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Humanism: A Defense

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ABSTRACT: This paper develops an approach to humanist social critique that combines insights from Marx and Fanon. I argue that the concept of the human operative in humanist social critique should be understood both as the normative background against which questions of human flourishing and dehumanization can come into view, and as the evolving demand for universal human emancipation. Far from being abstract, essentialist, or ahistorical, Marx and Fanon show that humanist social critique operates through a dialectic between particular, socially and historically situated forms of oppression and struggle, and the universal species-context of the human life-form in which particular forms of suffering and injustice can come into view as instances of dehumanization. In developing this approach to humanist social critique, I defend humanism against three prominent objections: the charge of speciesism, the charge of essentialism, and the recent charge from Kate Manne who argues that humanism underdescribes relations of social antagonism and that recognition of humanity is compatible with inhumane treatment. In addition to considering the necessary relation between the particular and the universal, I also consider the relation between the psychological and social/political, arguing against the recent approach to the problem of dehumanization in the work of David Livingstone Smith.

I find myself suddenly in the world and I recognize that I have one right alone: that of demanding human behavior from the other.
—*Frantz Fanon,* Black Skins, White Masks

1.

Describing the role of social criticism in its essential connection to inciting praxis, Marx wrote in 1844 that "we must make the actual oppression even more oppressive by making [the people] conscious of it, and the insult even more insulting by publicizing it . . . So as to give them courage, we must teach the people to be shocked by themselves."[1] Fueled by indignation, the task of critique for Marx is the denunciation of all circumstances in which human beings are "humiliated, enslaved, abandoned, and despised." But what does criticism (*die Kritik*) have at its disposal to publicize and make visible oppressive circumstances *as* oppressive? What theoretical tools and frameworks are available to social critics to render suffering and injustice widely visible so that people are sufficiently shocked and moved to action? Marx's answer was that what appeared to be particular or isolated forms of suffering and injustice had to be rendered visible as *universal human suffering and injustice*: oppression can become public and socially visible only insofar as it is visible as the oppression of human beings *qua* human.

Marx's answer surely earns him a place in the contested, non-unified tradition of Enlightenment humanism,[2] but from the start, the prospects of such an answer were immediately in doubt. Philosophically, it is not evident precisely what *concept* of the human being is at work here: aiming to be at once natural and historical, descriptive and normative, many question whether or not Marx was ultimately able to present a plausible theory of humanism as the framework for his critique of capitalism, contending that Marx himself ultimately abandoned this approach. On the side of praxis, universal humanity as an agent of social and political change had to be represented by a *particular class*, leading to the controversial politics of the proletariat. My aim in this paper is to investigate the plausibility of an approach to humanism as a necessary condition for the publicity and visibility of social suffering and injustice. If the latter can fully appear only in a human form, then the characteristic shape of oppression is *dehumanization*, and a fundamental task of criticism is the critique of dehumanizing conditions, circumstances, and acts. In what follows, I try to make sense of the claim that oppression must appear in a human form and defend this idea against a number of prominent objections.

1. Marx 2000, 74.
2. The refrain of *Towards a Critique of Hegel's* Philosophy of Right is: "Man is highest being for man." In presenting his humanist framework for critique, Marx also employs a number of Kantian ideas, including Copernicanism and the categorical imperative. The reference to "courage" in the passage quoted above also recalls Kant's elaboration of the motto of the Enlightenment demanding that we must have the courage to use our own understanding.

In more recent discussions, humanism has been criticized on at least three fronts: first, for being "speciesist," in placing undue emphasis and priority on membership in the human species as a marker of moral significance; second, for relying on an essentialist understanding of human beings that conflicts with both the scientific consensus against essentialism, and the undeniable historical and cultural malleability of human societies; and third, for relying on a notion of "common humanity" that underdetermines the social relationships and antagonisms between human beings, and further, that can be compatible with certain forms of dehumanizing treatment.[3] This third charge against humanism has recently been defended by Kate Manne as part of her attempt to present a philosophical account of misogyny as it operates within patriarchal ideology. In developing my account of humanist social critique, I will draw broadly from the philosophies of Marx and Fanon, and also defend humanism against these three prominent criticisms. My approach will also point to a number of shortcomings in contemporary approaches to dehumanization, represented by the work of David Livingstone Smith, which focus narrowly on the psychology of dehumanizers who conceive of certain groups as "subhuman." The critical and constructive work of the paper aims to show that the concept of the human operative in humanist social critique should be understood both as the normative background against which questions of human flourishing and dehumanization can come into view, and as the evolving demand for universal human emancipation. In addition to standing up against prominent criticisms, this approach to humanism also provides a framework for understanding social struggles against dehumanization, a framework that is absent in both Manne and Smith.

