a responsibility to help states fulfill this task, and that if a state is failing to protect its populations the international community can take appropriate collective action to protect those populations. Though, once again, what "appropriate collective action" looks like is somewhat unclear. Education and the promotion of human rights are other macro-efforts. In addition to these, there are a number of other longer-term prevention methods (some at the micro-level), many of which fit the bill of appropriate collective action. These include conflict prevention, deepening democracy, increasing the legitimacy of elections, reducing discrimination,

²⁷⁸ Staub, "Roots and Prevention," 166.

promoting ideologies of tolerance and pluralism, and increasing the legitimacy of state institutions.

A number of these longer term, macro-level prevention methods are not just beneficial for genocide prevention, but aim to engender liberal, democratic, cosmopolitan norms that would, in the eyes of their advocates, ideally mitigate other social troubles and harms that, left to fester, might tend toward genocidal violence. But when it comes to responding to mass atrocity and genocide in particular, most prevention methods are aimed at assessing the current conditions of a situation and responding accordingly. These short term solutions include a variety of actions that states, NGOs, and other international bodies can take. They include actions such as increasing training for mediators, inducing states to make changes through the use of debt relief or economic sanctions, mediation or negotiation, media monitoring, withdrawal of military assistance, and military intervention.²⁷⁹

One ideological strain of thought holds this multitude of preventive measures together: the belief in the validity of fundamental human rights, human dignity, and the “oneness” of the human group. Though the notion of human rights as it is described in the UN’s Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) emerges out of European Enlightenment philosophies of natural rights, until the 1940s, following WWII and the genocide of the Jews, even in societies that saw themselves as liberal and democratic, rights belonged to limited classes of people. For example, even though the United States’ Declaration of Independence claimed that “all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness” women, slaves, and Native Americans were

²⁷⁹ Albright, *Preventing Genocide*.

exempt from some or all of these rights to one degree or another.²⁸⁰ Though slow progress was made to expand these rights to more and more categories of people, it was in the aftermath of WWII that the concept of *universal* human rights took hold.

According to the United Nations Charter of 1945, one of the purposes of the UN is to promote and encourage respect for human rights as enumerated in the (UDHR). The commitment to human rights carries through into the goals of the 1948 CPPCG and the 2002 Rome Statute, which defines crimes against humanity. The UDHR, which was proclaimed the day after the 1948 CPPCG, calls for the “recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family.”²⁸¹ In this statement the UN proclaims that human rights are universal and stem directly from a being’s membership in the human species. Not only do these rights emerge out of humanity itself, but they cannot be taken away or separated from the individual who bears them. In claiming that human rights are inalienable, the UN takes the position that any violation of these rights is an epistemological rather than an ontological problem. Human rights violations are thus a case of mis-recognition or denial on the part of the party refusing the right as we saw in Ignatieff’s analysis of Levi’s exchange with Pannwitz.

The belief in the validity and usefulness of human rights for halting atrocity and securing the wellbeing of human individuals around the world emerged as a response to the first officially recognized genocide—the Holocaust. In this respect, genocide prevention and human rights discourse are inextricably entwined. But the turn to human rights is in itself noteworthy. The goal of human rights is to declare and uphold human

²⁸⁰ US, Declaration of Independence.

²⁸¹ UNGA, Universal Declaration.

dignity. Human dignity refers to the special moral worth and status had by a human being. When a human person is treated without dignity, then it has been assumed that they have been deprived of something essential to their humanness—in other words, they have been dehumanized. Human rights, then, is a direct response to the dehumanization that occurs during atrocities like genocide. Human rights establish a standard by which human dignity can be measured and can provide a guideline for rehumanizing those who have been treated without dignity.

The self-evidence of inherent and inalienable human rights permeates genocide prevention literature. In psychology literature, the attention to human rights is framed in terms of education and fostering empathy. Leo Kuper, for example, writes that the need for preventive action includes “developing education on human rights in the schools and universities.”²⁸² Similarly Ervin Staub claims that “[m]embers of groups, whether nations or subgroups of societies, must develop an appreciation of one another’s humanity.”²⁸³ In political science and policy literature the concept of human rights is treated as both normative and legal. For example Madeline Albright and Richard Cohen state that “genocide is, fundamentally, a human rights issue” and argue that the promotion of human rights should be a key element of the strategy for genocide prevention.²⁸⁴ E.N. Anderson and Barbara Anderson are more straightforward. They say that when it comes to prevention, “Possibly the first and most basic need is to recognize human and civil

²⁸² Kuper, *Genocide*, 147.

²⁸³ Staub, “Roots and Prevention,” 175.

²⁸⁴ Albright, *Genocide Prevention*, 9.

rights—the rights of all people to life, property, some degree of dignity, and above all *equal treatment under the law*.”²⁸⁵

The R2P doctrine, developed by the UN under Kofi Annan in 2005, is an example of how genocide prevention and human rights discourse intersect. According to the UN Office on Genocide Prevention, “The responsibility to protect embodies a political commitment to end the worst forms of violence and persecution. It seeks to narrow the gap between Member States’ pre-existing obligations under existing international humanitarian and human rights law and the reality faced by populations at risk of genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing, and crimes against humanity.”²⁸⁶ The R2P rests on three pillars. First, states have a responsibility to protect the populations that live within their borders from mass atrocities. Second, the international community also has a responsibility to help other states in fulfilling this mandate. Third, if a state fails to protect its own populations, the international community must be prepared to intervene.²⁸⁷ The R2P was developed in response to the failures of the CPPCG and UDHR. Though both documents created normative policies that set standards for valuing human life, they lacked practical steps that countries could take to ensure the protection of oppressed populations. The R2P aims to spread out the responsibility for protecting civilians from mass atrocities while also respecting the sovereignty of nation-states. As such, the R2P is motivated by maintaining political stability and security as much as by human rights, but ultimately the protection of individuals and seeing that their rights are respected is the

²⁸⁵ Anderson, *Warning Signs*, 133.

²⁸⁶ ICISS, “Responsibility to Protect.”

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

basis for the claim that international actors can and must intervene in situations in which populations are at risk.

Despite the creation of resolutions like the R2P and the proliferation of human rights discourse, mass atrocities and crimes against humanity have not stopped, and some scholars have argued that mass atrocities and genocide in particular might even be on the rise.²⁸⁸ Since WWII, dozens of genocides (legally recognized or not) and other mass atrocities that deploy genocidal violence have occurred or are occurring. The proliferation of human rights discourse has not reduced the amount of dehumanization occurring in the world either even though it is a response to that dehumanization. Outside the context of genocide, dehumanizing rhetoric, images, and discourses infuse daily life from media and advertising tropes to political rhetoric.²⁸⁹ For some, this means that education about human rights is needed more than ever as well as an expansion of the concept “human” to incorporate historically excluded groups of people. But, perhaps it means that there is a flaw in the human rights approach and that some other method of prevention is needed.

II. The Metaphysics of Human Rights

Human rights may be the current reigning model for dealing with questions of international ethics and justice, but the rise of human rights and their lasting establishment in the international arena has not gone unchallenged. The notion of “the human” in human rights has been accused of androcentricism,²⁹⁰ ethnocentrism,²⁹¹

²⁸⁸ Straus, *Fundamentals*, 232. Clapper, “Worldwide Threat.”

²⁸⁹ Adams, *Sexual Politics*.

²⁹⁰ Cook, *Human Rights*.; Pateman, *Sexual Contract*.; Peterson, “Are Women Human?”; Schwartzman, “Liberal Rights Theory.”; Wollstonecraft, *Vindication*.

heterosexuality,²⁹² and speciesism,²⁹³ with the claim that this notion of the human is modeled after property-owning, heterosexual, cisgender, Anglo-European males. Contemporary advocates of human rights acknowledge that this has been part of the history of human rights as it has emerged out of the European Enlightenment, but argue that contemporary human rights can be rescued from these problems should they be recognized as sufficiently expansive and inclusive.²⁹⁴ In this section I will review some current arguments by non-foundationalist human rights advocates who claim that the human rights paradigm is the best model for responding to human degradation and mass atrocities like genocide. By non-foundationalist I mean authors who do not presuppose a religious or transcendental principle for grounding human rights. They argue that human rights are a universal concept, and when put into action respectfully, can be applied in the international sphere without imposing colonial or gendered norms. Despite these claims, I argue that in their explanation and defense of human rights these authors continue to rely on the same metaphysical framework that supports genocidal and dehumanizing thought.

As discussed in chapter four, dehumanization and genocide share three metaphysical principles: 1) a commitment to a rendering of reality and the beings and states that constitute it such that those beings can be separated into natural kinds according to fixed, unchanging essences (essentialism); 2) adherence to a naturalized logic that either excludes the possibility of middle terms and interstitial beings or treats such terms and beings as monstrous, deviant, or polluting (purity); and 3) a commitment

²⁹¹ Robinson, "The Limits.;" Mills, *Racial Contract*.

²⁹² Lugones, "Heterosexuality.;" Simpson, *As We Have.*; Smith, *Conquest.*; Braidotti, *Posthuman*.

²⁹³ Singer, *Animal Liberation*.

²⁹⁴ Ranciere, "Who Is the Subject.;" Rorty, "Human Rights."

to a strict moral and ontological hierarchy in which humans outrank other beings, especially animals (human exceptionalism). I argue that human rights discourse also utilizes these three metaphysical principles to justify defending humans from atrocity. Though this seems like a powerful way of flipping the script on these potentially harmful principles by reclaiming them for a positive project, the way that human rights discourse takes for granted “the human” leads to several problems that keep genocide prevention efforts locked into a logic of dehumanization.

In *Human Rights as Politics and Idolatry*, Ignatieff claims that human rights are “not a creed; it is not a metaphysics. To make it so is to turn it into a species of idolatry.”²⁹⁵ Human rights, he says, are not built on any particular religious or metaphysical foundations. Rather, even as they are touted as universal, they are foundationless. This is necessary to avoid privileging one set of principles over another and to ensure that human rights remain flexible and adaptable to the current needs of humans. He elaborates, “There is thus a deliberate silence at the heart of human rights culture. Instead of a substantive set of justifications explaining why human rights are universal, instead of reasons that go back to first principles...the Universal Declaration of Human Rights simply takes the existence of rights for granted and proceeds to their elaboration.”²⁹⁶ For Ignatieff, avoiding the question of justifications is possible if human rights are not thought of as descriptions of what humans have or are, but describe that from which humans should be free. As he puts it, “Human rights is morally universal because it says that all human beings need certain specific freedoms ‘from’; it does not

²⁹⁵ Ignatieff, *Human Rights*, 53.

²⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 78.

go on to define what their freedom ‘to’ should consist in.”²⁹⁷ In this respect, human rights may be normative, but only insofar as they describe a future ideal of freedom with which all humans can participate. How that freedom is experienced is up to individuals.

Though Ignatieff seems content to accept that rights are just things humans have, he does acknowledge that this raises some difficult questions for secular humanists like himself. For example, what makes the human the measure of all things? Does humanism prioritize human life over the lives of other animal species and over nature more generally?²⁹⁸ And if there is no difference between humans and other animals, then what is the harm of using humans for means to an end such as in medical experiments? Is humanism just a kind of secular worship? His response:

Humanists do not literally worship human rights, but we use the language to say that there is something inviolate about the dignity of each human being...humanists must reply...there *is* nothing sacred about human beings, nothing entitled to worship or ultimate respect. All that can be said about human rights is that they are necessary to protect individuals from violence and abuse, and if it is asked why, the only possible answer is historical.²⁹⁹

Ignatieff defers from making a satisfactory reply to any of these questions. Nowhere does he return to the issue of the difference between humans and other animals or why other animals do not also have “something inviolate” about their own dignity. Yet, as I pointed out earlier in the chapter, Ignatieff uses the term “species” to denote the group “human.” Human species membership, a biological category, ultimately determines who or what has dignity and rights. That Ignatieff fails to recognize that adhering to biological

²⁹⁷ Ibid., 75.

²⁹⁸ Ibid., 82.

²⁹⁹ Ibid., 83.

difference is actually a kind of foundationalism is a problem for both his claims to his approach to human rights and for human rights more generally speaking.

A similar type of slippage occurs for other “non-foundationalist” authors. Political scientist Jack Donnelly, for example, states in *Universal Human Rights in Theory and Practice* that there is no foundational human nature that grounds human rights. Human nature is a social construction, and in this respect it does not try to pre-determine the limits of human potential and human modes of being in the world. Adherence to human rights is just one way of creating or practicing a way of being human. In this respect, “human beings create their ‘essential’ nature through social action on themselves. Human rights provide both a substantive model and a set of practices to realize this work of self-creation.”³⁰⁰ In this way, Donnelly makes the claim that there is no such thing as a human essence that provides the basis for a particular way of doing or practicing human rights. Rather, by engaging in rights discourse and participating in human rights-guided politics and ethics, a notion of what it means to be a human being emerges from that. If this seems troubling, it is, especially given the way in which human rights discourses today emerge largely out of Anglo-European political and ethical traditions. This suggests that whoever has the power to enforce and defend human rights gets to determine how to be human. Donnelly and authors like Ignatieff, Bertrand Ramcharan, Paul Laurens, and others argue that the notion of human rights is not exclusive to European cultures, but has its origins in Hinduism, Buddhism, and ancient Mesopotamian cultures as well. Furthermore, the drafting of UDHR was a multicultural endeavor, backed by the many nations of the world. Yet, this seems to naively dismiss the imbalance of power that exists when it comes to recognizing the rights of marginalized peoples or recognizing

³⁰⁰ Donnelly, *Universal Human Rights*, 15.

human rights violations, pursuing them in courts of law, and meting out punishment. For example, three affluent and powerful countries, the United States, Australia, and Canada, refused to ratify the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples because of what consequences that might have for these governing bodies given that there are indigenous peoples living under oppressive conditions in their own countries. In refusing to ratify, these superpowers were essentially saying that rights of indigenous peoples were not human rights. This is the point Wendy Brown makes when she criticizes Igantieff for describing a rights approach that ultimately produces power in the form of liberal individuals. This blindness to the fact that human rights projects are formed by certain assumptions about freedom and power leads her to issue the following warning: “Human rights activism is a moral-political project if it displaces, competes with, refuses, or rejects other political projects, including those also aimed at producing justice, then it is not merely a tactic but a particular form of political power carrying a particular image of justice, and it will behoove us to inspect, evaluate, and judge it as such.”³⁰¹

In addition to this problem, Donnelly’s anti-essentialist stance regarding human nature is belied by his claim that human rights are tied to species-being. He states,

Human rights are literally the rights that one has simply because one is a human being...one either is or is not a human being, and therefore has the same rights as everyone else (or none at all). Human rights are also *inalienable* rights: one cannot stop being human, no matter how badly one behaves or how barbarously one is treated. And they are *universal* rights, in the sense that today we consider all members of the species *Homo sapiens* ‘human beings’ and thus holders of human rights.³⁰²

³⁰¹ Brown, “The Most We Can,” 134.

³⁰² Donnelly, *Universal Human Rights*, 10.

If human rights are inalienable, then they must attach themselves to some sort of aspect of human nature that exists across all human beings. Otherwise, it would be the case that being human would be contingent upon behavior, practice, etc. Clearly, for Donnelly this is not so. Human being is, it turns out, determined by one's biology and membership within a species. Thus, human rights is *not* a practice that create humans. They belong to beings that are already human. They just shape humans to accord with a particular set of ideals.

Political scholar and activist Bertrand Ramcharan echoes these sentiments in *Contemporary Human Rights Ideas*. Like Ignatieff and Donnelly, he claims that human rights as espoused in the UNDR do not have a metaphysical basis, but emerge out of the “shared heritage of humanity.”³⁰³ Like these authors he also holds that the idea of human rights means that “all human beings, wherever they are, enjoy certain fundamental, inalienable rights stemming from their humanity.”³⁰⁴ He also claims that human rights are an ordering principle.³⁰⁵ They create a particular type of world in which human dignity is respected and central to the pursuit of justice. Neither he nor Donnelly wonders what effects this might have on nonhuman life and nature.