3. There are many other challenges against humanism, along with different ways of naming these challenges. Kronfeldner discusses three challenges faced by the concept of human nature: the dehumanization challenge, the Darwinian challenge, and the developmentalist challenge (2018). It is also worth mentioning three other prominent critiques of humanist discourse (some of these concerns could be grouped within the three named by Kronfeldner). First, the anticolonial critique, which targets the racist, pseudo-humanism of the European Enlightenment. See for example, Césaire 2000; Fanon 2004, 2008; and Scott and Wynter 2000. A key feature of this tradition is the goal of creating a true and new humanism by way of a critique of racist and colonial forms of dehumanization, rather than abandoning the normative resources of humanism altogether. I discuss Fanon's humanist thinking in section 4 below. Second, Foucault's historicist, anti-essentialist account famously argues that "man" is a recent invention. See Foucault 1970. Finally, a third critique of humanist thinking comes from posthumanist thought. As I understand it, posthumanist critiques (which are quite varied and difficult to unite into a coherent doctrine) are centered around a number of somewhat well-founded concerns, including problematic construals of the human/animal divide; speciesist approaches in which the human species is at the top of a hierarchy of nature; the role of technology in human embodiment, expression, and action; an overemphasis on rationalism in our understanding of the human being; anthropocentrism; false or pernicious universalisms concerning human nature; and the historical and socially constructed character of our concepts of "the human." While many of these concerns are important, the target of posthumanism is somewhat sweeping and ill-defined, often relying on overgeneralizations or a misunderstanding of their supposed targets. Marx's humanism is surely presented with many if not all of these concerns in mind. On posthumanism, see Wolfe 2010.

Section 2 begins with some general remarks and provides responses to both the speciesism and essentialism charges. Section 3 takes up Manne's critique of humanism and challenges her "socially situated" approach as a viable alternative. In considering Manne's critique, I also take up Smith's narrowly psychological account of dehumanization, arguing that it fails as a model of social criticism on four counts. Section 4 presents an approach to humanist social criticism drawing on both Marx and Fanon, and also completes my critique of both Manne and Smith. I argue that humanist social criticism is best understood by considering two sets of relationships: the relationship between the particular and the universal, and the relationship between the psychological and the social/political.

2.

In claiming that the publicity and visibility of oppression is enabled by appearing *qua* human, the humanist criticism advocated by Marx can initially seem like a rhetorical tautology: the injustice suffered by human beings has to appear as human suffering and injustice. Rather than a position with any real substance, the invocation of the human here is merely rhetorical and carries no philosophical weight in understanding how oppression becomes socially visible. There are at least two reasons why this misunderstands the aim of humanist critique. First, the goal is not simply to identify those who suffer injustice as in fact human beings, although some authors do argue that this identification can be in question in certain cases of dehumanization.[4] Instead, what is suggested is that one can suffer injustice in different kinds of capacities and under different kinds of descriptions: for example, I can be oppressed as a worker, as a religious minority, as a racialized subject, as undocumented, as disabled, as a woman, and so forth. In suggesting that critique should render injustice visible as human in contrast with other possible kinds of descriptions, what Marx is drawing our attention to is an implicit ambiguity in how injustice can appear as something particular on the one hand, and as something universal on the other. As particular, injustice appears as both socially and historically indexed, referring to specific social roles, relationships of domination, and hierarchies between individuals and groups. As universal, injustice appears as a form of dehumanization, in which certain kinds of treatment are deemed unjust on account of being unworthy of human beings because it impedes our ability to lead a truly, or perhaps better, a flourishing human life. We can note that in emphasizing the importance of the latter for social critique, the Marxian viewpoint neither denies nor diminishes the significance of the former; indeed, Marx's own work undoubtedly revolves around the forms of domination and exploitation suffered by the working class. In stressing the universal aspect

4. Smith argues that humanity of those oppressed *are* in question, that in fact, their oppressors view them as subhuman. See for example, Smith 2011, 2020. I take up Smith's account in section 3 below.

of critique, Marx instead appears to be suggesting that there is work to be done in demonstrating that particular forms of injustice are not *merely* particular, but also need to be viewed as something general and universal. Insofar as the universal aspect of injustice needs to be demonstrated—both theoretically and through praxis—this suggests, secondly, that the idea of the human invoked in critique is aspirational. As an aspirational, achievement concept, the universal determination of the human is continually articulated in connection with particular forms of injustice, and more specifically, in coming to grasp these particular forms as instances of dehumanization. The task of humanist criticism is to render the universal aspects of injustice visible, so as to continually transform the concept of the human—and humanity itself—in both theory and practice.

With this preliminary clarification in view, let me briefly address the first two strands of criticism faced by humanist thinking. The first and very prominent strand of criticism raises the charge of speciesism, contending that humanist perspectives grant undue primacy to human beings as subjects of moral concern.[5] In making membership in the human species a criterion for moral significance, humanism at once excludes nonhuman animals as worthy of moral consideration and instills a hierarchy in the "great chain of being" whereby humans are at the top. This kind of speciesist thinking parallels racist and sexist thinking whereby membership in the right race and gender grants moral consideration on the basis of racial and gender hierarchies. If the universal aspect of injustice appears as dehumanization, then nonhuman forms of suffering and injustice cannot even come into view in the humanist picture, implying a human/nonhuman animal hierarchy in which the latter are excluded a priori as beings of moral significance.

The speciesism charge is pressing given that Marx invokes the idea of human "species-being" (*Gattungswesen*) and our alienation from it as part of his account of the dehumanizing effects of labor under the capitalist mode of production. This idea is complex, but an undeniable aspect of this idea concerns what Marx takes to be distinctive about human activity in contrast with the activities of animal life more broadly, even if his account also assumes that the former indeed shares much in common with the latter. One such distinctive feature is that human activity is, at least in part, self-consciously or intentionally directed, involving forethought and planning in accordance with certain goals, and thus, can be characterized as self-determined or free. This would appear to place Marx's humanism squarely within a speciesist point of view insofar as the wrong of alienation concerns the thwarting of specifically human capacities that give shape to our distinctive species-being, excluding nonhuman animals by definition from his critique.

Although there may be some problems with the way in which Marx parses the human/animal divide—he mostly follows a long philosophical tradition which takes self-conscious rationality, even while emphasizing the practical and not merely theoretical side of that rationality, to be the marker of human distinctiveness—there

5. See Singer 1974 and 2009 for the classic statement of the speciesism charge.

are two clarifications of his use of the term species-being that can help in avoiding the speciesism charge. First, there is no *intrinsic* connection between the indexing of wrongs to species-specific capacities and any implied or explicit claim to a hierarchical relation between species. Instead, attention to the context of the life and ecology of particular species—i.e., attention to species-being—is essential for providing an adequate diagnosis of possible unjust conditions and treatment. The orientation of a defensible sort of humanist criticism, then, is not to claim human supremacy in relation to other species; rather, it claims that species-specific considerations *matter* for understanding capacities and how these can be thwarted in ways that constitute injustice. The indexing and diagnosing of wrongs in relation to species-specific considerations and capacities is the flipside of acknowledging that these same considerations matter for understanding how best to encourage growth and development, or more broadly, to encourage what the German tradition that influenced Marx called *Bildung*. The reference to species-being simply affirms the importance of the context of species-life for understanding the actualization and de-actualization of capacities, where certain cases of the latter constitute dehumanization. On this account, the phenomenon of dehumanization is the systematic and forcible removal, reversal, or thwarting of human features, activities, or capacities, something that can only be grasped with the human form of life in view.[6] Invoking the context of species-being suggests that nonhuman animals, too, can be "de-animalized" with reference to their specific form of species-life, where such de-animalization can be adequately grasped or diagnosed only with *their* species-being in view.[7]

Beyond not implying human supremacy, the second point of clarification concerns the status of the species-concept that is invoked as the context for critique.

6. In referring to human capacities, I follow Crary's critique of what she calls moral individualism, in which "a human or non-human creature's moral standing is a function of its *individual characteristics*" (2016, 122; my emphasis). Capacities in the relevant sense, then, are always understood in connection with the life of the species rather than solely as discrete features of individuals. Crary's critique of moral individualism argues that moral importance attaches to membership and participation in species-life (for example, being human or being a dog) rather than to individual capacities or characteristics. Moral individualism leads inevitably to ableist assumptions, in which humans or animals with disabilities are taken to be of diminished moral worth. In claiming that dehumanization must be grasped in connection with the broader context of species-being, I am also critical of moral individualism and its ableist conclusions.

7. Criticizing Bentham's employment of the principle of utility and defending the importance of species-specificity, Marx remarks in *Capital*: "To know what is useful for a dog, one must investigate the nature of dogs. This nature is not itself deducible from the principle of utility. Applying this to man, he that would judge all human acts, movements, relations, etc. according to the principle of utility would first have to deal with human nature in general, and then with human nature as historically modified in each epoch. Bentham does not trouble himself with this. With the driest naïveté he assumes that the modern petty bourgeois, especially the English petty bourgeois, is the normal man. Whatever is useful to this peculiar kind of normal man, and to his world, is useful in and for itself. He applies this yardstick to the past, the present, and the future" (1976, 758–59). Philippa Foot makes a similar argument against utilitarianism from the perspective of natural normativity, arguing that utilitarianism takes as a generalized, non-species-specific foundation—the principle of utility—something that can in fact only be discovered in light of species-specific considerations, and hence, cannot be a generalizable principle (2001, 48–50).

In pointing out the arbitrariness of connecting moral significance with species membership, the speciesism charge assumes a strictly biological concept of the human being as *Homo sapiens*. This generally leads to difficult if not irresolvable questions concerning the criteria of classification, revealing that there are no morally relevant characteristics possessed by all and only human beings. While this point is well taken, and already begins to address some of the concerns regarding essentialism to which I will turn in a moment, it misconstrues the concept of the human that is operative in humanist perspectives, which is not strictly biological but irreducibly normative and contains ethical content. To be sure, both the biological and the normative categories of the human are contested, as are their possible relationships.[8] Maria Kronfeldner, for example, argues that while these categories overlap significantly, there are no relationships of entailment between them.[9] Alice Crary defends a more radical position in which our empirical concepts of human beings and other species are fundamentally shaped by ineradicable ethical considerations of what matters for the kinds of beings in question. Developing a Wittgensteinian line of thought, Crary contends that being human as such matters morally, and human beings only come into full empirical view in a manner relevant to ethics as "irradiated by a . . . conception of human flourishing."[10] Animals, too, "matter just as the kinds of creatures they are," where bringing into view the *kind* of creature they are always already involves ethical considerations of apprehending what matters to the life of a particular species.[11] The species-being of animals is thus not simply a matter of biological classification, but a lived, ethical context of activity, one that emerges as part of bringing the individuals of particular species into full view.[12]

The worry about speciesism already suggested the second prominent criticism against humanism, namely, that it relies on a problematic essentialism with regard to human nature. If human beings can be *dehumanized*, this means that there must be some essential nature to human beings that is being undermined, attacked, or

8. Kronfeldner argues that the normative concept of human nature is an essentially contested concept (2018, 226–29). Smith argues that "human" is a category from folk taxonomy, making it impossible to settle empirically (2020, 109–15).