There are two problems with these explanations of human rights that I would like to examine. The first and most obvious is that these non-foundationalist approaches all clearly have a foundation: biology. The idea that humans are all part of the same biological family is compelling and can certainly tell us about common attributes and behaviors that beings that we call human share. But biology is a shaky foundation upon

³⁰³ Ramcharan, *Human Rights Ideas*, 15.

³⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 29.

³⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 5, 29.

which to build a set of normative politics and ethics because human biology is not fixed, but is constantly and literally evolving. Furthermore, the biological differences between humans and other beings are porous. For example, recent research in biology has shown that gene transfer does not just happen vertically from parent to offspring, but horizontally across species. Studies indicate that 5-6% of the human genome has been shaped by horizontal gene transfer from bacteria, viruses, and mosquitoes.³⁰⁶ Nor does the notion of species membership here acknowledge the biomes existing within the human body that consist of all the creatures that keep humans alive. As symbiotic species that exist within human bodies, do they have inalienable rights as well?

This leads to the second issue: to treat biology as a foundation is to make a metaphysical claim. As Ramcharan points out, human rights are “one of the pillars of the contemporary world order.”³⁰⁷ They determine who or what has dignity, is human, and deserves justice and representation before law. Thus, in practice, human rights organize the world such that humans and nonhuman animals are categorically different. This difference rests on the notion that humans and other animals have different essences, whether it is recognized as an essence or not. The assumption of essences lends credence to the notion that humans and other animals have different ontological and moral statuses. This provides the set up for a dualistic relationship between humans and nonhuman animals. As a normative project, human rights create and reinforce a reality in which nonhuman beings are inferior to human beings. This is problematic because the human/animal dualism makes dehumanization possible. In other words, the metaphysics

³⁰⁶ Quammen, *Tangled Tree*.

³⁰⁷ Ramcharan, *Human Rights Ideas*, 29.

of human rights adheres to the metaphysics of dehumanization. As long as human rights try to operate within the same metaphysics, dehumanization remains a constant threat.

The problem with the “human” of human rights can also be approached from the other side, through the concept of “the animal,” which often goes unmentioned in discussions of human rights, but is the assumed Other that marks the limit of the human. One concern that has been raised by critics of human rights is that the universal concept of the human erases the variety of human difference, forcing it to conform to a model of the human based on the European liberal ideal.³⁰⁸ Because nonhuman animals are contrasted with humans, the move to make a universal claim about human life has the same effect on nonhuman animal life. The concept of “the animal” becomes one-dimensional, forced to represent a vast array of heterogeneous living organisms, or, as Derrida puts it, “more precisely...a multiplicity of relations between living and dead, relations of organization or lack of organization among realms that are more and more difficult to dissociate by means of the figures of the organic and inorganic, of life and/or death.”³⁰⁹ In other words, the boundary created between the human and the nonhuman animal fails to account for the ontological impurity of these categories and the way in which humans, animals, organic and inorganic defy, exceed, or transition between these limits. In this respect, the logic of human rights functions according to the metaphysical principle of purity.

Furthermore, Derrida argues that the boundary between human and animal does not have two edges. Instead, the boundary is more like an abyssal rupture that is multiple

³⁰⁸ Brown, “The Most We Can Hope.”; Kapur, “Human Rights.”

³⁰⁹ Derrida, *Animal*, 31.

and heterogeneous.³¹⁰ In other words, the difference between homo sapiens and zebras is just as different and significant as the difference between humans and bluebirds, humans and wasps, and wasps and zebras. The difference cannot be reduced to a simple dichotomy despite the way that Western thought strives to do so. But this border also speaks to human difference as well. No two groups of human are exactly alike and they cannot be reducible to the concept “human.” Yet, when this happens, difference becomes a negative attribute and grounds for exclusion or elimination. As Iris Marion Young explains, “...by seeking to reduce the differently similar to the same, it turns the merely different into the absolutely other. It inevitably generates dichotomy instead of unity, because the move to bring particulars under a universal category creates a distinction between inside and outside.”³¹¹

As Derrida notes, animals become the receptacle for all qualities that are considered un-human: “The animal is deprived of language. Or, more precisely, of response, of a response that could be precisely and rigorously distinguished from a reaction; of the right and power to ‘respond,’ and hence of so many other things that would be proper to man.”³¹² This form of signification is what makes dehumanization so powerful. When one group of humans wants to exclude another from the category human by claiming that they do not display the requisite characteristics, they can point to “the animal.” This is precisely Carl Schmitt’s point when he says,

The concept of humanity is an especially useful ideological instrument of imperialist expansion, and in its ethical-humanitarian form it is a specific vehicle of economic imperialism...whoever invokes humanity wants to

³¹⁰ Ibid.

³¹¹ Young, *Justice*, 99.

³¹² Derrida, *Animal*, 32.

cheat. To confiscate the word humanity, to invoke and monopolize such a term probably has certain incalculable effects, such as denying the enemy the quality of being human and declaring him to be an outlaw of humanity; and a war can thereby be driven to the most extreme inhumanity.³¹³

Human rights discourse expresses a tension between essentializing humans and nonhuman animals and admitting that “the human” and “the animal” are arbitrary concepts. As a project that envisions universal humankind, human rights threaten to homogenize and essentialize human life, in turn doing the same to the nonhuman. But if human rights, as advocates like Ignatieff and Donnelly try to claim, really have no metaphysical basis whatsoever, then that would make them and the definition of the human arbitrary. Either way, the concept of the human becomes a tool of exclusion. If there is an essential human nature, then human rights will play the role of rehumanization, of transforming and returning people into the dignified beings that they are supposed to be. But if human nature is an arbitrary concept, its deployment throughout Western history has only served to demonstrate that it has been and is a tool of violence. As long as the human exists at the expense of the animal, other-than-human animals and humans who are considered animal-like will be on the receiving end of that violence.

Human rights scholars claim that the purpose of a document like the UDHR is to provide the international community with a set of basic standards that, if met, will ensure that people have the ability to lead a good life. While this may be how the UDHR functions for people living within peaceful, democratic societies, often the UDHR functions as a guideline for those societies when violence and oppression are occurring elsewhere in the world. As a guide, the UDHR’s purpose is to help nations, NGOs, and

³¹³ Schmitt, *Concept of the Political*, 54.

other institutions rehumanize victims of oppression and violence—that is, restore or give them the dignity that they merit based on their membership in the category *Homo sapiens*. Consider again the vignette that begins this chapter. For Ignatieff, the problem in the situation is that Pannwitz fails to recognize Levi as human, treating him, instead, as if he were an other-than-human animal. For Ignatieff, the principles of human rights are meant to correct this breach in respect by affirming and validating Levi’s humanity and dignity. Human rights doctrines also provide nations with a set of standards to help them decide when it is appropriate to take action against other nations who are failing to protect their populations and can provide those countries with an agenda. Thus, human rights are more than just a normative ideal of life that humans can aspire to; they are a tool for changing the ontological and moral status of certain humans, conforming them to those standards. Because human rights function according to the same metaphysical principles as dehumanization and genocide, they cannot solve the problems generated by those metaphysics. In this respect, the good that human rights do bring about are only a stop-gap measure until the metaphysical problems can be resolved.

III. Why Not Animal Rights?

Before I conclude this chapter, I wish to briefly address a possible objection to my above analysis. Perhaps Ignatieff, Donnelly, and the rest are honestly trying to avoid the problem of essentialism. Perhaps, they only discuss rights insofar as they impact humans in these texts because they are trying to tackle issues of injustice, oppression, and violence within and between human communities. Humans, along this line of argumentation, might not be the only bearers of rights, but we can talk about human

rights because we are talking about rights within the context of the human political and social spheres. In other words, the problems above would be solved if we extended rights to nonhuman animals. However, the problems caused by basing human rights on the membership in the biological category of *Homo sapiens* are not solved by expanding rights to nonhuman animals because the same metaphysics remain at work. As Kelly Oliver puts it, “If the man/animal binary is part and parcel of the history of rights discourse, then how can we use that same discourse to overcome it?”³¹⁴

In the vignette at the start of this chapter Ignatieff takes umbrage with the fact that Dr. Pannwitz treats Levi as though he is a nonhuman creature. This comparison is morally affronting only if it is already accepted that nonhuman animals are morally inferior to humans. As I have argued above and in previous chapters, the notion of dehumanization implies in its definition that human life has an ontological status that demands greater moral respect than the lives of other beings. In calling this moral and ontological degradation dehumanization, the focus of the concern becomes centered on human lives. As a result, little attention is actually paid to the nonhuman animals that are made to represent the disdain, fear, and disgust humans project toward one another. However, the stereotypical image of the animal other that is used to justify and motivate genocidal violence is also used to justify and motivate heinous acts of violence against actual animals. This violence occurs with such regularity and often without meaningful reflection, and has become so normal that it seems natural that humans would kill, experiment on, eat, and use other types of animals.

For instance, in 2017, 32.2 million cows, 500 thousand calves, 121.3 million pigs, 2.18 million sheep and lambs, 9 million chickens, and 200 thousand turkeys were

³¹⁴ Oliver, *Animal Lessons*, 29.

slaughtered in the US alone.³¹⁵ This number is vastly higher when fish are included in the count. Though animal husbandry has almost always involved slaughter, the rise of concentrated feeding animal operations (CAFOs) and factory farms has significantly changed the relationship between humans and the other animals they eat. For example, chicken farms, even those labeled organic and free range, often consist of large buildings packed with thousands of chickens at once. In order to keep the peace in these overcrowded, dirty, and stinky confines, farmers de-beak chicks to prevent them from injuring one another and themselves.³¹⁶ Adding to their pain, chickens are dosed with a mix of hormones and antibiotics that cause them to grow so fast and big that they become too heavy to support their own weight. Contrary to the bucolic vision of farm life that involves frolicking calves, cows contentedly munching on grass, and pigs rolling in fresh mud, many of the animals put to slaughter in the United States live in conditions that warrant the description “poor, nasty, brutish, and short.”³¹⁷

The violence endured by farm animals is just one aspect of the regular violence directed toward nonhuman animals in the US. Every year approximately 6.5 million companion animals enter shelters. Of these, 1.5 million are euthanized.³¹⁸ The US also churns through laboratory animals, but the actual numbers are obscured for two reasons. First, the Animal Welfare Act of 1966 (AWA), which is the only federal law in the United States to regulate the treatment of animals in research, exhibition, teaching, and transport, defines “animal” as “live dogs, cats, monkeys (nonhuman primate mammals),

³¹⁵ USDA, *Livestock Summary 2017.*; USDA, *Poultry Slaughter 2017 Summary.*

³¹⁶ McKenna, *Livestock.*

³¹⁷ Hobbes, *Leviathan.*

³¹⁸ ASPCA, “Shelter Intake and Surrender.”

guinea pigs, hamsters, and rabbits.”³¹⁹ Mice, rats, aquatic animals, and livestock, which make up the majority of animals used in laboratory settings, are all notably absent from this list. Second, aside from the few types of animals covered by the AWA, the US government does not require records to be kept of how many animals are used in laboratory testing. It is estimated, however, that between 17 and 22 million animals (85% of which are rats and mice) are used for research, education, and testing per year in the US, 2% of which are the animals covered by the AWA.³²⁰

Given the indifference regarding the consistent and prevalent violence toward nonhuman animals occurring every day in the United States, is it any wonder that our society shows indifference or at most ambivalence toward the suffering of humans both within its own borders such as in the treatment of undocumented immigrants, Native American tribes, and Black men let alone the plight of humans facing oppression, mass violence, and genocide elsewhere in the world? As we saw in previous chapters, the frequent response to this question is to say that the suffering of humans is different in some morally significant way. As Nick Haslam notes in his studies of dehumanization, the reasoning follows any one of these excuses: humans are created in the image of god to rule over other animals; humans can express their suffering through language; humans have cognitive, spiritual, and moral reasoning beyond that of other animals; humans have a concept of the future, death, and their own mortality, and so on.³²¹

It is tempting to suggest that we could solve the problem of the human/animal dualism in rights discourse if we extend rights to nonhuman animals. Though this may be

³¹⁹ Animal Welfare Act of 1966.

³²⁰ National Center for Biotechnology Information.

³²¹ Haslam, “What Is Dehumanization?”

an important step toward dissolving the human/animal dualism, animal rights—like human rights—continue to operate within the same metaphysical framework as genocide. Thus, they will never be a true solution to the metaphysical problem posed by dehumanization and genocide. Consider the following issues with animal rights. First, scholars and activists who are concerned about animal welfare and suffering do not even agree on whether animals should have rights. Some scholars argue in favor of animal welfare, which is focused on creating more stringent regulation around the human treatment of animals as a means of preventing unnecessary suffering and ensuring humane treatment.³²²

Second, animal welfare and rights advocates do not agree on what qualities make it reasonable for a being to have rights. Peter Singer, for example, argues from a utilitarian standpoint that animal welfare should be focused on reducing as much unnecessary suffering in the world as possible.³²³ Because suffering is prioritized over other qualities, certain types of nonhuman animals (apes, cetaceans, elephants, and other vertebrates) would be more likely to be on the receiving end of this welfare than others (shellfish, corals, earthworms and other invertebrates). Another common qualification in animal rights literature is whether or not the being is sentient. For example, Lesley Rogers and Gisela Kaplan argue that the “more advanced its higher cognition, the better the case to include its species as the recipient of a set of new privileges.”³²⁴ Others, like Tom Regan, have argued that in order for beings to have rights they must be sentient as

³²² Sunstein, “Introduction.”

³²³ Singer, *Animal Liberation*.

³²⁴ Rogers, “All Animals Are *Not* Equal,” 176.

well as have some sense of future-orientation.³²⁵ Such arguments draw on human conceptions of personhood, agency, and mental life to determine who or what is deserving of rights.³²⁶

But approaches like these have problems. First, these qualifications would include certain types of creatures like apes, dolphins, crows, and elephants (and in the case of suffering, most vertebrates), but could exclude a whole realm of animal life that does not overtly exhibit the necessary traits according to a human measuring stick. If we draw the line at one set of animals, how is that not any more arbitrary than drawing the line at a certain group of humans? We would just be using the same exclusionary logic except that instead of asking “what is a human?” we would be asking “what is an animal?” To see how precarious this notion already is, consider the United States AWA described above. It defines “animal” as “live dogs, cats, monkeys (nonhuman primate mammals), guinea pigs, hamsters, and rabbits.”

Second, the qualities used to measure worthiness of rights are based on what we value for human life. The qualities that make a human life good and worthwhile may not be the same for other kinds of animals. Some animal welfare advocates like Martha Nussbaum have tried to address this concern. Nussbaum, for example, adopts a capabilities approach for thinking about animal welfare: “The core of this approach...is that animals are entitled to a wide range of capabilities to function, those that are most essential to flourishing life, a life worthy of the dignity of each creature. Animals have

³²⁵ Regan, *Defending Animal Rights*.

³²⁶ Common references include Descartes and Kant.

entitlements based on justice.”³²⁷ While Nussbaum offers a rich and thoughtful theory, she continues to rely on Aristotelian and Kantian notions of personhood. Determining happiness and a “good life” according to the standards of other animals is human hubris at its best, and has led to a variety of assumptions and policies based on those assumptions that attempt to regulate animal lives for their own good. A key example of this is the use of hunting to manage wildlife populations.

Third, another problem with expanding rights to animals is that in the current rights framework, rights are a legal and moral construct designed for navigating the human socio-political-ethical realm. Because animals cannot engage as equals in this realm (they will always need surrogates and representatives), humans will always ultimately decide the limits, scope, and worthiness of their rights claims. Ultimately, animal rights, like human rights, attempt to solve an ethical and metaphysical problem from within the system that is built on those principles. Playing around with the dualistic relationship—such as changing it from human/animal to animal/plant or sentient/non-sentient—does not change the logic at work; it only moves the line somewhere else.