9. Kronfeldner 2018, 4–7, 216–17. On Kronfeldner's response to speciesism, see 2018, 218–19.

10. Crary 2021, 165. See also Crary 2016.

11. Crary 2021, 167.

12. The etymological root of *ethology*, the biological study of animal behavior that pays attention to species-typical traits and the ecology and *Umwelten* of particular species, is *ethos*, which speaks to the irreducibly ethical dimension of animal life and activity. Species-specificity is particularly important for cognitive ethology, which studies the cognitive capacities of animals. On this approach to the study of animal behavior and cognition, see DeWaal 2016. In the intellectual context in which Marx was educated, Herder perhaps came closest to indexing all capacities to a species-specific context, which he referred to as the "sphere" or "circle" of particular animals. See Herder 2002, 78–81. Although there are very few direct references to Herder in the writings of Marx, Marx would have been steeped in Herderian ideas through his teachers, and most importantly through the writings of Hegel and Feuerbach. See Noyes 2020 on the genealogical connection between Herder and Marx.

thwarted. Although there is a lack of consensus about how exactly to conceive of species, there is an *anti-essentialist* consensus, which contends that essentialist approaches to species that rely on identifying intrinsic, universal, unchanging properties or characteristics cannot be supported in light of Darwin's theory of evolution.[13] With respect to human nature or essence in particular, the classic criticism comes from David Hull, who argued that proponents of human nature relied on identifying necessary and sufficient conditions for species membership, conditions that either did not exist (universal characteristics are not limited to humans, and characteristics limited to humans are not universally distributed), or were extremely rare and morally irrelevant to defenders of human nature (for example, perhaps all human beings are able to digest Nutrasweet).[14] What the theory of evolution revealed was the centrality of the *variability* of species, the very idea of which undercuts the possibility of talking about human nature or human species-being. Given that the operative concept of the human in humanist discourse is neither strictly nor primarily biological, one might think that the anti-essentialist consensus concerning the nature of species is not relevant here; however, the issue is slightly more complicated. First, there is *some* relationship between the biological and normative concepts of the human. If humanists give up all claim to the former, then it is difficult to substantiate talk of human capacities, needs, functioning, or social reproduction, all of which appear to be important for humanist critique. Second, anti-essentialism also extends to the domain we call culture such that it is not only the natural features of human beings that are highly variable, but cultural features and social practices as well (leaving aside here the perennially difficult question of how this distinction is even to be understood).[15] If the anti-essentialist consensus is right, then there are simply no relevant features of human nature *or* culture we could identify that would neither be unduly inclusive (extends far beyond human beings, making the emphasis on the human moot) nor exclusive (excludes many human beings, making the claim to universality pernicious and false). Worries about essentialism have long surrounded Marx's employment of human species-being as a context for critique, and the apparent waning of this concept in his later work attests to its questionable philosophical merit.[16]

Despite all this, there are a number of ways in which the humanist perspective developed by Marx is particularly well positioned to avoid essentialism. First, we can point to the undeniable emphasis on the historical nature of human activity

13. On the difficulties surrounding an essentialist approach to species, see Dupré 1981, Okasha 2002, and Godfrey-Smith 2014, 100–119.

14. Hull 1986.

15. Challenging the demarcation between nature and culture, Clifford Geertz famously wrote, "there is no such thing as human nature independent of culture" (1973, 49). In the philosophical tradition of Hegel and Marx, the question concerning the distinction and relation between nature and culture is posed in terms of "second nature."

16. There is a long history of criticizing Marx's essentialism, but for a recent account that attempts to revive a Hegelian-Marxist approach to alienation while avoiding essentialist commitments, see Jaeggi 2014.

in Marx's analysis, and more specifically, to his approach to human labor and social reproduction in terms of *natural history*.[17] Although the initial formulation of species-being in Marx's early work is indebted to Feuerbach, and more importantly than is generally recognized, to Hegel,[18] the subsequent development of this idea in connection with historical materialism makes the idea of natural history increasingly central for Marx's humanism. John Bellamy Foster has shown the extent to which Marx was impacted by the publication of Darwin's *The Origin of Species* in 1859, with Marx writing in a letter to Ferdinand Lassalle in 1861 that Darwin provided "a basis in natural science for the historical class struggle."[19] Although the Marx/Engels/Darwin connection is complex and beyond the scope of our present discussion, what this minimally suggests is that charging Marx's humanism with essentialism is hermeneutically suspect, and fails to appreciate the extent to which Marx understands human development along the lines of natural history. But beyond hermeneutical uncharity, the charge of essentialism also obscures an important conceptual distinction in Marx's treatment of human nature, which considers both "human nature in general" and "human nature as historically modified in each epoch."[20] One clear example in which this distinction comes into play is in the concept of metabolism, which describes the labor process as purposeful activity that takes place through the metabolic interaction between human beings and nature.[21] This metabolic interaction is a "universal condition . . . common to all forms of society in which human beings live," but which takes on historically specific contours in different times and places. In considering human activity from this dual perspective, humanist critique can bring into view both the general shape of the human form of life shared across historical periods, and the historically and culturally specific features of societies and cultures rightly emphasized by anti-essentialists. Identifying the general form of human productive activity and social reproduction not only provides a context for understanding historical and cultural variability as essential to the human form of life, but further, provides a context for assessing and evaluating its variable shapes.[22]

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17. Marx describes his project in the preface to the first edition of *Capital* as follows: "My standpoint, from which the development of the economic formation of society is viewed as a process of natural history . . ." (1976, 92).
18. On the connection between Marx's concept of species-being and Hegel's concept of recognition, see Quante 2011.
19. Quoted in Foster 2000, 197. On Marx and Darwin, see especially chapter 6 of Foster 2000.
20. Marx 1976, 759.
21. Marx 1976, 283, 290. The concept of metabolism is drawn from biochemistry. On the origins of this term and its role in Marx's critique of capitalism, see Foster 2000, ch. 5.
22. Honneth and Joas capture this dual perspective of philosophical anthropology as follows: "[the historicist position that points to] the historical mutability of all human circumstances . . . might seem plausible in view of the great diversity of cultures and societies . . . but it is untenable in the face of biology and even of the concrete comparisons of animals and the human being. However, anthropology must not be understood as the theory of constants of human cultures persisting through history, or of an inalienable substance of human nature, but rather as an enquiry into the unchanging preconditions of human changeableness. These unchanging preconditions of human

In addition to offering a dual perspective on the social reproduction of human life, the concept of metabolic interaction with nature makes evident a final point in responding to the essentialist charge. Given that metabolism is in no way exclusive to human beings but common to all life processes, Marx's ultimate choice to center his analysis of human nature on the concept of metabolism reveals that his humanism is not interested in policing the boundaries between the human and nonhuman life by seeking out the necessary and sufficient conditions of membership in the human species. Rather, and returning to the importance of species-being as an ethical context, attending to the general form of human activity matters for understanding human flourishing and its negation, and moreover, allows us to understand the many connections between human activity and the activity of other forms of life, not to mention human beings and their environment.

3.

Having responded to the charges of speciesism and essentialism, I now want to turn to a recent criticism of humanism launched by Kate Manne, who argues that dehumanization fundamentally fails as an explanatory paradigm for capturing forms of conduct that we characteristically consider "inhumane," especially when this conduct targets groups such as women or racialized peoples. Manne's broader ambitions involve presenting a philosophical account of misogyny and understanding how it operates within the larger picture of patriarchal ideology, but her critique of humanism means to undermine not only the contemporary literature on dehumanization as a psychological attitude, but also the explanatory power of what she takes to be a long-standing humanist philosophical tradition that includes "Aristotelians, Kantians, and Wittgensteinians amongst them, as well as more general proponents of a rationalist, Enlightenment ethos."[23] Although she does not target Marx directly,[24] much of her discussion centers on questions pertaining to the *recognition of humanity*, an idea that has roots in both Enlightenment and Hegelian thought, and one that lies at the heart of Marx's humanism.[25] Against the

changeableness cannot, though, simply be factually ascertained; they are not evident in nature. They present themselves only in the form of reconstructed inceptive conditions of the species' history and of the individuals' development" (1988, 7).

23. Manne 2016, 391. Manne 2016 is reproduced in chapter 5 of Manne 2018. They diverge only slightly. Where the citations overlap, I will cite both the 2016 and 2018 text; where they do not, I will only cite the one under discussion.

24. Chapter 2 of *Down Girl* on "Ameliorating Misogyny," however, opens with Marx's famous eleventh thesis on Feuerbach as an epigraph.

25. That the philosophical context most important for understanding Marx's humanism is implicit in Manne's critique is clear in a number of ways. First, the feminist perspective criticized by Manne on the objectification and dehumanization of women draws much from the work of Simone de Beauvoir, whose entire philosophical analysis is Hegelian. Second, the broadly Wittgensteinian approach she criticizes relies on a concept of ethical acknowledgment that has deep concep-

idea that social suffering and injustice come into full view against the background of an ethically saturated species-context of humanity, Manne contends that recognition of humanity both underdetermines antagonistic social relationships and can itself be ambivalent, which makes it not only compatible with forms of inhumane treatment, but can sometimes even underly them.

Manne presents humanist thinking as being committed to a number of connected claims, the most important of which is that "human beings are capable of seeing or recognizing other human beings *as such*, in a way that goes beyond identifying them as other members of the species."[26] This recognition is normatively laden, involving both conceptual and perceptual dimensions since it is an ability to see others in accordance with a concept of common humanity. In recognizing others as fellow human beings, we attribute to them certain capacities that are assumed to be shared, and on this basis, are motivated or disposed to treat them humanely. Recognition of humanity, then, is a necessary condition of humane treatment and possesses motivational force, one that is mediated through emotions such as empathy and compassion. If this is correct, then morally egregious treatment of others likely reveals a failure to recognize them as fellow human beings. This failure of recognition can be viewed from both a historical and moral/political perspective. Historically, when an oppressed group comes to be seen as fellow human beings by dominant groups or society at large, moral and social progress is likely or even inevitable; conversely, moral atrocities against certain oppressed groups are typically due to their *not* being recognized as human beings (they are viewed as subhuman, as animals, vermin, etc.). If this historical perspective is correct, then an important moral and political goal is to ensure that the humanity of oppressed social groups becomes widely visible.