IV. Conclusion

As the ideology of current international politics, rights frameworks can serve the important function of drawing attention to acts of violence toward humans and other animals that may have been ignored or accepted as normal and natural. For humans, they can provide a venue for the oppressed, vulnerable, and dispossessed to seek justice for harms from which they have and are suffering. However, rights discourse is just a

³²⁷ Nussbaum, *Frontiers of Justice*, 392.

temporary solution because it is embedded in a metaphysical framework that continues to operate according to the principles of essentialism, purity, and human exceptionalism. Human rights do not help to achieve the ethics of difference and relationality suggested by Ann Cahill and Kelly Oliver in the previous chapter. As a project of universalism that has a tendency to essentialize the human and the animal, rights discourses attempt to subsume everything into the same by simply changing the parameters of who is protected. However, rights often fail at this effort, leaving millions of humans and billions of other animals vulnerable to a variety of forms of violence. In the next chapter I connect violence against animals to violence against humans through a decolonial critique of the distinction between ecocide and genocide. In the final chapter, I return to the notion of an ethics of difference in an effort to develop what such an ethics might look like and what types of metaphysical principles it would entail. This will require a radical shift away from traditional Western metaphysics to a non-Western mode of thinking, namely a Native American worldview.

CHAPTER VII
ECOCIDE, GENOCIDE, AND INDIGENOUS PHILOSOPHIES
OF NONHUMAN AGENCY

As we have seen in previous chapters, dehumanization—the process of making a human person become less than human—is necessary for the practice of modern genocide. Studying the role of dehumanization in genocide reveals an underlying set of metaphysical assumptions in genocidal thought that are present in dehumanizing thought as well. These include essentialism, purity, and human exceptionalism. Though the problems of essentialism and purity have been recognized and discussed to some extent by various scholars of both genocide and dehumanization, the last issue—human exceptionalism—has been largely neglected, especially in conversations around the causes of genocidal violence and for preventing genocidal violence. Treating genocide and rights as strictly human issues that do not apply accept by metaphor to other animals has several problematic ramifications. First, it reinforces the supposed ontological divide between humans and other animals so that the logic of exclusion continues into perpetuity. Second, it erases or occludes the link between human acts of violence against other animals and inter-human violence.³²⁸ Third, it normalizes and naturalizes violence to nonhuman animals, relegating such violence to a different ontological and ethical status. Fourth, as a product of the previous three issues, it fails to account for the intertwining of human-animal relationships and the various forms these might take outside of the Western metaphysical purview.

This last point is a problem that affects how genocide is defined and how genocide needs to be responded to. As we will see, it not only reveals the neglect of nonhuman animals, but shows that neglecting animals (and other nonhuman beings) may

³²⁸ Linzy, *Link Between Animal Abuse.*; Levitt, *Animal Maltreatment.*

be genocidal in itself. The principles of Western logic and metaphysics may inhibit this understanding of genocide, but if we adopt a non-Western approach to logic and metaphysics this notion becomes more viable. This is the case when it comes to considering the genocides of Indigenous peoples, many of whom belong to cultures where other types of beings besides human animals can be persons and community members.

The previous chapters have dealt to some extent with those first three problems. In this chapter, I wish to explore the last issue in greater depth, through the lens of Native American experiences of genocide and Native American ethics and metaphysics. In this chapter I argue that the study of genocide and our current responses to it are still largely colonial and speciesist, and that the two problems go hand-in-hand with the Western metaphysical principles I have outlined in earlier chapters. By looking at examples from the colonization of North America, I will demonstrate how the destruction of nonhuman animals, land, water and other nonhuman beings constitutes genocide according to indigenous metaphysics without requiring a complete revision of either Raphael Lemkin's or the UN's definitions of genocide. In *Environmental and Genocide Studies*, the destruction of nonhuman beings and nature is typically treated as a separate, but related type of phenomenon—ecocide. In this chapter I follow in the footsteps of Native American and First Nations scholars like Donald Grinde, Winona LaDuke, Tasha Hubbard, and Laurelyn Whitt to argue from an Indigenous perspective on nonhuman personhood that ecocide and the genocide of indigenous peoples are inextricably linked and are even constitutive of the same act.³²⁹ I draw on the work of many different Native

³²⁹ Grinde, *Ecocide of Native America.*; LaDuke, *All Our Relations.*; Whitt, *Science, Colonialism.*; See also, Churchill, *Struggle for the Land.*

American scholars from different tribes and nations. This approach to genocide is also consistent with my claim that dehumanization is necessary for the practice of genocide, because dehumanization, which denies the humanity of certain groups, involves perpetrators acting in accordance with the belief that the people they are killing are nonhuman animals. Recognizing that ecocide is genocide challenges the notion of human exceptionalism and expands the concept of genocide without significantly altering its official legal definition.

I. Cultural Genocide, Social Death, and Ecocide

One of the primary shortcomings of the human rights approach to responding to genocidal violence is that the focus of humanitarian efforts becomes based almost entirely on the wellbeing of individual humans rather than with concern for the natural world that sustains them. Not one of the rights in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) mentions the environment, natural world, or other than human creatures even though human life depends on nonhuman nature for sustenance and cultural development. Both the definition of genocide—which only accounts for human groups—and the UDHR exhibit such shortcomings, writing nonhuman animals and other beings out of the ethical and political equation when it comes to atrocities. Yet, such a limited definition of genocide and human wellbeing has not been the only way of interpreting genocide and genocidal violence. As noted in chapter two, Raphael Lemkin, who coined the term genocide and worked tirelessly to have the UN make genocide into a prosecutable crime, defined genocide in a significantly different way than the definition

eventually adopted by the UN. According to Lemkin, genocide does not necessarily entail the physical destruction of a national or ethnic group. Rather, genocide signifies,

a coordinated plan of different actions aiming at the destruction of essential foundations of the life of national groups, with the aim of annihilating the groups themselves. The objects of such a plan would be the disintegration of the political and social institutions, of culture, language, national feelings, religion, and the economic existence of national groups, and the destruction of the personal security, liberty, health, dignity, and even the lives of the individuals belonging to such groups.³³⁰

Whereas the UN definition restricts genocide largely to acts carried out against the bodies and individuals of the targeted human group, Lemkin's definition accounts for a much broader understanding of what constitutes group destruction. While mass murder, preventing births, and physical destruction all count as genocidal acts for Lemkin, he also includes the dissolution of political parties, colonization, abolition of local law, censorship, restrictions on language, withholding food and medicine, moral debasement, and crippling economic development. Unlike the acts listed in the UN definition, each of which describes a harm that would directly affect the physical body of the group members, these acts are indirect harms that compromise quality of life and the ability of a group to carry on as a group. The acts that Lemkin lists destroy a group not by taking lives per se but by forcefully supplanting one group's way of being in the world—the principles, institutions, and values that make that group distinct from other human groups—with the principles, institutions, and values held by another group. In this respect, genocide is not just about the physical destruction of a group, but the cultural destruction of that group as well.

³³⁰ Lemkin, *Axis Rule*, 79.

By adopting this broader notion of genocide, the range of acts that the concept “genocide” covers grows enormously. This broader conception aligns with more recent conversations about genocide. Claudia Card, for example, argues that what distinguishes genocide from other crimes against humanity is its role in bringing about social death.³³¹ According to Card, a social group is not just a collection of individuals, but a set of relationships that are constituted by social, institutional, political, and moral practices. Social death involves the breakdown or eradication of these relationships so that what made life as a group meaningful no longer exists. Social life applies not only to living members of the group, but is intergenerational, connecting the members of the group through history and time. Genocide, both physical and cultural, inhibits the flourishing, growth, and organic development of these relationships. Though social death can be understood within the terms of the UN definition of genocide, Lemkin’s account, which directs attention to the destruction of cultural relationships makes this particular harm all the more evident.

Recently, there has been a renewed interest by genocide scholars in Lemkin’s writings, some of which are still unpublished. Unsatisfied with the limitations of the UN definition, researchers like Dirk Moses, Damien Short, and Jürgen Zimmerer note that by excluding cultural destruction from the definition of genocide, many groups of people who have experienced loss of group life are not considered to be victims of genocide and see Lemkin’s research as one way of conceptualizing problems related to genocide that have been under-theorized or overlooked, especially in regard to colonization.³³² These authors note that the narrow definition of the UN does a great disservice to colonized

³³¹ Card, “Genocide and Social Death.”

³³² Moses, “Empire, Colony, Genocide.”; Short, *Redefining Genocide.*; Zimmerer, “Colonialism.”

indigenous peoples who were not always killed in the process of colonization, but whose group life was forcibly altered and destroyed through the efforts of colonizers. Even acts that were considered “humanitarian” or “humanizing” by settler colonists such as residential schools, the designation of reservations, and other efforts at assimilating native peoples into the new dominant culture often brought about social and cultural death by depriving people of carrying on traditions, language, and relationships not just with one another but with the land and other elements of nonhuman nature around them. Though there is growing interest in the link between colonization and genocide, the majority of genocide literature, which debates definitions and legal action, as well as much of the human rights literature that responds to genocide, perpetuate (often unintentionally) the erasure of the plight of indigenous peoples as an act of genocide. The experiences of colonized indigenous people are treated as something categorically different from genocide. This is similar to the way that violence directed toward nonhuman animals has been treated as well. For example, in *Native America and the Question of Genocide* Alex Alvarez argues that the term genocide is overused when discussing the harms experienced by the indigenous peoples of North America. Many of these assertions of genocide, he says, “seem to be based more on a general sense of outrage and horror than on any clear and rigorous understanding about what is or is not genocide.”³³³ Though he approaches the claims of genocide in North America with some skepticism, Alvarez does not say genocide did not occur. Rather, “care needs to be taken when applying this label to specific historical events.”³³⁴ Following a review of various episodes of violence perpetrated against Native Americans, Alvarez concludes that the

³³³ Alvarez, *Native America*, 3.

³³⁴ *Ibid.*, 4.

Trail of Tears, though horrific, was not genocide while the residential school system was a form of cultural genocide (notice here that “cultural” modifies genocide, but is not genocide properly so-called), and the massacres of Californian Indians were definitely genocide. As noted in chapter two, Native scholar Joseph P. Gone of the Gros Ventre Nation makes a similar argument in his article “Colonial Genocide and Historical Trauma in North America,” but he goes a step further than Alvarez in restricting the definition of genocide. As noted in chapter two, Gone argues that for the sake of conceptual clarity, genocide should *only* refer to instances of violence that involve mass murder. He argues that there are already a variety of terms to describe various acts of violence including ethnic cleansing, colonization, massacres, and human rights violations; “Thus, what seems to be distinctive about the term *genocide* is its reference to the ‘crime of all crimes,’ namely, group-based mass murder.”³³⁵ Given this definition, Gone holds that much of the violence that occurred against Native Americans through colonization is not genocide even though intermittent genocides did occur as colonization proceeded. He specifically calls into question the value of lumping Indian killers, buffalo hunters, and residential school teachers together as perpetrators of genocide.³³⁶ In other words, Gone claims that genocide was not “at all *typical* or *representative*, of the European project of colonization, or that colonization can be casually equated with genocide.”³³⁷ For both authors, the goal of making these distinctions is to ensure that the power of the word genocide does not become diluted.

³³⁵ Gone, “Colonial Genocide,” 279.

³³⁶ *Ibid.*, 285.

³³⁷ *Ibid.*, 284.

Alvarez's and Gane's reasons for defining genocide so narrowly might be beneficial for bringing about conceptual clarity, might reflect a consideration for the legal standing of the definition, and might be useful for helping communities to overcome past violence and reconcile past differences,³³⁸ but mass killing is hardly exhaustive of the methods that can be used to destroy a group. Lemkin's definition, which does take into account the destruction of language, religion, and other cultural institutions can provide a more nuanced account of what happened to (and is still happening to) Indigenous peoples around the world with the arrival of the Europeans. Though Lemkin did not specifically talk about the destruction of nature, the environment, or ecosystems in his definition of genocide, his expanded definition leaves room for consideration of this issue as well. This is especially relevant for indigenous peoples whose physical and cultural destruction coincided with their removal from their land, the decimation of various indigenous nonhuman animal species including beaver and bison, and with alterations to the landscape including the damming of rivers, deforestation, and the introduction of new pollutants. As I will discuss in greater depth later, because many indigenous cultures lived in close proximity to the other-than-human world around them, the destruction of these relationships would have constituted a type of social death as well.

The majority of genocide literature does not seriously or thoroughly analyze the connection between genocide and the destruction of nonhuman nature, otherwise known as ecocide. In this respect most genocide scholarship (and human rights scholarship) remains anthropocentric, considering only the destruction of and the dignity of human life to be of consequence. The term "ecocide" was coined in 1970 by a group of scientists to describe the devastation being wrought to the land in Vietnam as a result of chemical

³³⁸ Ibid., 285.

weapons like Agent Orange. Later it was defined by lawyer and activist Polly Higgins as “extensive damage to, destruction of or loss of ecosystem(s) of a given territory, whether by human agency or by other causes, to such an extent that peaceful enjoyment by the inhabitants of that territory has been severely diminished.”³³⁹ Because “ecocide” is still a relatively under-theorized subject, the term is used to cover a wide array of acts and harms. Unlike the UN definition of genocide, which stipulates that genocidal acts require intent, the definition of ecocide above does not. This means that humans may commit ecocide unintentionally or as a means to a different end as in the case of many businesses that do not intentionally set out to destroy land, forests, or water, but do so negligently or in pursuit of some other goal. In fact, natural events such as tsunamis, hurricanes, or floods could be considered perpetrators of ecocide. Higgins distinguishes between two forms of ecocide: ascertainable and non-ascertainable. The former kind has no discernible human cause, while the latter does.³⁴⁰ For the most part, however, the term is commonly used to describe harms done by humans to nonhuman beings and the planet with the effect of inhibiting the flourishing of human life. As Arthur W. Galston argued in his proposal for an international agreement on banning ecocide, “It seems to me that willful and permanent destruction of environment in which a people can live in a manner of their own choosing ought similarly to be considered a crime against humanity, to be designated by the term ecocide.”³⁴¹ Thus, examples of ecocide are quite varied, including everything from the mass death of bees due to the overuse of pesticides to the clear-cutting of the Amazon Rainforest for the purposes of creating more farmland to the

³³⁹ Higgins, *Eradicating Ecocide*, 63

³⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 63.

³⁴¹ Quoted in Short, *Redefining Genocide*, 40.

poaching of rare species to be sold on the black market as medicine, as pets, or as delicacies.

Though the concept of ecocide has gained traction among environmentalists and advocates for indigenous rights, ecocide is not considered a crime on the international stage. Only ten countries have adopted laws criminalizing ecocide.³⁴² Even though the inclusion of ecocide as an international crime has been debated at the UN various times between the years of 1973 and 2010, culminating with a proposal to amend the Rome Statute to include ecocide as the fifth Crime against Peace, each effort to incorporate it ultimately failed.³⁴³ However, as the threats of anthropogenic climate change become increasingly real, there has been a recent resurgence of interest in the connections between ecocide and genocide. As Higgens points out, “ecocide leads to resource depletion, and where there is escalation of resource depletion, war comes chasing close behind.”³⁴⁴ And often with war comes a surge of crimes against humanity, one of which may be genocide.

In *Ecocide of Native America*, Donald Grinde of the Yamasee tribe and Bruce E. Johansen link ecocide with the genocide of Native Americans and other indigenous peoples. By examining the testimonies of Native people impacted by a variety of environmental disasters that followed colonization including uranium mining, depletion of fisheries, and destruction of the plains for ranching, the authors demonstrate how these practices have interfered with traditional Native methods of engaging with the nonhuman

³⁴² These include Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, the Republic of Armenia, the Republic of Moldova, the Russian Federation, Tajikistan, Ukraine, and Vietnam.

³⁴³ Higgens, *Eradicating Ecocide*.

³⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 62.

world and the devastating impact this has had on the future of those communities, physically, spiritually, and culturally. According to the testimony of Jewell Praying Wolf James of the Lummi Tribe, the destruction of land, water, and nonhuman life has been central to this experience of genocide:

At one time our plains, plateaus, and ancient forests were respected and not considered a wilderness. The skies were darkened with migrating fowl. The plains were blanketed with massive herds of buffalo. Our mountains teemed with elk, deer, bear, beaver, and other fur-bearing animals. All the rivers were full of salmon and fish—so much that you could walk across their backs to get to the other side. The plants and trees were medicines or food for us.