Having distilled the humanist standpoint, Manne argues that humanism fails to explain conduct that we would typically call dehumanizing, and in particular, misogynist and racist conduct. Her critique claims that the idea of recognizing others as "fellow human beings" is "radically incomplete," for a fellow human being is also intelligible as "a rival, enemy, usurper, insubordinate, betrayer, and so on."[27] The recognition of humanity thus under-describes the social relationships that are operative in the dynamics of misogyny and racism, which involve complex social hierarchies and "jostling for position."[28] This is easy enough to grant, but its power as a retort against humanism relies on assuming an unreasonably thin understanding of *recognition*, whereas the most influential philosophical tradition of recognition—which includes Hegel and Marx, but more importantly for her

tual connections to the Hegelian tradition of recognition (see Honneth 2008). Third, she cites Korsgaard and Darwall as defending aspects of the humanist perspective she is criticizing (2016, 394/2018,140), who both develop their positions through the works of Kant and Fichte respectively.

26. Manne 2016, 395/2018, 141.

27. Manne 2016, 399/2018, 147.

28. Manne 2016, 405/2018, 155.

account with its focus on misogyny and racism, Beauvoir and Fanon—contends that the recognition of humanity *necessarily involves social struggle*.[29] Earlier, I claimed that Marx's account suggests that injustice can appear as something particular and indexed to specific social hierarchies, or as something universal in the form of dehumanization, where both play an important role in social critique. I will return to this relation between particular and universal in the next section, but it is not evident that *any* humanist would deny the significance of particular social hierarchies in accounting for dehumanizing conduct. Manne, however, *is* denying the significance of the universal aspect of suffering injustice, presenting it as an idle "view from nowhere" in contrast to her "socially situated view" in which agents are "*embedded* in the social world."[30] In addition to being a false dichotomy, below I argue that the socially situated view, which entirely *disembeds* particular social hierarchies from the context of the human form of life, taken in isolation is liable to misunderstand both the nature of social struggles, and the normative context that underwrites them. Despite targeting the broad philosophical tradition of humanism, her critique relies on an implausibly narrow understanding of the humanist position, and her proposed alternative comes with many problems of its own.

Although I have suggested that Manne's critique relies on an overly narrow account of humanism given its broad argumentative ambitions, her distilling of the humanist position does appear to successfully target a contemporary approach that focuses almost exclusively on dehumanization as a psychological attitude, asking after the moral psychology of dehumanizers rather than considering the dynamics of social hierarchies or the social and psychological perspective of those who are dehumanized.[31] Despite the anti-essentialist consensus mentioned above, human beings are nonetheless prone to psychological essentialism, "a pervasive, pre-theoretical disposition to think of the world as divided into natural kinds."[32] Given this undeniable human propensity, David Livingstone Smith argues that dehumanization, especially in its racist form, is best understood as an attitude in which other human beings are conceived of as *subhuman creatures*.[33] This attitude is the "disease" that explains the various "symptoms" that are the effects of dehumanization, namely, the cruel and degrading treatment that social critics aim to both

29. Hence, the title of Axel Honneth's pioneering work on the philosophical anthropology of recognition, *The Struggle for Recognition* (1994). "Jostling for position" sounds like a weaker way of describing struggles for recognition.

30. Manne 2016, 406/2018, 156.

31. Given Manne's critique of a psychological approach to misogyny that focuses on properties of individual agents (2018, 43–49), it is somewhat puzzling that she supposes a narrowly psychological approach to humanism. Many of the critiques she applies to psychologizing misogyny apply, I think, to psychologizing humanism. Berenstain 2019 also criticizes Manne's oversimplified, psychological approach to dehumanization, arguing that it is more accurately understood as part of social processes and practices.

32. Smith 2014, 815.

33. Smith 2011, 2014, 2020. See Smith 2016 for his response to Manne's critique.

explain and denounce.[34] On Smith's view, the failure to recognize others as fellow human beings is the most powerful cause of dehumanizing conduct, and it is in conceiving of others as less than human that we are able to override our generally empathetic and cooperative social attitudes.[35]

Smith's approach appears to at least partially affirm the Marxian position with which we began, in which oppression takes the characteristic form of dehumanization. However, there are a number of problems with Smith's account that make it inadequate as a model for social critique. First, in rooting his account in our fixed, universal psychological tendency to essentialize, Smith is unable to offer any solutions beyond acknowledging this tendency and pleading that we remain vigilant against it.[36] If the tendency to essentialize and dehumanize is a fixed psychological trait of human beings, then identifying it is not social criticism in any meaningful sense (it is a feature of individual psychology, not societies, and criticism only applies to things that can be changed). Although Smith does acknowledge that dehumanization has both a psychological and political dimension, his account of the political dimension is restricted to the effects of propaganda and ideology *on* our psychology, and his political prescription is the same as the psychological one: vigilance against the tendency in our political speech and rhetoric to essentialize and dehumanize.[37] Second, despite his goal of combatting dehumanization, he nonetheless comes to the conclusion that the concept of the human is an "ideological construction that's basic to ways that human societies exercise power."[38] Smith treats the human exclusively as a folk category that supports our essentializing and dehumanizing tendencies, so the idea that we can recognize others as human in an ethically saturated way plays no role in his analysis, which oddly, suggests that he is not engaged in humanist social critique. Third, Manne is correct that Smith's understanding of dehumanization under describes the social relations of hierarchy at work in racist and misogynist conduct, reducing different dynamics of group antagonism to simply conceiving of others as subhuman (as opposed to rivals, enemies, insubordinates, etc.).[39] Fourth and finally, Smith's psychological

34. Smith 2020, 19–21.

35. Smith 2011, 126–27.

36. Smith 2020, 6–7, 70, 185–86. This passage simply presents dehumanization as our fate: "Dehumanization isn't something that's a *choice*. Imagining that it's something that's within our conscious control is to greatly underestimate its danger . . . The more confident you are of your ability to resist dehumanization, the more vulnerable you are likely to be to its uncanny power" (2020, 108).

37. Smith 2020, 7, 184. Dehumanization is "*a psychological response to political forces*," and political action against dehumanization involves "calling it out where you see it, objecting when people you speak to or people who represent you employ its dangerous rhetoric, and crucially, opposing it in the voting booth" (2020, 185).

38. Smith 2020, 110.

39. Although Manne criticizes Smith's approach to dehumanization in connection with racism and misogyny, Smith tries to separate dehumanization from other kinds of derogatory attitudes, including sexism, ableism, and transphobia, while maintaining that only racism and dehumanization are closely connected (2020, 179–83). This attempt to distinguish dehumanization from attitudes *other* than racism is ad hoc and unconvincing, so I think Manne's critique here stands.

approach is one-sided in only considering the psychology of dehumanizers. A more complete account of the moral psychology of dehumanization would also consider the perspective of those who experience dehumanization. Considering these experiences lead to different perspectives on the social dynamics of oppression, political solutions beyond "vigilance," and philosophical insights into how combatting dehumanization can reshape and transform the species-being of humanity.

4.

Returning to Marx and turning now to Fanon as well, I want to conclude by outlining some features of humanist critique in light of the defense offered thus far, focusing on two sets of relations: the relation between the particular and the universal, and the relation between the psychological and the social/political.

I began by presenting Marx's claim that a central task of social criticism is to render particular or isolated forms of suffering and injustice visible as universal human suffering and injustice. The publicity and social visibility of oppression, according to Marx, requires that oppression is visible as the oppression of human beings *qua* human. There is, then, an ambiguity in how oppression can appear as something particular and embedded in social relations and hierarchies on the one hand (between classes, genders, racialized groups, etc.), and as universal in the form of dehumanization on the other. While the appearance of both can be obscured and may require both social criticism and political action to become widely visible, the universal, human aspect of oppression plays a dual role in critique that can be easily missed. First, the universal context of the human life-form (or human species-being) is the presupposed, ethically contentful background context that allows us to bring particular forms of domination and oppression into view. When we identify some particular form of treatment or a social hierarchy as oppressive, we are doing so against the background of a conception of human flourishing and bringing into view how such practices operate as impediments to human flourishing. Second, and at the same time, the universal concept of human species-being also functions as the historically developing demand for universal human emancipation that is the aim of progressive social struggles, one that continually evolves, transforms, and is given shape in relation to particular forms of oppression. For humanist social criticism, the dual function of a universal concept of humanity is deliberately and unavoidably circular: it functions both as the necessary presupposition of meaningful claims against oppression *and* as the historically developing demand for universal human emancipation.

If particular, socially situated forms of oppression only come into view against the background of a universal concept of humanity that continually evolves in light of particular cases, then Manne is simply wrong to oppose her so-called "socially

situated view" to the humanist one. The socially situated positions of enemies, subordinates, usurpers, and friends are only meaningful and potentially *critical*—i.e., can do the work of social critique—against the background of an evolving context of human flourishing. Without that background context, it is not evident why it is wrong to treat women as subordinates, or why it represents social progress when (in her example) Huck begins to recognize Jim as a friend.[40] Absent the ethical context of humanity, Manne's socially situated approach becomes purely descriptive: groups jostle for position, men want to keep their social position and resent women for trying to unseat them, and misogyny is the expression of the "law-enforcement" branch of patriarchy.[41] Even if one accepts this as an adequate description of the social dynamics underlying misogyny, this description does not suffice for social critique unless forms of gender and racial hierarchy can be shown to be forms of domination that restrict certain groups from living a flourishing human life. The socially situated relations that she privileges—enemies, subordinates, usurpers, friends—are only normatively meaningful insofar as they are embedded within the context of the human form of life, that is, insofar as these relations play a role in meeting or not meeting human needs, developing or thwarting human capacities, giving shape to social reproduction, and most broadly, enabling or preventing human flourishing. In severing her socially situated view from humanist considerations, what she calls "jostling for position" cannot appear as anything more than a struggle for power. It is only against the background of an ethical context of human flourishing that social struggles become intelligible as something more than a struggle for power, but as struggles for universal human emancipation.

To illustrate this necessary relation between the universal and the particular in grasping the normative background of social struggles against oppression, I want to turn to the work of Frantz Fanon. Fanon's approach to humanism is particularly instructive because it opposes the false humanism espoused by European colonists and their supporters, while at the same time defending the normative importance of a true, universal humanism as the basis for his antiracist, anticolonial critique. The struggles against colonialism aim at constructing what Fanon calls a "new humanism," one that is given shape through opposition to practices of dehumanization. In his discussion of the importance of developing a new national consciousness or distinctly African consciousness in the struggle against racist, colonial oppression, Fanon presents the relation between the particular, socially (and culturally) situated point of view, and the universal, humanist point of view as follows:

40. Manne takes up the example of Huck and Jim as part of her discussion of Nomy Arpaly's work.

41. Manne 2018, 63. To be fair, Manne herself claims that her account is a descriptive, "ameliorative" approach to misogyny. I'm not critiquing that account here and actually find Manne's approach to misogyny to be helpful, overall. I'm simply challenging her critique of humanism and pointing to some weaknesses of her "socially situated" alternative. I also think that the critique of humanism undercuts some of the critical potential of her account of misogyny and is largely unnecessary.