We knew neither hunger nor disease until contact came in 1492, then our holocaust began and that of the plants, animals, and environment.³⁴⁵

Though Grinde and Johansen link ecocide and genocide, their focus is primarily on ecocide and less on how this connects to the problem of genocide more generally speaking. In *Redefining Genocide*, sociologist Damien Short provides some of this theoretical groundwork by taking a closer look at what he deems the “genocide-ecocide nexus.” Drawing on Lemkin’s broad definition of genocide that takes genocide to be the destruction of a group’s culture as well as physical life, Short argues that ecocide has been used again and again in the modern era to destroy group life, especially for indigenous societies. According to Short ecocide is a *method* of genocide if “such destruction results in conditions of life that fundamentally threaten a social group’s cultural and/or physical existence.”³⁴⁶ According to Short, humans are “ecologically embedded beings.”³⁴⁷ As such, wrecking the ecosystems in which humans persist would

³⁴⁵ Grinde, *Ecocide of Native America*, 250.

³⁴⁶ Short, *Redefining Genocide*, 6.

³⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 9.

ultimately lead to the destruction of human lives and cultures. Through various case studies of situations in Palestine, Sri Lanka, Australia, and Canada he shows how settler colonists put profits and resource extraction ahead of the lives and livelihoods of indigenous groups who share(d) the territory. Exploitation of land and resources for political and economic gain on the part of the state and businesses becomes a justification for ethnic cleansing, extermination, and forced removal of indigenous groups.

For example, in one case study Short looks at the effects of Canada's tar sands project on nearby First Nations communities. Short reports that in the name of energy security, the US and Canada have pursued opportunities to extract oil and other resources using risky and especially environmentally destructive technologies. The exploitation of the tar sands in Alberta, Canada has involved extracting bitumen, a viscous and dense form of petroleum, through techniques such as strip mining and fracking. The site of the tar sands, which is almost as large as the state of Florida, consists of mined pits, pools of oil, and rivers of water that have been redirected from all available nearby sources. The land has been stripped of wildlife, trees, and top soil. Runoff from the mining procedures contaminates rivers on the level of major oil spills on a regular basis. These lands, which had traditionally belonged to the Cree, Metis, and Dene peoples, are now entirely uninhabitable.³⁴⁸ Though members of these First Nations still live in Alberta not far from the site of the tar sands, the contamination of the land and water has been so bad that members of these tribes fear to drink water, hunt, or plant on the land. Cancer rates have soared in their communities with a large number of cases of rare cancer occurring.³⁴⁹ The Canadian government has repeatedly denied that the tar sands have anything to do with

³⁴⁸ Short, *Redefining Genocide*.

³⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

these issues and insist that the project provides jobs for members of these indigenous communities, even though prior to beginning extraction, the indigenous peoples were able to survive and carry on their traditional cultural practices through their relationship with the land and by way of subsistence hunting.

Short demonstrates that the oil-extraction process is genocidal insofar as it damages the physical health and wellbeing of the indigenous peoples who live near this site while inhibiting their ability to carry on their traditional cultural practices by inducing fear and by taking over more and more of the land on which they lived. Indigenous scholars like Michelle Jacob of the Yakama Nation agree: “From an Indigenous perspective, the Tar Sands extraction project represents an assault on the earth; the fracking, drilling, extraction, and massive construction of pipelines across Turtle Island, from Alberta to the Gulf Coast, is creating a wasteland. Tribal treaty rights and tribal people’s ability to protect their homeland become casualties of war in the settler colonial quest to extract resources for profit in the energy wars.”³⁵⁰ Environmental devastation of this sort functions like a slow genocide, eroding the health of the people, their sovereignty as a nation, and the land, all of which are integral to their group identity. Because this form of genocide might occur over such a long period of time, it may not always be immediately recognizable as genocide, especially when compared to other genocides like the Holocaust, the Rwandan genocide, or the genocide in Darfur.

In this case study and the others that Short recounts, ecocide is a *method* of genocide, but not equivalent to genocide. In other words, environmental devastation is one way of destroying human groups that could potentially fall under two criteria for the UN definition of genocide: causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the

³⁵⁰ Jacob, *Indian Pilgrims*, 64.

group and deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction. Through these case studies Short convincingly demonstrates that ecocide carried out by dominant colonial cultures disproportionately affects indigenous peoples in a genocidal way. His analysis, one of the few in genocide scholarship that makes an explicit connection between the effects of ecocide and its role in genocide, provides new avenues for thinking about the causes of genocide and how they might be prevented.

However, I argue that ecocide is more than just a method. It *is* genocide. As I will show in the following section, Short's analysis relies on one of the same Western metaphysical assumptions that appear in dehumanizing and genocidal logic: human exceptionalism and the existence of the human/animal and human/nature binaries. This assumption is especially problematic when thinking about the effects of ecocide on indigenous peoples. Though Short takes an important step toward bringing a new decolonial lens to the study of genocide, I argue that we need to go further by recognizing that the metaphysical assumptions that exist for Westerners do not necessarily hold for indigenous peoples, and that by attending to some of those differences we will see that ecocide is not just a method of genocide, but genocide itself. This is especially evident when the worldviews of indigenous peoples are taken into account. It is not just a method, which suggests that destroying the natural world is a tool for destroying a group of human people, but an act of genocide because it literally eliminates, disfigures, and maims the other-than-human members of indigenous communities. Furthermore, by treating ecocide as a method rather than genocide itself, a distinction between the value of human life over and above that of nonhuman animal and plant life remains. For both of

these reasons, I draw on Native American philosophies of nonhuman personhood to argue in the next sections that ecocide and genocide should be thought of as the same thing, and that preventing genocide, dehumanization, and ecocide require the same metaphysical and ethical solution—namely, a metaphysical reorientation.

II. Nonhuman Personhood and the Genocide-Ecocide Nexus

Though Short connects the role of ecocide to the practice of genocide, there are two aspects of his analysis that need further development. The first is that Short deems ecocide problematic because of its devastating effect on human life but not necessarily because of the harms it does to nonhuman beings and the planet. In this respect, Short relies on and maintains a human/nature dualism that understands ecocide to be more morally problematic because of its effects on humans over and above its effects on other beings. Throughout *Redefining Genocide*, Short frames the problem of ecological and environmental destruction in terms of how it will impact human communities. For example, in a discussion of fracking, Short states,

Indeed, in numerous studies from both countries [the US and Australia], local communities most affected by developments often cite considerable negative impacts on the environment and human health, including groundwater contamination, air pollution, radioactive and toxic waste, water usage, earthquakes, methane migration, and the industrialization of rural landscapes, the cumulative effect of which has led to calls for the United Nations Human Rights Council (HRC) to condemn fracking as a threat to basic human rights, particularly the rights to water and health. Fracking development is fast becoming a human rights issue.³⁵¹

As this passage shows, Short frames ecocide as a human rights problem. As such, ecocide is bad because of the toll it takes on human lives. Short briefly mentions the negative

³⁵¹ Short, *Redefining Genocide*, 59.

impact fracking has on the environment, but this is part of his case for why fracking is ultimately harmful to humans. Nowhere in the book does he specifically examine the implications of fracking and other types of resource exploitation practices on the lives of nonhuman beings, even though all of these acts are done at their expense. Perhaps he frames ecocide anthropocentrically because it is discussed in relation to the problem of genocide, which by nature of its definition, is anthropocentric and is a problem that has been treated as solely affecting humans. In following the logic of genocide and human rights, Short relies on and perpetuates the metaphysical principle of human exceptionalism. This is especially ironic given that ecocide, by its definition, should shed a light on the specific harms suffered by nonhuman beings and nature on their own terms and not necessarily mediated through the lens of human goods, desires, and needs. Implied in this reading of ecocide and genocide is the notion that nature is passive, waiting to be exploited or preserved at the whims of whatever various groups of humans seem to value it at the time. In this outlook, the land, water, air, plants, and nonhuman animals exist for the sake of human use, and their depletion, overuse, extinction, and destruction might be tragic on its own but is only immoral insofar as it puts human life in jeopardy. This approach to ecocide leads into the second problem, which has to do with the way that Short understands the impact of ecocide on Indigenous peoples.

Short's analysis of the impact of ecocide on indigenous peoples follows the logic that nature is a passive recipient of human action that supplies humans with the necessary resources they need. For example, in his assessment of the impact of the tar sands extraction, he writes, "The effects on downstream indigenous groups are truly staggering. Their ability to hunt, trap and fish has been severely curtailed and, where it is possible,

people are often too fearful of toxins to drink water and eat fish from waterways polluted by the ‘externalities’ of tar sand production.”³⁵² Elsewhere he writes,

Indigenous peoples living close to and in the midst of tar and sand deposits have been expressing concern over the lethal impacts that these industrial events have had on their communities for years, with elders citing caustic changes to water quality, meat quality, and to the availability of fish and game. Concern is growing recently as health professionals and community members witness more and more friends and family fall ill with a variety of serious illnesses, and local fish populations are inflicted with ever more severe deformities.³⁵³

In both of these quotes, Short notes that tar sands extraction has a detrimental effect on nonhuman creatures, but the language he uses indicates that he is thinking about this harm in terms of its consequences for humans. In this way, the extraction process does not harm deer, elk, and other wildlife, but affects the freedom of humans to hunt game and acquire meat. His mention of fish is connected to the human fear of eating them. The changes to water quality, the explosion of illnesses, and the increasing precariousness of life in these areas are only understood in terms of human suffering.

To be clear, these issues pose serious problems for the health and wellbeing of the individual members of indigenous communities and for the perpetuation of their cultures, which rely on their ability to live according to traditional practices that are rooted in their connection with particular areas of land and the beings that live there. Short demonstrates that he recognizes the importance of this connection, but even this is described in anthropocentric terms. He states,

As Native author and activist Andrea Smith noted (Smith 2005: 121), ‘when Native peoples fight for cultural/spiritual preservation, they are ultimately fighting for the landbase which grounds their spirituality and culture’. That is, the land or ‘specific geographical setting’ (Churchill

³⁵² Ibid., 11.

³⁵³ Ibid., 174.

2005: 168) with which many indigenous nations/communities identify themselves fundamentally embodies their ‘historical narrative’ (Abed 2006: 362) and who they are as peoples; with both their ‘practices, rituals, and traditions’ (ibid.: 327), *and* their political and socio-economic cohesion as a group, inextricably bound to the surrounding landscape. Alienation from that landscape, therefore inevitably results in the dissolution of an indigenous people’s ‘network of practical social relations’ (Powell 2007: 538), for they will no longer be able to carry out, develop and preserve their ‘cultural heritage and traditions,’ or ‘pass these traditions on to subsequent generations - thereby rendering them ‘socially dead.’³⁵⁴

In this passage, Short continues to think in terms of a human/nature dualism. Even though indigenous peoples rely on the land to ground their spirituality, history, and culture, the land is treated as something fundamentally other. According to Short, Indigenous peoples have strong connections to the land on which they live and the land is a site at which “practical social relations” take place, but the land itself is not recognized as a participating member in these relations. In fact, for Short, it is not so much that indigenous peoples become alienated from land, but from “landscape,” which is defined as a particular place or territory in which activity (presumably human) happens.³⁵⁵ But this is not the predominant way in which many Native peoples— especially Native Americans, First Nations, and Maori, among others—identify with land. In fact, if we take into account the metaphysical principles and expansive notion of personhood that grounds many of these cultures, we can see that ecocide is a far more direct and egregious crime for these communities than even Short seems to recognize. To demonstrate this, I turn to the philosophies of Native American and First Nations peoples.

³⁵⁴ Ibid., 160. It should be noted that this is one of just two brief explanations that Short gives about the relationship between indigenous peoples and the land. Of the four people cited in this passage, only two have identified as Native American and both of them have been involved in controversies about whether they lied about those identities.

³⁵⁵ Merriam Webster, “Landscape.”

In what follows I will touch on three metaphysical “principles” of indigenous philosophies.³⁵⁶ These include 1) there is a diversity of creations,³⁵⁷ 2) everything is related, and 3) the universe is alive and must be approached in a personal manner.³⁵⁸ Though these principles are interconnected, in this chapter I will mainly focus on the third principle insofar as it resists the principle of human exceptionalism.

According to Muscogee scholar Daniel Wildcat, “Stated simply, *indigenous* means ‘to be of a place.’”³⁵⁹ However, this does not just refer to the fact that individuals are born in particular places. To be of a place is an active concept that denotes an ongoing relationship that shapes and reshapes the identity of the place and the individuals that inhabit it. As Oglala Lakota scholar Vine Deloria, Jr. elaborates, in an indigenous worldview “power and place are dominant concepts—power being the living energy that inhabits and/or composes the universe, and place being the relationship of things to each other.”³⁶⁰ Because relationships are not abstract, but are particular from many Native American perspectives, the notion of place is also deeply connected to a physical location—the land. In contrast to Short’s description of the relationship between Native peoples and the land, the land is an active, lively participant in the making and sustaining of relationships. As Choctaw scholar Laurelyn Whitt explains, “The land and living

³⁵⁶ I have two brief caveats to this claim. First, there are hundreds of indigenous nations in what is known today as the US and Canada, and they each have their own philosophies. However, there are certain consistent themes that arise across many of these cultures. I try to incorporate a variety of voices to demonstrate how these principles overlap across Native cultures. Second, “principles” might be too strong of a word for describing Native relations to these worldviews. However, for the sake of clarity, I use this term to demonstrate how they contrast with Western metaphysical principles.

³⁵⁷ Phrasing adopted from Cordova, *How It Is*.

³⁵⁸ Phrasing adopted from Deloria, *Power and Place*.

³⁵⁹ Deloria, *Power and Place*, 31.

³⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 23.

entities which make it up are not apart from, but a part, of the people. Nor is the ‘the environment’ something outside of, or surrounding a people. The relation of belonging is ontologically basic. With inherent possession, agency is sometimes held to be reciprocal—a people belongs to/owns the land, and the land belongs to/owns a people.”³⁶¹ In other words, in this cosmology the land is a *person*, not a thing or a resource to be consumed. Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabe scholar Vanessa Watts reinforces this notion when she states that not only is the land in relation to indigenous peoples, it actually is a relation: “in a majority of Indigenous societies, [people] conceive[s] that we (humans) are made from the land; our flesh is literally an extension of the soil.”³⁶²

Though Short recognizes that land is not generic and that removing indigenous peoples from their lands is harmful because they have specific ties to those particular lands, insofar as he is still working from the perspective of Western metaphysics, he misses an important point: that “power and place produce personality.”³⁶³ According to Deloria, what this is means is that “the universe is alive, but it also contains within it the very important suggestion that the universe is personal and, therefore, must be approached in a personal manner.”³⁶⁴ If the land is a living being that possesses power, particularity, personality, and agency, then acts like strip mining, tar sands extraction, fracking, deforestation, and other activities that disfigure the land are not just ecocidal,

³⁶¹ Whitt, *Science, Colonialism*, 43.

³⁶² Watts, “Indigenous Place-Thought,” 27.

³⁶³ Deloria, *Power and Place*, 23.

³⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

but genocidal. Destruction of the land is not just a means of destroying human group life; the land itself is a living member of the community.

The same argument can be made in regards to nonhuman animals, plants, and other beings. According to Shawnee philosopher Thomas Norton-Smith, Native Americans have an expansive notion of personhood, which reflects the insights that “(1) personhood does not constitute the essence of a human being; (2) an entity is a person by virtue of its membership and participation in a network of social and moral relationships and practices with other persons; and (3) moral agency is at the core of personhood.”³⁶⁵ This view of personhood contrasts sharply with many theories of personhood in the Western worldview, which almost exclusively attribute personhood to humans due to various characteristics that are supposedly unique to human life—primarily rationality, agency, moral reasoning, and free will.³⁶⁶ Because the Western notion of personhood relies on human uniqueness, it assumes a hierarchy between humans, animals, and other beings. However, this hierarchy does not exist for many Native American communities. Chickasaw writer Linda Hogan, explains, “For us, the animals are understood to be our equals. They are still our teachers. They are our helpers and healers. They have been our guardians and we have been theirs.”³⁶⁷

Difference is not a barrier to these relationships. Rather than ascribing to a metaphysics that values sameness (i.e. purity), indigenous thought holds that there is a diversity of creations. But, in contrast to an essentialist metaphysic, this diversity is not a cause for ontological and moral division. This is because underlying this approach to

³⁶⁵ Norton-Smith, *Dance of Person and Place*, 86.

³⁶⁶ In some Western nations, like the US, personhood has, strangely, also been attributed to corporations.