> After the struggle is over, there is not only the demise of colonialism, but also the demise of the colonized. This new humanity, for itself and for others, inevitably defines a new humanism. This new humanism is written into the objectives and methods of the struggle.[42]
>
> If man is judged by his acts, then I would say that the most urgent thing today for the African intellectual is the building of his nation. If this act is true, i.e., if it expresses the manifest will of the people, if it reflects the restlessness of the African peoples, then it will necessarily lead to the discovery and advancement of universalizing values . . . It is at the heart of national consciousness that international consciousness establishes itself and thrives.[43]

In opposition to the false dichotomy suggested by Manne, Fanon presents the socially situated, antiracist, anticolonial struggles of African nations in connection with a broader, universal, humanist struggle. In claiming that a "new humanism is written into the objectives and methods of the struggle," Fanon makes evident that what Manne calls "jostling for position" can become visible and intelligible as a *struggle against oppression* only insofar as human needs, capacities, and flourishing are at stake as part of a socially situated struggle for freedom. Moreover, Fanon contends that particular acts of social struggle are *true*—are warranted or justified—only if they lead to "the discovery and advancement of universalizing values." The struggle against racist, colonial oppression on Fanon's account both presupposes a concept of humanity against which the dehumanizing situation of colonialism can be grasped, and generates a demand for and the discovery of a new humanity and universal values. Instead of a dichotomy between humanism and social situatedness, the particular social hierarchy of colonizer and colonized comes into view as oppressive by appearing as dehumanization.

Finally, Fanon's work also illustrates the relationship between the psychological and social/political dimensions of humanist social critique in a way that corrects for the shortcomings of narrowly psychological approaches to dehumanization like Smith's. Two features are worth mentioning in particular. First, in contrast to focusing exclusively on the psychology of dehumanizers and tracing dehumanization to a presumably fixed feature of human psychology, Fanon tries to understand the psychological perspective of those who are dehumanized through the concept of alienation.[44] He writes:

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42. Fanon 2004, 178.

43. Fanon 2004, 180.

44. Alienation is of course also a central concept in Marx's humanist critique of capitalism. For Marx, like Fanon, the concept of alienation is not narrowly psychological, but has an objective, structural dimension. Although the antiracist, anticolonial critique of dehumanization considers at length the experiences and perspective of the targets of dehumanizing conduct, it should be noted that it does not do so at the expense of the perspective of dehumanizers. Instead, it contends that those who participate in dehumanizing conduct and ideology are themselves dehumanized. The critical claim is that dehumanizing practices and ideology—most notably, colonialism and racism—have dehumanizing effects on *both* colonizers and colonized, providing a more holistic psychological account of dehumanization. For a classic statement, see Césaire 2000.

> The analysis that I am undertaking is psychological. In spite of this it is apparent to me that the effective disalienation of the black man entails an immediate recognition of social and economic realities. If there is an inferiority complex, it is the outcome of a double process:—primarily, economic;—subsequently, the internalization—or, better, the epidermalization—of this inferiority . . . It will be seen that the black man's alienation is not an individual question.[45]

In describing the psychological dimension of dehumanization as alienation, Fanon immediately turns to social, political, and economic realities, where the former is understood to be a result of the latter. This means that second, the psychological and social/political dimensions of dehumanization must be grasped in tandem, and moreover, the complex, material and institutional realities of social/political life should not be reduced to concerns about dehumanizing propaganda, as they are on Smith's account. In focusing on the psychological and material alienation of those who experience dehumanization, Fanon reveals a necessary and goal-directed connection between the psychological and social/political sides of dehumanization: it is the experience of alienation that drives the political activity of eliminating or transforming the social and economic realities that sustain and enable dehumanization. This presents a much more compelling and cogent direction for political action than Smith's politics of "vigilance," in which guarding against one's own personal tendencies to dehumanize and calling out this tendency in others is the best we can hope for. Smith's model provides no basis for understanding social struggles against dehumanizing practices, and no basis for grasping the institutional and material dimensions of dehumanization. For Fanon, dehumanization consists in much more than conceiving of others as subhuman (although this is part of the story), and involves concrete social, political, and economic forces that must be criticized and dismantled.

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In this paper, I have tried to make sense of the claim that an essential task of social critique is to render particular forms of suffering and injustice visible as universal human suffering and injustice. I defended this approach to humanism against a number of prominent objections and argued that humanist social critique operates through grasping the necessary relations between the particular and the universal, and the psychological and the social/political. Moreover, humanism, I argued, provides a cogent and compelling account of the normative background of social critique, as well as how particular, socially situated struggles against dehumanization give shape to the demand for universal human emancipation. In spite of both long-standing and more recent attempts to reject humanist discourse, it remains one of the most powerful paradigms for social critique, playing a central role in both critical theory and practice.

45. Fanon 2008, 10–11.

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