³⁶⁷ Hogan, “First People.”

nonhuman personhood and diversity is the ontological principle that everything is related. As Deloria explains, “Everything in the natural world has relationships with every other thing and the total set of relationships makes up the natural world as we experience it.”³⁶⁸ Put differently, no one human or nonhuman exists independently; all things are connected to one another in lively relationships. In contrast to the view that nonhuman nature is dead, inert, or passive, in Native American worlds, nonhuman animals like deer, bears, and salmon, along with bodies of water, features of the land like canyons or buttes, and sacred objects like drums and pipes, all possess a kind of power/force/spirit. Algonkin tribes call it *manitou*, but other tribes use the terms *nilchi’i* (Dine), *usen* (Apache), *wakan* (Lakota), and *orenda* (Wendat).³⁶⁹ This quality imbues these beings (and humans as well) with their own animacy, power, and purposiveness, which calls for recognition and respect. Because all beings share these attributes and all beings are in relation to one another, there is no innocent, passive, or isolated being-in-the-world. Everything and anything is a person through its relationships and through the obligations it owes and receives.

This notion of personhood has real effects in the world, guiding the form that relationships between humans and other animals take. According to some Native American philosophies, the relationship between humans and other animals is one of kinship. Both the Ojibwa and Lakota regard nonhuman persons as ancestors or siblings.³⁷⁰ Black Elk of the Oglala Lakota, for example, describes how his life story is “of all life that is holy and is good to tell, and of us two-leggeds sharing in it with the

³⁶⁸ Deloria, *Spirit and Reason*, 34.

³⁶⁹ Cordova, *How It Is*, 103-4.; Norton-Smith, *Dance of Person and Place*, 86.

³⁷⁰ Norton-Smith, *Dance of Person and Place*, 90.

four-leggeds and the wing of the air and all green things; for these are children of one mother and their father is one spirit.”³⁷¹ In other words, other-than-human animals and plants are siblings to humans. In many Western societies it is accepted that humans have moral obligations first and foremost to their immediate kin and family. By understanding relationships with nonhuman persons as familial, Indigenous peoples more easily fold those beings into their realm of moral obligation. What binds people together is not species membership, but a shared experience, knowledge, and participation in life that is rooted or born of a particular place.

Other forms these relationships take are more political in nature. For instance, First Nations and Native American scholars like Nuu-cha-nuulth philosopher E. Richard Atleo, Anishinaabe writer Leanne Simpson, and Tewa philosopher Gregory Cajete say that for many tribes nonhuman animals and humans are in treaty relationships: “According to Nishnaabeg traditions, our relationship with the moose nation, the deer nation and the caribou nation is a treaty relationship like any other, and all the parties involved have both rights and responsibilities in terms of maintaining the agreement.”³⁷² All three authors describe particular protocols³⁷³ that must be followed when dealing with nonhuman animal nations that demonstrate the proper amount of respect for those beings whose activities and lives sustain Native communities.³⁷⁴ Accepting either claim about

³⁷¹ Quoted in Norton-Smith, *Dance of Person and Place*, 90.

³⁷² Simpson, *Dancing*, 111. See also Atleo, *Tsawalk* and Cajete, *Native Science*.

³⁷³ Simpson prefers to use the word “practice” rather than “protocol” because protocols are rules that substitute for engaged practices of producing relationships. I continue to use the word here, however, because other authors like Atleo use them to denote formal procedures, which is conveyed more clearly through the terminology of “protocol.”

³⁷⁴ Atleo, for example, begins *Tsawalk* by recounting a whale hunt carried about by his grandfather where the protocols were not performed correctly. The disruption of the protocols almost caused the hunt to fail,

human/nonhuman relationships leads to a radical rethinking of who and what is affected by ecocide/genocide. The UN definition of genocide states that genocide involves killing a group in whole or in part. If we accept that nonhuman beings can be kin to humans, then killing other-than-human persons is a direct attack on a given community or group. If land, salmon, and maize can be kin to humans, then their destruction constitutes destroying part of a group. Likewise, if we accept that there is a political relationship between humans and other-than-human persons, then this will also amount to genocide. One of the groups named in the UN definition of genocide is the national group. If groups of nonhuman animals consist of nations, their destruction is genocide. And that genocide, while it may lead to the genocide of the humans who are in relation with them, can also be recognized as independent from the genocide experienced by humans. To illustrate this, consider the mass slaughter of buffalo that was carried out during westward expansion in the US.

In her article “Buffalo Genocide in the Nineteenth Century,” Tasha Hubbard of the Cree, Nakota, Anishinaabe and Metis makes this point exquisitely. She argues that the destruction of the buffalo was not genocidal simply because it led to the physical and social deaths of human persons, but because “specific genocidal practices and their theoretical underpinnings can be applied to the buffalo slaughter.”³⁷⁵ Citing historical documents, she shows how settlers intentionally set about slaughtering buffalo with the goal of exterminating them, killed vast numbers of them or kidnapped calves, which resulted in the social death of the buffalo and the decline of their mental and emotional

but thanks to the intervention of Wren, who recognized that the proper ceremonies were disrupted accidentally, the hunt was led back on track. See page x.

³⁷⁵ Hubbard, “Buffalo Genocide,” 295.

health.³⁷⁶ Though Hubbard's argument is quite compelling, it is worth reviewing the case of the buffalo here to clearly demonstrate what is at stake.

III. Buffalo Genocide

Prior to the 1800s, 30 million to 60 million buffalo lived on the plains stretching from what is now known as Northern Saskatchewan to New Mexico and as far east as the Appalachian Mountains.³⁷⁷ Their presence shaped the environment, making them a keystone species.³⁷⁸ For the plains tribes that lived in those areas, the buffalo were also a keystone of their cultures and social fabric. Not only did the buffalo create a particular habitat suited to a diverse ecosystem on which indigenous peoples could survive, their bodies provided a source of food, clothing, and other tools. In addition to this, the buffalo were also central to the spiritual identity of the community. According to Black Elk, "For it was the White Buffalo Cow Woman who in the beginning brought to us our most sacred pipe, and from that time, we have been related with the Four-Leggeds and all that moves. Tatanka, the buffalo, is the closest four-legged relative that we have, and they live as a people, as we do."³⁷⁹

By the mid-1800s, the buffalo populations were starting to decline. White settlers, who were bringing their cattle onto the land, took up the space that buffalo roamed. In addition, tribes from the east, forced to vacate their traditional homelands, were removed

³⁷⁶ Ibid.

³⁷⁷ Fitzgerald, *Bison*, 7.

³⁷⁸ Hubbard, "Buffalo Genocide," 292.

³⁷⁹ Quoted in LaDuke, *All Our Relations*, 143.

onto plains land, leading to greater demand for the buffalo as a resource.³⁸⁰ This was accompanied by sudden growth in the market for buffalo hide robes. In 1835, the American Fur Co. alone had an order for 36,000 buffalo robes. By 1857, the number of hides being delivered to retailers was up to 70,400 hides a year.³⁸¹ Between 1872 and 1873 alone, over 825,000 hides were transported by rail from the plains to the east.³⁸² But the real devastation took place in the 1870s and 80s as hunters, the military, and growing numbers of cattle ranchers moved deeper into the plains, eliminating buffalo for their own varied purposes. The expansion of the railroad and cattle ranching into the west occurred simultaneously as part of the industrialization of American agriculture and was bolstered by the Homestead Act of 1862, which granted individuals and families of settlers 160 acres of land each. The destruction of the buffalo herds made more room for ranchers as well as opened up a new market of beef buyers, the Native Americans who were starving as a result of the depletion of the buffalo herds.³⁸³

Historian Daniel Smits argues that the military also played a significant role in the extermination of the bison.³⁸⁴ The army was integral to securing the frontier and pushing it westward, making room for the railroads and accompanying ranchers and settlements. General William T. Sherman, for example, held that getting rid of the buffalo was necessary for the development of the rail system, and frequently sponsored civilian hunting expeditions as one solution to the problem. Likewise, in his memoirs, Lieutenant

³⁸⁰ Hämäläinen, “The First Phase.”

³⁸¹ White, “Hunting Buffalo,” 44.

³⁸² *Ibid.*, 49.

³⁸³ LaDuke, *All Our Relations*, 142.

³⁸⁴ Smits, “The Frontier Army,” 314.

John M. Schofield, commander of the department of the Missouri from 1869-1870, wrote, “With my cavalry and carbined artillery camped in front, I wanted no other occupation in life than to ward off the savage and kill off his food until there should no longer be an Indian frontier in our beautiful country.”³⁸⁵ Slaughtering the buffalo had a two-fold benefit. Not only did it open up land for settlers, it took care of the so-called “Indian problem.” An article in *Navy Journal* from June 26, 1869 reported that Sherman stated “that the quickest way to compel the Indians to settle down to civilized life was to send ten regiments of soldiers to the plains, with orders to shoot buffaloes until they became too scarce to support the redskins.”³⁸⁶ In a twist on dehumanization, for the army, the buffalo and Native Americans were so inextricably linked that soldiers would occasionally pretend that when they were killing buffalo they were actually killing Indians.³⁸⁷ In this respect, the killing of buffalo was a symbolic act of killing Indigenous peoples, while having real life-threatening consequences for indigenous peoples and their cultures.

The army worked in tandem with hunters as a method of eradicating Native Americans, often sponsoring hunting expeditions and inviting hunters to accompany them.³⁸⁸ For the hunters, killing the buffalo provided both sport and profit. With the development of the railroads, amateur hunters took excursions to the plains to shoot buffalo from the train windows as they passed herds.³⁸⁹ Their impact on the herds was

³⁸⁵ Quoted in Smits, “The Frontier Army,” 316.

³⁸⁶ Quoted in Smits, “The Frontier Army”, 317.

³⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 318.

³⁸⁸ Dary, *Buffalo Book*.

³⁸⁹ White, “Hunting Buffalo,” 46.

relatively benign compared to the market hunters, some of whom claimed they could kill 40 to 50 buffalo in a day.

[The hunters] often worked in pairs. They would hide in a foxhole and wait for a herd to pass. Killing the herd leader was the most effective way to start. If you could kill the boss, the herd would dissolve into grand confusion, because it would take some time for a new leader to emerge. The next best plan was to kill an animal and wait until others in the herd caught the scent of blood. With the aid of a needle gun and telescopic sight, it was easy to hit one animal. After it had fallen, all those near enough to smell the blood would circle around the fallen one, sniffing the air and pawing the ground. These stationary targets were easy to pick off, one by one.³⁹⁰

According to Hubbard, the hunters were not simply taking advantage of the fear and chaos incited by the buffalo's sense experience, but preying on the complex social and inner lives of the buffalo as well. She states, "Buffalo feel grief for their dead, according to both my traditional teachers and the longtime buffalo warden at the Grasslands National Park, Wes Olson. He has observed [that]...rather than abandon the body, buffalo will stay with the deceased, attempt to revive their family member, and make audible sounds of grief."³⁹¹ Hubbard contends that ignoring the personhood of the buffalo reinforces the human-centric bias in genocide scholarship, which leads to a failure to account for the particular types of relationships between humans and other-than-human beings that exist in many indigenous cultures.³⁹² Not only could buffalo feel grief for their dead, but the killing of adults and kidnapping of young buffalo broke down the bison's own social relations and led to mental illness. Hubbard recounts the experiences of John Cook, a buffalo hunter:

³⁹⁰ Ibid., 49.

³⁹¹ Hubbard, "Buffalo Genocide," 300.

³⁹² Ibid., 295.

[T]he hunters' [had a] practice of surrounding available waterways, forcing the buffalo to approach anyway, and gunning them down. Those buffalo who managed to find a water source that was free from hunters 'would rush and crowd in pell-mell, crowding, jamming, and trampling down both the weak and the strong, to quench a burning thirst. Many of them were rendered insane from their intolerable, unbearable thirst' (Cook 1938: 198). Instead of living cooperatively in their herd society, the buffalo were tortured prior to their death at the hands of the hide hunters.

The death of the buffalo had a debilitating effect on the Indigenous communities who regarded them as kin, allies, and protectors. According to environmental activist Winona LaDuke of the Anishinaabe, "Many Native people view the historic buffalo slaughter as the time when the buffalo relatives, the older brothers, stood up and took the killing intended for their younger brothers, the Native peoples."³⁹³

As we can see, given the principle that personhood is not restricted to human beings, ecocide is not simply a *method* of genocide. It *is* genocide. According to Short, ecocide is genocidal when it harms human groups. But, from an indigenous perspective, there is no distinction. In their co-authored book *Indian from the Inside*, Ojibwa scholar Dennis H. McPherson and philosopher Douglas J. Rabb sum up this point: "There is, we suggest, a moral obligation to protect the habitat of the moose, the beaver, the muskrat, and the lynx; the habitat of geese, ducks, grouse and hare, not just because members of the Band wish to continue hunting and trapping, but because these other-than-human persons are also extended members of the Ojibwa society."

IV. Conclusion

Ecocide and genocide function according to the same metaphysical principles. In ecocide, nonhuman beings are considered to be essentially other than human beings,

³⁹³ LaDuke, *All Our Relations*, 154.

locating them outside of the realm of moral obligation. While ecocide is often motivated by human exceptionalism, which manifests as a belief in the human right to nonhumans as resources for human consumption, ecocide can also be the result of a desire for purity. This arises through efforts to eradicate certain species deemed dangerous to human life or deemed obstacles to human development. Oftentimes ecocide and genocide coincide because ecocide involves the destruction of the material conditions for human life. Sometimes the effects of this have an immediate impact, but in other cases the effects are not felt or recognized until many years later.

One of the aims of this discussion of ecocide and genocide is to call attention to the way that research within the field of genocide studies remains locked within the logic and metaphysics of Western, liberal, cosmopolitan societies. As long as Westerners remain the dominant voices in the field without incorporating non-Western voices, important insights into the nature of genocide and dehumanization will remain overlooked. This puts artificial limits on the possibilities for thinking about how to respond and prevent dehumanization and genocide. In this chapter, I have shown that Native American philosophies can broaden the notion of what counts as genocide. In contrast to rehumanization and human rights—two responses developed from within a Western metaphysical framework—Native American philosophies rely on a different set of metaphysical principles. As mentioned above, these include the recognition that there are a diversity of creations, that everything is related, and that the universe is alive and must be approached in a personal manner. Starting with these principles as the foundation for thinking about developing an ethics for countering genocide opens the door for new, more radical approaches to prevention. These principles value difference rather than

sameness, recognize the relational aspect of all beings in the world, and do not privilege human modes of being over the experience of other beings. This is in contrast to many ethical responses developed in a Western metaphysical framework. Such ethics tend to value sameness over difference, focus on the rights and autonomy of individuals over the relationships in which the individual finds herself, and, sometimes overtly and sometimes implicitly, privilege human wellbeing at the expense of other beings.

In the following chapter I conclude my dissertation with a brief exploration of the three principles of Native thought that I have identified as alternatives to the three metaphysical principles of Western thought that underlie dehumanization and genocide. I argue that the principles of Native philosophies can more effectively form the basis for an ethics of difference and an ethics of relationality that were called for by philosophers Ann Cahill and Kelly Oliver in chapter five. In this respect, by drawing on the metaphysical principles of Native thought, I offer an alternate way of responding to genocide and dehumanization that is both decolonial and nonhumanist.

CHAPTER VIII
CONCLUSION: DEVELOPING A GROUNDWORK
FOR A NONHUMANIST ETHICS

Preventing genocide and dehumanization requires a radically different approach than the dominant methods that have been put forward in the Western philosophical and political traditions. Solutions like rehumanization and human rights may provide stop-gap measures for responding to these injustices, but ultimately they fall short of their intended goals. This is because human rights and rehumanization discourses take the problem of dehumanization and genocide to be the violation of human life and dignity when the real problem is the metaphysical foundations on which genocidal and dehumanizing logics rest.

In this dissertation I have argued that dehumanization is a necessary condition of genocide, serving three functions: 1) lowering moral inhibitions against violence; 2) motivating violence; and 3) legitimizing violence. In addition to this, dehumanization characterizes the practice of genocide. Dehumanization is an effective tool for carrying out these roles because of how it plays on a particular set of metaphysical principles that are integral to dominant, mainstream Western culture. These principles are 1) a commitment to a rendering of reality and the beings and states that constitute it such that those beings can be separated into natural kinds according to fixed, unchanging essences (essentialism), 2) adherence to a naturalized logic that either excludes the possibility of middle terms and interstitial beings or treats such terms and beings as monstrous, deviant, or polluting (purity), and 3) a commitment to a strict moral and ontological hierarchy in which humans outrank other beings, especially animals (human exceptionalism). Because

dehumanization is a necessary condition for genocide, the metaphysical principles that apply to the logic of dehumanization also apply to the logic of genocide.

Remarkably, current dehumanization and genocide studies literature recognizes essentialism and purity as themes in both phenomena, but not as metaphysical issues. Instead, they are explained away as effects of psychology or ideology.³⁹⁴ With only a few exceptions, these same scholars do not address the principle of human exceptionalism.³⁹⁵ This is striking given that dehumanization only makes sense when there is an active concept of the sanctity and purity of “the human” and if there is some Other nonhuman being to which the human can be compared. In almost all cases, this nonhuman refers to the animal.³⁹⁶ I argue that preventing dehumanization, and consequently genocide, requires a confrontation with and reassessment of these metaphysical principles followed by a reorientation toward a different set of principles. This means admitting that there are no essential natures, that purity is an impossible ideal, and that there is nothing so unique or special about human life that would warrant the exclusion of nonhuman animals and nature from the realm of moral obligation.

When genocide scholarship fails to confront the metaphysics of dehumanization and genocide, especially the principle of human exceptionalism, it not only limits the possibilities for developing new solutions, but it continues to perpetuate colonial definitions of the term “genocide” that do not fully recognize indigenous experiences of genocide. For many indigenous peoples, the mass murder, forced removal, and

³⁹⁴ Smith, *Less Than Human.*; Smith, “Paradoxes of Dehumanization.”; Haslam “Dehumanization.”; Kiernan, *Blood and Soil.*; Kuper, *Genocide.*

³⁹⁵ Costello, “Exploring the Roots.”; Smith, “Paradoxes of Dehumanization.”

³⁹⁶ In chapter two I noted that sometimes dehumanization involves comparisons of humans to machines or objects.

assimilation of the human members of their nations only capture one aspect of the genocide they suffer. The other component is the destruction of nonhuman animals, land, and water, and this is treated as a separate phenomenon—ecocide. For the majority of dehumanization and genocide scholars, the principles of Western metaphysics seem natural. This natural attitude obscures the way that using this metaphysics in the analysis of indigenous genocide and for developing a method of prevention is just another way in which indigenous cultures and contributions to the conversation continue to be erased and undervalued.

As we saw in chapter seven, thinking of ecocide as genocide requires an orientation towards a different set of metaphysical principles than those that ground dehumanizing and genocidal thought. While this is one way of challenging the definition of genocide from a decolonial and nonhumanist standpoint, there is more that indigenous philosophy can offer for discussions about understanding genocide and dehumanization and for developing new methods of preventing dehumanization and genocide. To conclude this dissertation, I will briefly outline how Native metaphysics can provide a foundation for an ethics of difference and relationality called for by feminist scholars like Ann Cahill and Kelly Oliver. In this conclusion, I draw on three principles of native metaphysics to show how this set of principles provides an alternative to the principles of essentialism, purity, and human exceptionalism for the grounding of ethics. These principles are 1) there is a diversity of creations (diversity), 2) everything is related (relationality), and 3) the universe is alive and must be approached in a personal manner (liveliness). I argue that if the metaphysics of dehumanization is the problem that needs resolving in order to prevent dehumanization and genocide, then Native American

metaphysical principles offer a better starting point for responding to those problems, allowing for the development of approaches that differ from rehumanization and human rights.

I. Native American Metaphysics vs. the Metaphysics of Dehumanization

Rehumanization and human rights are both normative responses to dehumanization and genocide that treat sameness as the condition for overcoming prejudice, discrimination, and dehumanization. The thinking goes that if we can prove that some other individual or group shares qualities with ourselves or our own group then we have demonstrated why that individual or group should be included within the realm of our moral responsibility. In both rehumanization and human rights, the condition of sameness is humanness. Even in the case of some animal welfare and rights scholarship, the more human-like characteristics a nonhuman animal has, the more likely that animal will be considered a subject that has rights. Recall, for example, the studies carried about by Costello and Hodson from chapter two. In these studies they found that showing participants videos that compared animals to humans reduced the participants' levels of discrimination and prejudice toward immigrants.³⁹⁷ Their findings show that highlighting similarities can have some effect on reducing prejudice; however, the comparison only worked in one direction—when that which was perceived as inferior on the moral and ontological hierarchy was likened to something higher up. This suggests that ethics based on sameness might only be effective when the common traits are deemed desirable and valuable. Other commonalities that are less flattering or desirable will be rejected or

³⁹⁷ Costello, “Exploring the Roots.”; Hodson, “(Over)Valuing ‘Humanness.’”

could exacerbate discrimination. This way of approaching the Other does not ultimately respect the Other for who or what they are, but only insofar as the Other is like oneself. This approach may teach people to tolerate differences, but not to respect, value, or seek out differences.

This is unlike many Native American approaches to difference, which are expressed in the principle that there is a diversity of creations. As Vine Deloria, Jr. explains, “To recognize or admit differences, even among the species of life, does not require then that human beings create forces to forge to gain a sense of unity or homogeneity. To exist in creation means that living is more than tolerance for other life forms—it is recognition that in differences there is strength of creation and that this strength is a deliberate desire of the creator.”³⁹⁸ According to Jicarilla Apache philosopher Viola F. Cordova, to say that there is a diversity of creations is to affirm the notion that “each group has a creation story that tells only of their unique creation. No one group claims to have the one, and absolute, story of creation that concerns all peoples everywhere.”³⁹⁹ Diversity is expected and even necessary because each being has a role to play as part of a greater whole. This sentiment is echoed by Leanne Simpson, who writes that “Nishnaabeg society in its fullest realization requires a diversity of excellence to continue to produce an abundance of supportive relationships.”⁴⁰⁰ According to Simpson, no one person can know everything. In order for society to flourish, different people with different skills and knowledge sets must work together cooperatively and in appreciation of their differences in order to live successfully.

³⁹⁸ Deloria, *God Is Red*, 88.

³⁹⁹ Cordova, *How It Is*, 105.

⁴⁰⁰ Simpson, *As We Have Always Done*, 155.

Though difference is privileged, it is not essentialized. Both Cordova and Simpson emphasize autonomy and self-actualization as core values of Native American philosophies and practices.⁴⁰¹ In some contexts, identities are not pre-given but acquired or earned. Seminole philosopher Anne Waters describes the case regarding gender in traditional Chipewyan societies: “Males must achieve the status of having maleness by attaining *Inkoze*. They do so by displaying behavior appropriate to having the knowledge of *Inkoze*...Prior to attaining *Inkoze*, men do not have gender.”⁴⁰² This is similar to Cordova’s claim that for some Native societies, humanness itself was an earned status.

Each new human being born into a group represents an unknown factor to that group...he must be taught what it is to be a *human* being in a very specific group...The newborn is at first merely *humanoid*—the group will give him an identity according to their definition of what it is to be human. The primary lesson that is taught is that the individual’s actions have consequences for himself, for others, for the world. The newcomer’s *humanness* is measured according to how he comes to recognize that his actions have consequences for others, for the world.⁴⁰³

In other words, a person’s identity is not fixed or determined ahead of time. Through *practice*, one becomes oneself. This stands in sharp contrast to the principle of essentialism discussed in chapter two, which relies on an Aristotelian notion of identity in which $A = A$. Such a concept of identity relies on sharp boundaries that separate one pre-determined kind from another. But this is not the case in Native notions of identity. As Scott Pratt explains in his article “The Metaphysics of Toleration in American Indian Philosophy,” “Unlike the Aristotelian notion of essences...such identities are not enclosures; rather they are intersections of the purposes and activities of the individual,

⁴⁰¹ Simpson, *As We Have Always Done*, 121.; Cordova, “Ethics,” 178.

⁴⁰² Waters, “Language Matters,” 109.

⁴⁰³ Her italics. Cordova, “Ethics,” 177-8.

the individual's kind, and the purposes and activities of those around her.”⁴⁰⁴ Individuals are not static or fixed. As self-determining beings they have agency over themselves and their being-in-the-world.

This notion of essences and the privileging of difference over sameness in Native American thought and practice makes sense in relation to the two other metaphysical principles mentioned above. As we can see from the quotes above, the value of difference emerges insofar as difference helps to connect and build relationships. This may seem counter-intuitive—that difference is the basis for relation—but the fact that there are differences means that people (human and nonhuman) can each bring something meaningful to the community. If everyone were the same then there would be less overall knowledge and skill to be shared among the group. So even though autonomy and self-determination are valued, “the autonomous person, in this environment, is one who is aware of the needs of others as well as being aware of what the individual can do for the good of the group.”⁴⁰⁵ This compounds with the Native notion of identity, so that “the changing character of a relational being means that a thing may be, in its transitions, both itself and not itself and, as such, neither itself nor not-itself.”⁴⁰⁶ The changeable nature of identity not only rejects essentialism, but the notion of purity as well. As beings in relation that adapt to their purposes in accordance with those relations, no being is totally discrete, autonomous, or individual in the way that Western philosophies understand these terms.

⁴⁰⁴ Pratt, “Metaphysics of Toleration,” 35.

⁴⁰⁵ Cordova, “Ethics,” 178.

⁴⁰⁶ Pratt, “Metaphysics of Toleration,” 35.

The principles of diversity and relationality are enriched by the principle that the universe is alive and must be approached in a personal manner. To say that the universe is alive is to say that it is populated by lively beings that are not passive recipients of human actions, but active participants in relations. As we saw in the previous chapter, these active beings include nonhuman animals, the land, water, and sacred objects. Just as humans can alter the world, the world can act on and alter us. In this respect, the universe is personal—that is, having personality and particularity. Beings are respected as individuals who have their own particular modes of behaving and participating in the community. According to Deloria, this means that “the personal nature of the universe demands that each and every entity in it seek and sustain personal relationships.”⁴⁰⁷ This also means there are no static or unchanging elements of the world. The world is always in motion and changing. Furthermore, because the universe is populated with animate, purposive beings whose differences matter in the formation of relationships, these beings are regarded as equals rather than superiors or inferiors. Everyone has something to contribute. In this respect, ontologically speaking, American Indian philosophies generally do not recognize hierarchies of difference. According to Cordova, “Instead of hierarchies [Native Americans’] see *differences* which exist among equal ‘beings.’ The equality is based on the notion, often unstated, that everything that is, is of one process.”⁴⁰⁸ In other words, Native American thought tends to ascribe to a relational ontology in which there are no discrete, atomistic individuals, but, rather, ongoing processes and practices that make and remake the world and its inhabitants. This stands in direct contrast to the principle of human exceptionalism, which ranks beings in a

⁴⁰⁷ Deloria, *Power and Place*, 23.

⁴⁰⁸ Cordova, *How It Is*, 177.

hierarchy based on how like or unlike humans they are. Native American origin stories clearly demonstrate the interplay of these principles, especially the notion that the universe is alive.

Consider the following two stories. The first is the Potawatomi story of “Skywoman Falling.” The second story, “How Son of Raven Captured the Day” belongs to the Nuu-cha-nuulth people of Vancouver Island. Like metaphysical principles, which ground the way we perceive reality, these two stories are origin stories—that is, they tell of the beginning of the world and the peoples who inhabit it. As such, they, too, are meant to be read as foundational for Native cultures and philosophies. I have selected these stories not only because they illustrate principles of Native American metaphysics, but also because they illustrate the values that should be part of an ethics of difference and relationality. As I will discuss below, these values include consent, reciprocity, recognition, and respect. In both stories, the goals of the people involved can only be achieved when these values are present. Finally, these stories also demonstrate cooperation and equality between humans and nonhuman animals.

a. Skywoman Falling

My retelling of the story is based on the version that Robin Wall Kimmerer of the Potawatomi recounts in *Braiding Sweetgrass*.

“She fell like a maple seed, pirouetting on an autumn breeze.⁴⁰⁹” From a hole in skyworld, Skywoman falls, light streaming behind her from the hole into a world of darkness. Below she can only see water and, from the water, many eyes glinting up at her in the new light. The eyes saw “a small object, a mere dust mote in the beam. As it grew closer, they could see that it was a woman.” Recognizing her for what she was, the geese agreed to break her fall, rising from the water to cushion her descent with their wings. Slowly, they gently brought her down.

However, they couldn’t hold Skywoman above the water forever, so they called a council to decide what to do. All the different animals arrived, and Turtle offered to let Skywoman sit upon his back while they hatched a plan. “The others understood that she needed land for her home and discussed how they might serve her need.” Having heard rumors of something called mud beneath the water, the deepest divers and strongest swimmers among them—sturgeon, loon, otter, and beaver—offered to search for it. After many attempts the swimmers either returned empty-handed or not at all, until only Muskrat was left. After a time, they had all but given up hope when the body of Muskrat surfaced. Though he had given his life, clutched in his paw was a handful of mud.

Turtle told Skywoman to spread it on his back, which she did. “Moved by the extraordinary gifts of the animals, she sang in thanksgiving and then began to dance, her feet caressing the earth. The land grew and grew as she danced her thanks.” Together, through their cooperation, perseverance, hard work, and gratitude, Skywoman and the animals created the earth.

⁴⁰⁹ Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass*, 3-5. All subsequent quotes in this section come from the same version of Kimmerer’s story.

Like a good guest, Skywoman had come with a gift of her own. As she toppled from Skyworld, she had grasped at the tree of life, taking branches, seeds, and fruits to the world below with her. Strewing them across the new ground, she tended them until they grew and flourished. “Wild grasses, flowers, trees, and medicines spread everywhere. And now that the animals, too, had plenty to eat, many came to live with her on Turtle Island.”

b. How Son of Raven Captured the Day

The second story is retold based on the version presented by E. Richard Atleo of the Nuu-chah-nulth in his book *Tsawalk*.

“They had no light in the beginning. Son of Raven suggested that they try to capture the day” from a Chief who lived across the waters and kept the light of day in a box.⁴¹⁰ The people who lived in darkness asked Son of Raven if he had a plan.

Son of Raven suggested that they send Son of Deer, known for his grace and beautiful leaping, to dance for the Chief and his people. Once the audience was so captivated by Son of Deer’s dancing, he could swing by the Day Box, dip in a piece of dry cedar bark, then with his strength and quickness, bound back across the water with it.

The people liked this plan, so they observed the proper protocols. Son of Deer dressed in his best costume, crossed the water, and performed. However, as soon as he lit the cedar on fire, the Chief was upon him and put the fire out. Realizing that Son of

⁴¹⁰ Atleo, *Tsawalk*, 6-10. All quotes in this section come from these pages.

Raven was trying to get the daylight, the Chief and his people decided to guard the box more closely.

“The people who lived in darkness regrouped.” They decided to call wise Wren for help. Wren suggested that the people turn into sockeye salmon, which were plentiful this time of year. “Women will be cleaning and preparing fish,” he told them. “Turn yourselves into sockeye and swim to the other shore. When you are captured you will have an opportunity to kidnap the Chief’s daughters.” Everyone transformed into sockeye except Son of Raven, who insisted on being a large king salmon. But when the people saw the giant king salmon, they suspected it was Son of Raven, and the plan was foiled.

The same happened when Wren suggested that everyone become Salmonberry shoots. Son of Raven insisted on being the biggest, and it again drew the suspicions of the Chief’s people. Finally, “rather than rejecting or chastising Son of Raven for his blunders, Wren devised a plan that would take advantage of Son of Raven’s great desire to do great deeds.” For this plan, Son of Raven must become a tiny leaf, float on the water of the Chief’s well, and get swallowed by one of his daughters.

Sure enough, when the Chief’s daughter drank from the well, Son of Raven slipped toward her mouth, and she swallowed him. Not long after, the daughter became pregnant. Eventually she bore a son, and it was a crybaby. It cried so much they everyone suspected he was Son of Raven. However, since they weren’t sure, they accepted him.

“As the baby grew, it continued to cry and whine a lot. When the baby was old enough, he loved to play in the canoes. All day he would play in these canoes. He also knew about the paddle of great power owned by his mother. With one stroke the paddle could propel any canoe a great distance. The boy began to whine for this paddle.” He

kept whining until the adults gave in and allowed him to play with it. Seeing that he wasn't doing anything unusual, they began to trust him. Then the boy asked to play with the Day Box in the canoe. When he was refused, he threw tantrums until his mother relented in exasperation. Once he had the Day Box, he did nothing unusual, and everyone relaxed.

In the meantime, Wren sent mice to cross the water and chew holes in all of the Chief's canoes except for the one belonging to the boy. The next morning, when the boy asked to play with the Day Box in the canoe again, he wasn't watched as closely. "Then all of a sudden, the boy gave a mighty thrust of his mother's paddle. Swiftly his canoe raced over the water toward the other shore." The Chief and his people tried to follow, but as they launched their canoes, they began to sink.

As the boy neared the other shore, he slowly uncovered the Day Box, and the people who lived in darkness saw that it was Son of Raven bringing them daylight for the first time. "Today, when the tide is out, you may notice Son of Raven is the first to enjoy any food that is found at water's edge. This is his right and privilege, recognized by all Nuu-chah-nulth."

II. Lessons from Skywoman and Son of Raven

Storytelling is a powerful tool for evoking sympathy, changing sentiments, passing on knowledge, and instilling values into individuals and communities. The same is true of stories in many indigenous cultures. Stories are one of the primary means by which knowledge is communicated and, as a result, are treated with respect and reverence. Some stories, for example, are only told at certain times of year or on certain

occasions. Yet, whatever the occasion, stories provide a means for the listener to work out for themselves the knowledge that has been presented and the value it provides. Stories, as vehicles of knowledge that are meant to be shared and that depend on and establish relationships in the telling, provide a foundation upon which to build a community. Through stories the community develops a shared knowledge-base. The above stories are one such example of knowledge being generated and shared.

For example, in “Human Rights, Rationality, Sentimentality,” Richard Rorty argues that telling the right kinds of stories is one of the key ways for establishing a culture and ethics that can effectively combat dehumanization, genocide, and other crimes against humanity. In his case, this culture is a human rights culture. As Rorty explains, “[I]t seems that most of the work of changing moral intuitions is being done by manipulating our feelings rather than increasing our knowledge... We pragmatists argue from the fact that the emergence of the human rights culture seems to owe nothing to increased moral knowledge, and everything to hearing sad and sentimental stories.”⁴¹¹ For Rorty, simply pointing out what humans have in common is insufficient for dealing with dehumanization, because doing so fails to account for the fact that certain humans have already been designated as nonhuman or subhuman. Thus, change from a culture where human rights are not valued to one where they are involves “sentimental education,” an education that “sufficiently acquaints people of different kinds with one another so that they are less tempted to think of those different from themselves as quasi-human. The goal of this manipulation of sentiment is to expand the reference of the terms

⁴¹¹ Ibid., 113-4.

‘our kind of people’ and ‘people like us.’”⁴¹² Through stories our feelings can be manipulated to increase our sympathy for others and adjust our notions of who is worthy of moral consideration. To achieve a human rights culture, the right stories need to be told.

Though I disagree with Rorty’s conclusion that human rights culture is the best method for countering dehumanization for the reasons provided in chapter five,⁴¹³ his notion of sentimental education addresses one way that dehumanization is practiced. In chapter three, I explain how Rowan Savage argues that dehumanization involves the composition of narratives, of manipulating language to invoke feelings and stories that make it natural to regard one group as essentially different from another.⁴¹⁴ Likewise, Costello and Hodson’s research shows that by telling certain stories they can manipulate sentiments to encourage greater sympathy. Priming, propaganda, cultural narratives, and metaphysical principles are all stories that we tell each other and ourselves as a means of organizing and making sense of the world. In this respect, telling different stories could lead to an adjustment of sentiment. The above stories are one example of storytelling that can provide the foundation for a new kind of knowledge and sentimentality that builds community across difference and species membership.

⁴¹² Ibid., 119.

⁴¹³ Rorty’s argument in favor of human rights hinges on his claim that there are no real differences between humans and other animals except the “historically contingent facts of the world” (111). Despite this, Rorty insists on a “human” rights culture rather than a rights culture more generally speaking. He also insists that even though human rights culture is culturally relative and largely derived from European Enlightenment principles, that it is still the morally superior culture. Such superiority is also dependent upon historically contingent facts, but his focus on it could lead to closing the door on other cultural notions of justice that could be as or more effective in combatting the problems Rorty raises—a point that Aakash Singh Rathore raises in “Wronging Rights.”

⁴¹⁴ Savage, “Modern Genocidal Dehumanization.”

For the Native peoples to whom the above origin stories (and many others) belong, these stories are not just folklore. As Haudensaunee and Anishnaabe philosopher Vanessa Watts explains, “[T]hese two events took place. They were not imagined or fantasized. This is not lore, myth or legend. These histories are no longer versions of ‘and the moral of the story is...’. This is what happened.”⁴¹⁵ Accepting these as genuine origin stories presents a way of viewing the world that entails a different orientation that makes different demands and involves having a different set of behaviors than the origin stories of the West. In these stories diversity, relationships, and the agency of nonhuman beings all feature prominently and are necessary for the successful completion of the goals within the stories.

The knowledge and sentiment developed in these stories runs counter to the stories of human exceptionalism in many Western cultures. As we saw in earlier chapters, dehumanization and the metaphysics of genocide depend on the principle of human exceptionalism, the notion that the ontological status of humans corresponds to their moral status. As the highest beings on the hierarchy, they deserve moral consideration first and in the greatest amount. According to many Native American traditions, humans are not different in kind from other animals. In fact, as the last beings to arrive on earth, humans are like the younger siblings of the animals, and, thus, have to learn from them. As Kimmerer explains, “human people are often referred to as ‘the younger brothers of Creation.’ We say that humans have the least to experience with how to live and thus the most to learn—we must look to our teachers among the other species for guidance.”⁴¹⁶

⁴¹⁵ Watts, “Indigenous Place-Thought,” 21.

⁴¹⁶ Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass*, 9.

In both of the above stories nonhuman animals have important roles to play, and their actions give meaning and life to others. In “Son of Raven” the different animals band together to bring daylight to the world. In “Skywoman Falling,” Skywoman would surely not have survived had the animals not seen the danger she was in and offered their help. Not only did they bring her safely down, many of them gave their lives to help her live. From a Western utilitarian perspective, for example, this would be nonsensical. Letting Skywoman drown would have certainly saved more lives in the short term, and her arrival definitely brought suffering, especially for the animals who died to help her. Or, if the animals had ignored the plight of this stranger who showed up in their midst, acting selfishly, they also could have continued on with their lives as they were. However, this story is not based on selfishness, or putting oneself and one’s own group first, but about recognition, consent, respect, and reciprocity. The emphasis on these values and the way that they tap into emotion, sentiment, and experiential knowledge is what makes these two stories so powerful.

As these stories demonstrate, cooperative and mutually beneficial relationships like the ones depicted demand that beings act toward one another in certain ways, particularly with recognition, respect, consent, and reciprocity. Atleo and Anishnaabe scholar Leanne Simpson argue that recognition is central to Native approaches to ethics, politics, and community building. Recognition involves seeing another for who they are and accepting that person as they are with all of their strengths and flaws. It also means recognizing them as in relation to oneself and in relation to the greater community. This goes for nonhuman animals as well as other human beings.⁴¹⁷ As Simpson explains,

⁴¹⁷ Atleo, *Principles of Tsawalk*, 80-82.

recognition or *aaniin* “is akin to working to see the energy they [others] put into the universe through their interactions with the land, themselves, their family, and their community. Aaniin isn’t an observation but a continual process of unfolding; it is a commitment to the kind of relationship where I have dedicated myself to seeing the unique value in the other life as a *practice*.”⁴¹⁸ In other words, recognition is not just about seeing an individual separated from her relations, but the network of relations in which that person is embedded. Furthermore, the act of recognition is a practice that establishes and reaffirms relations. It is not a passive, objective observation, but an activity that helps to create the desired reality.

Atleo notes that recognition involves “mutual respect and understanding.”⁴¹⁹ Respect is not a synonym for idolization or worship, but a form of mutual recognition of individual identities and the ability of those individuals to seek self-determination and fulfillment. As Vine Deloria, Jr. of the Lakota explains, “The willingness of entities to allow others to fulfill themselves, and the refusal of any entity to intrude thoughtlessly on another, must be the operative principle of this universe.”⁴²⁰ To have respect for another means establishing relationships in which one person does not dominate the other. By centering respect for self-fulfillment, relationships, even across species or with the land, do away with obvious or sedimented hierarchies because no one member of the relationship can have full access to the purpose or intentions of the other. One must accept the other for whom or what that other is and go along with it. According to

⁴¹⁸ Her italics. Simpson, *As We Have Always Done*, 160-1.

⁴¹⁹ Atleo, *Principles of Tsawalk*, 80.

⁴²⁰ Deloria, *Spirit and Reason*, 50-1.

Deloria, respect entails two attitudes: “One attitude is the acceptance of self-discipline by humans and their communities to act responsibly toward other forms of life. The other attitude is to seek to establish communications and covenants with other forms of life on a mutually agreeable basis.”⁴²¹

Mutual agreement requires consent from all parties involved in the relationship. In a Western context, consent involves agreement free of coercion, arbitrary rules, and tyranny. This is similar to the way it appears in the Native context, but it is explicitly tied to recognition and respect. For the Nuu-chah-nulth, this is encapsulated in the concept *q^waasasa is*, which means “that’s just the way she is!”⁴²² *Q^waasasa is* connects to the notion of consent insofar as it “expresses the belief that each individual is unique and that this uniqueness requires free expression.”⁴²³ It follows from recognizing the free expression of another individual as a part of consent that one must accept another’s differences, disagreements, and purposes, even if those purposes are contrary to one’s own. Respect for these differences coupled with consent leads to greater freedom for everyone, building stronger, more mutually beneficial relationships because such relationships do not violate the freedom of others to be.⁴²⁴ When consent is privileged it leads to less interference with others, more respect for self-determination, and an abundance of diversity.⁴²⁵

⁴²¹ Ibid., 51.

⁴²² Atleo, *Principles of Tsawalk*, 94.

⁴²³ Ibid., 95.

⁴²⁴ Ibid., 97.

⁴²⁵ Simpson, *As We Have Always Done*, 140.

Another important aspect to the stories above is the act of reciprocity. Reciprocity involves responding in kind to others—that is, engaging in mutual giving. Gift giving, according to Kimmerer, is a form of mutual flourishing. In addition to this, gifting helps to restore and maintain equilibrium in the world.⁴²⁶ Though gifts come without a price tag, without necessarily being earned or deserved, they establish a kind of relationship, a relationship in which to show gratitude is to give back in some way. As Kimmerer explains, “The essence of the gift is that it creates a set of relationships. The currency of the gift economy is, at its root, reciprocity.”⁴²⁷ In other words, reciprocal relationships do not involve direct one-to-one exchanges; rather, the recognition of the value of the gift is demonstrated through re-gifting, through reciprocity. Norton-Smith elaborates on this point: “[T]o accept a gift is to receive a symbol of respect from another, and the gift obligates the recipient to show respect in return, to reciprocate.”⁴²⁸ In this way, the relationship remains strong and ongoing.

Each of these values applies to humans and nonhumans alike. Just because a being cannot give verbal consent in a language spoken by humans does not mean that it is incapable of giving consent. How it gives consent is different, and the form that consent takes must be learned through a process of recognition and respect for the other’s mode of expressing itself. For many indigenous people, the practice of hunting epitomizes the confluences of these values. As Simpson explains, “We recognize animals’ spirits before we engage in hunting them. Reciprocal recognition within our lives as Nishnaabeg people

⁴²⁶ Norton-Smith, *Dance of Person*, 114.

⁴²⁷ Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass*, 28.

⁴²⁸ Norton-Smith, *Dance of Person*, 113.

is ubiquitous, embedded, inherent. Consent is also embedded in this recognition. When I make an offering and reach out to the spirit of Waawaashkesh before I begin hunting, I am asking for that being's consent or permission to harvest it. If a physical deer appears, I have their consent. If no animal presents itself to me, I do not."⁴²⁹

Engaging without consent, respect, recognition, and reciprocity results in the dissolution of relationships. Simpson relates one such story in which the deer, moose, and caribou disappeared from the lands. Not knowing what had happened to members of the Hoof Clan, people became worried, anxious, hungry, and angry. Eventually, they decided to send out runners to look for the hoofed ones. Only one person returned with news, and it wasn't good. The single deer this runner encountered had told him that she and her relatives had left the people's territory because they were no longer being respected. This prompted some self-reflection on the part of the Nishnaabeg, who realized they had been wasting meat, not sharing the meat with all of the community members, killing deer when they didn't need them, and not treating the deer bodies with proper reverence. The Nishnaabeg decided to send a delegation to the Hoof Clan to repair the relationship. After long negotiations, they set up boundaries and guidelines for properly maintaining the relationship with the promise that if a member of the Hoof Clan should give its life as food to one of the Nishnaabeg, then the Nishnaabeg would perform proper ceremonies to honor that creature's life and gift.⁴³⁰ Key to this story is the element of ceremony and practice. The repetition of ceremony with certain acts helps to remind people of the agreements they have made with others. Ceremony, when practiced, (re)creates and

⁴²⁹ Simpson, *As We Have*, 182.

⁴³⁰ *Ibid.*, 58-61.

strengthens relationships, reminding those involved of the importance of respect, reciprocity, consent and recognition.

These four values are also central to the origin stories relayed above, and are clearly qualities and values important to both humans and nonhumans. Though the animals in “Skywoman Falling” were different from Skywoman, they recognized her personhood and acted accordingly. And they did so of their own volition and with the consent of one another. The diversity of the different beings was also integral to the success of their endeavors. If the geese had not been able to fly, then Skywoman might have fallen to her death. If Turtle had not had a broad, sturdy shell then the geese might have been injured trying to keep Skywoman afloat. The sturgeon, beaver, muskrat, loon, and other diving animals each had skills they employed to do what Skywoman, Turtle, and the geese could not. Put into relation with one another in service of a communal goal, their diversity became an asset rather than a cause for strife and conflict. Though Skywoman came from a different world, she did not treat the other creatures with contempt; she did not assume that she was better than them. Instead, she approached these other beings with humbleness, respect, and gratitude, not telling them what to do but accepting their suggestions for how to resolve her predicament. Recognizing their sacrifices, she reciprocates their gifts with gifts of her own. In this way, Skywoman’s coming to be in the world is literally grounded on her relationships with the other animals she encounters.

Diversity and the recognition of difference and *q^waasasa is* are also central aspects of “How Son of Raven Captures the Day.” In this story the various animals each have their own skills and talents and are called on to utilize those talents for the good of

the group. Son of Deer's exceptional grace and elegance, Wren's wisdom, the mice's discretion, and Raven's craftiness all have a part to play. And while everyone is willing to work together, they all have different personalities, which, especially in Son of Raven's case, sometimes spoil their endeavors. But instead of getting angry and trying to change Son of Raven, Wren recognizes Son of Raven for who he is and instead comes up with a plan that will take advantage of Son of Raven's behavior and personality. Thus, through recognition, consent, and respect, the people who live in darkness establish relationships of trust and reciprocal recognition that allow them to successfully complete their mission.

Dehumanization and genocide stand in direct contrast to these values. As tools for putting people into their ontological and moral place and for eradicating them when they refuse to accept that place, these phenomena become acts of domination that fail to recognize, respect, or gain consent from others. As we saw in chapter four, the logic of domination often involves backgrounding—refusing to acknowledge the contributions of the Other—which is the opposite of a reciprocal relationship. Many Indigenous scholars have pointed out that the Western model of being in the world (i.e. liberalism and capitalism) discourages the types of relationships described above even as it idealizes them. Instead, the Western model involves various practices that discourage individuals from recognizing and respecting others, seeking consent, and reciprocating. The more these practices continue, the more sedimented particular worldviews become. Thus, developing new stories and practices based on a set of metaphysical principles and values that respect diversity and relationality while recognizing that the universe is alive are

necessary for countering the logical conclusions of the Western metaphysical principles of essentialism, purity, and human exceptionalism.

III. Practices for a World without Dehumanization and Genocide

Combating dehumanization and genocide requires the establishment of respectful, reciprocal relationships based on recognition and consent between all beings, not just humans. This is easier to do when starting with a metaphysical framework in which diversity, relationships, and the liveliness of the universe are fundamental. However, abstract discourse is insufficient for bringing about change; rather, it is necessary to develop practices that (re)affirm and (re)establish the desired relationships. Telling stories like those above is one way of seeding a culture that respects and values diversity, relatedness, and nonhuman agency. But there are other practices that can begin to instill a nonhumanist culture. As discussed in chapter three, according to Norton-Smith, performances have ontological consequences. They transform and empower the participants and the symbolism of their acts. They function as “the principle vehicle of meaning and the way in which the world is made.”⁴³¹ In other words, practice and performance are both methods of creating a world and coming to know the world.

For Westerners, learning how to engage in practices that build respectful, reciprocal relationships based on recognition and consent will take time and effort given the dominant political and economic systems and institutions in place in the world today, but many Native scholars are cautiously optimistic about the prospects for bringing Westerners on-board to their way of doing things. As Atleo points out, when Europeans

⁴³¹ Norton-Smith, *Dance of Person*, 96.

and Aboriginal nations encountered one another for the first time, they were unprepared for the meeting. They lacked the experience and knowledge to properly interact with one another. But now, after five hundred years of coexistence, Atleo believes the time is right for that to change. For him, the recognition of Indigenous people's rights by the UN is one step in the right direction.⁴³²

Daniel Wildcat of the Yuchi and Muscogee tribes and Kimmerer share similar sentiments. For Wildcat, the cooperation of Indigenous peoples and Westerners is an urgent imperative in order to combat global climate change. From Wildcat's perspective, Indigenous people have much they can teach Westerners about building healthy relationships between humans and the other beings on the planet. This begins with challenging certain myths central to Western culture: "Primary among the myths to which modern humankind faithfully adheres is the notion of their moral and intellectual superiority among all other living beings on the planet...Humankind now needs a good dose of indigenous realism that demonstrates the miseducative character of the dualisms, dichotomies, and categorizations that dominate the thinking and activities of growing numbers of humans on the planet today."⁴³³ Wildcat's injunction calls for indigenous peoples to share their knowledge with the rest of humankind by modeling practices for building respectful, reciprocal relationships. Kimmerer also recognizes that indigenous resurgence might not succeed without getting settler society on-board, but she wonders how and if this compromises the very notion of indigeneity: "Immigrants cannot by definition be indigenous. *Indigenous* is a birth right word. No amount of time or caring

⁴³² Atleo, *Principles of Tsawalk*, 90.

⁴³³ Wildcat, *Red Alert!*, 68.

changes history or substitutes for soul-deep fusion with the land.”⁴³⁴ Yet, she is reminded of the fact that in the Potawatomi people’s origin story Skywoman herself was an immigrant, and through reciprocal relations of respect and consent with the animals she met in the world below, both she and they were able to work together for mutual flourishing. Kimmerer compares immigration to two models of plant life—invasive species like kudzu and naturalized plants like plantains (also known as White Man’s Footstep for the way that it followed settlers from Europe across North America). Kudzu colonizes the land while plantains integrate with the other beings they encounter. Reflecting on these behaviors, Kimmerer speculates that “[m]aybe the task assigned to Second Man [settler colonists] is to unlearn the model of kudzu and follow the teachings of White Man’s Footstep, to strive to become naturalized to a place, to throw off the mindset of the immigrant.”⁴³⁵

For each of these authors, the issue of teaching and integrating Westerners into indigenous practices is motivated by a concern for the state the world is in as a result of European domination. Colonization, ecocide, and genocide are practices based in a fundamental disrespect and disregard for the purposiveness, liveliness, and diversity that characterizes other human and nonhuman beings in the world. Teaching Westerners to become “naturalized” in a world based on indigenous metaphysics requires modeling and engaging in practices that establish the desired relationships. Practices that emphasize essentialism, purity, and human exceptionalism must be replaced with new practices that celebrate diversity, relationality, and the liveliness of the universe. These might, for example, take form through indigenous pedagogical methods.

⁴³⁴ Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass*, 212-3.

⁴³⁵ *Ibid.*, 214.

In “Nature-Culture Constructs,” Ojibwe scholar Megan Bang and non-Native scholar Ananda Marin develop a set of specific pedagogical practices for children designed to expand views of nonhuman agency. These include interactive nature walks and land-based learning activities that invite children and their families to engage in education outside of the classroom setting. While their immediate goals in the essay are to provide educational support for Native and non-dominant communities, their methods could be leveraged for non-Native students as well. This type of education is important because it involves activities outside of classroom learning, which is often abstract and does not always have clear connections to the world. Through nature walks and other interactive land-based learning, students get practice observing and learning from the world and other-than-human beings around them.

Similarly, in their book *Stop Talking*, Alut educator Ilarion Mercurieff and non-Native scholar Libby Roderick collaborated with Alaska Native elders to develop a model for Native-designed strategies for applying indigenous pedagogies in Western educational institutions. Some of these strategies included incorporating Native values like respect for ancestors, self-sufficiency, and respect for nonhuman nature into the classroom or prompting students to attend to their relationships with place and the knowledge that emerges from that relationship. Once again, these authors engaged in this project as a way to meet the needs of their indigenous students, but they could also benefit non-Native students by establishing practices of engaging with the world based on the recognition of and respect for nonhuman beings.

Native peoples are also involved in various movements and causes that matter to non-Native peoples, too. According to Michelle Jacob of the Yakama Nation, one pillar

of indigenous environmentalism is “embracing allies who understand the shared responsibility of protecting Mother Earth.”⁴³⁶ Building on shared values between groups can foster the integration of differences while providing the motivation to develop methods of working cooperatively to achieve a common goal that will benefit the greater community. Climate change and environmental protection is the kind of effort that requires a diversity of ideas, skills, backgrounds, and contributions—not unlike the collaborative efforts of the animals in the story of Skywoman.

Though Native scholars and educators have much to offer Westerners, it is not finally their responsibility to teach Western-educated peoples to critique and re-evaluate their own metaphysics. For scholars like Atleo, Wildcat, Kimmerer, and Jacob, who are making an effort to bridge the space between cultures, it is imperative that those of us who accept this gift do our part to reciprocate. As a non-indigenous person who has learned and benefited from the stories and lessons provided by Native American and First Nations scholars, I endeavor to and encourage others to bring these lessons to bear in their own lives and work. For academics, this means bringing the history and philosophy of Native Americans into the classroom and featuring it when possible. It also means using these lessons to critique and reflect on the methodological and philosophical practices in which we have been trained so that we can identify and resist methodologies that commodify, reify, and exclude marginalized philosophies and epistemological practices. Furthermore, given the history of colonialism and genocide in the U.S., for settlers who have and will continue to benefit from this state of affairs, reciprocity entails finding ways to unsettle the colonial state and dismantle colonialism beyond simply acknowledging its history. To this end, and in acknowledgement of the traditional lands

⁴³⁶ Jacob, *Indian Pilgrims*, 43.

of the Kalapuya on which I currently reside, I have created a brief guide for educators to use for incorporating Native American thought into their courses and work. This “handout” can be found in the appendix.

These are just a few examples of methods for incorporating Indigenous metaphysics into Western life. They alone are insufficient for putting an end to dehumanization and genocide, but they provide a premise for thinking about and developing new models of prevention that might not otherwise become apparent for those people entrenched in Western metaphysics. As we have seen, even scholars concerned with preventing dehumanization often take for granted human exceptionalism.

IV. Conclusion

Adopting an Indigenous metaphysical framework is not a panacea for resolving all issues of violence and disrespect. Simpson’s story about the disappearance of the Hoof Clan shows that even indigenous peoples make mistakes, overstep themselves, and must resist the allure of selfishness. However, accepting that the world is composed of interacting, agential, and purposive relationships leads to the notion that one’s actions do not happen without consequences.

Like Western metaphysics, Native metaphysics are also making a claim about reality, one that states that diversity, relationality, and the liveliness of the universe are preeminent. Such principles call for a different orientation toward the world and a different way of approaching ethics that does not limit the moral realm to humans alone. In a world where everything is alive and is in a necessary relationship with everything else, then every being is both giver and receiver of moral consideration and

responsibility. As Deloria explains, “In the moral universe all activities, events, and entities are related, and consequently it does not matter what kind of existence an entity enjoys, for the responsibility is always there for it to participate in the continuing creation of reality.”⁴³⁷

Dehumanization is an effective tool for inciting and legitimizing genocide because it relies on the premise that the only beings that really matter are beings that meet the criteria for being human (a set of criteria that shifts based on who is in power). When the principles that support this logic are not questioned or revised, the result is that ethical solutions to these views are devised within the same framework that perpetuates the logic of domination. In *Animal Lessons*, Kelly Oliver calls for an explosion of the concepts “human” and “animal” as a means of capturing the diversity of the beings slotted into these categories. Rejecting the homogeneity of these terms will help demonstrate how the human/animal dualism has been used to justify oppression and violence by sharply delineating the two kinds from one another while making way for a new form of ethics—an ethics based on difference and relationality. Such an ethics would recognize and affirm the array of beings in the world while acknowledging the way in which humans and other animals co-constitute one another through their relationships. The dream of this ethics has the potential to be fulfilled by Native philosophies and practices, which never created a human/animal dualism in the first place.

⁴³⁷ Deloria, *Spirit and Reason*, 42.

APPENDIX

In the preceding pages, I have argued that genocide prevention needs to involve a thorough re-evaluation of and change to the metaphysics that rules Western life. Such changes do not come about instantaneously, but through long-term cultural shifts that occur, in part, through education. For educators who live in a settler colonial nation-state or a nation-state formed in part by settler-colonialism, we can help Indigenous peoples resist the destruction of their cultures while also educating all students in a metaphysics that will be less likely to lead to dehumanization and genocide. In what follows I present several suggestions for how to incorporate nonhumanist and Indigenous philosophy, history, and pedagogical practices into the classroom and into other academic spaces. While these acts alone are insufficient for preventing violence on the scale of genocide or for putting an end to settler colonialism, they can be a way for educators to engage in recognition, respect, and reciprocity toward Native peoples.

I. How to Do a Land Acknowledgment

A land acknowledgement is typically a brief statement before a presentation, class, or workshop that calls attention to the history of the territory on which the presentation is about to occur and of the Indigenous people who live or lived there.⁴³⁸ In some cases a land acknowledgement may be brief. In others, it is more appropriate to do a longer acknowledgement. When preparing a land acknowledgement, consider the following:

⁴³⁸ I first heard a land acknowledgement during a presentation by Thomas Norton-Smith during the summer of 2013 at University of Oregon during the Summer Institute for American Philosophy. Since then I have heard many land acknowledgements, most recently at the 2019 Feminist Decolonial Politics Workshop, where Michelle Stanley of the Coharie Tribe provided guidance on giving respectful, meaningful acknowledgements. Other information for how to do a proper land acknowledgement can be found at websites like this one: <https://native-land.ca/territory-acknowledgement/>.

1. Why are you doing this acknowledgement?
2. Who are the Indigenous people who lived on this land? Where are they now?
3. What is the history of these people/this territory, and what are the impacts of colonialism on them?
4. How does this acknowledgement relate to the work you are doing/about to do?
5. What is your relationship to the land?
6. How else do you intend to disrupt settler colonialism? How can you become a better ally to Indigenous people?

II. Designing a Decolonial Campus Tour

One of the rituals of selecting a college is the campus tour. These tours often involve a current student guiding prospective students and their families around the campus, praising all of the wonderful amenities and opportunities students will have at that school. Such tours do not tell students about who or what may have been removed, excluded, or exploited in order for that school to be where it stands, functioning as it does. A decolonial campus tour is an activity you can design for your classes to give them insight into the often untold histories of their college and university campuses.

To design a tour, research the land that you are on. On whose Indigenous homeland is the campus placed? Prioritize Tribal sources in examining the history of the land. Using the school's archives and historical data or relevant internet searches, find out about who the buildings on campus are named, who donated money to the college, and what parties participated in the construction of the campus. What is the significance of any public art or monuments on the campus grounds? In addition to learning about the human history of the university, also consider the ecological and environmental history. What native species used to live here? Where are the oldest trees on campus? How did the university acquire the land on which it now stands? A decolonial tour can be an

interactive experience. For example, involve students in the task of doing the research and have them present to one another along the tour.

III. How to Bring Indigenous Philosophies into Your Syllabus

For philosophy instructors who wish to incorporate Native American philosophies into their syllabi, here are is a brief bibliographical list by topic of books and articles that pertain to the major areas of philosophical thought. These essays are accessible for lower and upper level courses.

General Philosophy

McPherson, Dennis H. and J. Douglas Rabb. *Indian from the Inside: Native American Philosophy and Cultural Renewal*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2011.

Waters, Anne, ed. *American Indian Thought: Philosophical Essays*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2004.

Ethics

Atleo, E. Richard. *Principles of Tsawalk: An Indigenous Approach to Global Crisis*. Vancouver, CA: UBC Press, 2011.

Cordova, Viola F. "Ethics: The We and the I." In *American Indian Thought: Philosophical Essays*. Ed. Anne Waters. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2004.

Epistemology

Deloria, Jr., Vine. *Spirit and Reason: The Vine Deloria, Jr. Reader*. Golden, CO: Fulcrum Publishing, 1999.

Fixico, Donald L. *The American Indian Mind in a Linear World: American Indian Studies and Traditional Knowledge*. New York: Routledge, 2003.

Metaphysics

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IV. Recognizing Nonhuman Difference and Agency

Dehumanization is made possible in part when other-than-human animals are treated as a monolithic category that homogenizes and essentializes both humans and other animals. Shifting the way we speak about humans and animals is one small adjustment that can be made. For example, speak about specific types of animal beings when possible such as trout, iguanas, and honey bees rather than making general statements about nonhuman beings. If using the term “animal” is unavoidable, modify it with terms like “nonhuman” or “other-than-human,” which helps to signal that humans are animals, too.

Philosophical issues related to nonhuman animals, plants, and other beings can also be incorporated into syllabi beyond the usual animal rights/welfare debates. Articles on how nonhuman beings think and interact with the world as well as how they relate to human animals can be incorporated into a variety of courses including ethics, feminist philosophy, global justice, environmental ethics, bioethics, social and political philosophy, and general survey courses. A brief bibliography of texts on these topics includes:

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V. Land-Based Pedagogy

One aspect of developing a practice that can reduce dehumanization and counters the logic of dehumanization is developing pedagogical methods that locate human beings within a context and network work of relations. In *Stop Talking: Indigenous Ways of Teaching and Learning and Difficult Dialogues in Higher Education*, Ilarion Mercurieff and Libby Roderick advocate place-based or land-based education that emphasizes the ties we have to the world around us and the other beings that populate it. Land-based pedagogy involves asking to students to recognize and reflect on their relation to the land on which they are learning. This means asking students to learn some of the history of the place as well as consider the relationships between both human and nonhuman beings that make life sustainable there. Such nonhuman beings might also include technological beings like cellphones, vehicles, and buildings. When considering these relationships, students could be asked to reflect on what it means to be in a healthy relationship and what it would require to bring harmony and balance to that relationship.

Another way to practice land-based pedagogy would be to incorporate outdoor activities into the curriculum that would encourage students to observe and learn from the land itself. One such activity might include asking students to walk around campus and note how the space is constructed to encourage or discourage certain behaviors or how the space might be designed to keep in or out certain types of people or beings. Another

activity might involve asking students to observe animals, weather, or plants over the course of several weeks and reflect on what they have learned and how it affects their understanding of the relationship with and responsibilities toward other-than-human beings.

Additional sources for learning about land-based or place-based pedagogy include:

- Bang, Megan and Ananda Marin. "Nature-culture Constructs in Science Learning: Human/nonhuman Agency and Intentionality." *Journal of Research in Science Teaching*. 52, no. 4 (April 2015).
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- Sun, Yi, Roger C.K. Chan, and Huiwei Chen. "Learning with Geographical Sensitivity: Place-Based Education and Its Praxis." In *The Professional Geographer*. 68, 4 (2016): 574-583.

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