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Metaphysical guilt: Jaspers, Honneth, and the problem of dehumanisation

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This paper addresses the conditions that need to be met for a human being to feel or, conversely, not to feel guilty of a wrongdoing against another human being. It does this in the light of Jaspers' understanding of metaphysical guilt as arising from inter-human solidarity. My claim is twofold. First, I claim that, while metaphysical guilt is not impossible, Jaspers does not offer an explanation of how it arises either in the *Question of German guilt* (Jaspers 2000) or in his other work on guilt in general. Secondly, despite metaphysical guilt's existence, it is, nevertheless, common for humans not to experience it, a phenomenon which Jaspers implicitly acknowledges but does not explain explicitly. I apply Axel Honneth's concept of recognition in order to supply the social component and the theory of dehumanisation to explain why, under some circumstances, metaphysical guilt does not arise.

Keywords: metaphysical guilt, dehumanisation, recognition, Karl Jaspers, Axel Honneth

Introduction

Discussions of guilt usually start with separating the *act* of ascribing guilt from the personal *emotion* of feeling guilty. It is common for humans to ascribe guilt to other human individuals, as well as variously understood human groups such as cultural, religious, political, or national ones, usually from the ethico-legal perspective of the understanding of the term. In this sense, we may find Oskar Pistorius (Doubek 2017) 'guilty' of the murder of Reeva Steenkamp, as much as we may find the Catholic Church (Ide 2017) 'guilty' of covering up numerous instances of paedophilia in its ranks, or consider the German nation 'guilty' of the Nazi (Wegener 2016) atrocities¹. It is much less common to reflect on the conditions that need to be met for a human being to feel or, conversely, not to feel guilty of a wrongdoing against another human being.

It is the latter aspect of the discussion of guilt that this paper addresses. It does this in the light of Jaspers's understanding of metaphysical guilt as arising from inter-human solidarity. My claim is twofold. First, I claim that, while metaphysical guilt is not impossible, Jaspers does not offer an explanation of how it arises either in the *Question of German guilt* (Jaspers 2000), or in his other work on guilt in general (*Philosophy* II 1969; *Psychologie der Weltanschauungen* 1919 etc.). Secondly, despite metaphysical guilt's existence, it is, nevertheless, common for humans not to experience it, a phenomenon which Jaspers himself implicitly acknowledges but does not explain explicitly.

In a two-stage argument, I offer a possible explanation of how metaphysical guilt arises and, at the same time why the, seemingly universal, emotion often does not occur. The paper thus takes the following course: first, I present the concept of metaphysical guilt as inter-human solidarity. Here, I initially provide a broader explanation of guilt as boundary situation and the consequences of such an understanding for the arising of responsibility for the deed or the attitude of denial. I then employ Axel Honneth's concept of recognition. By engaging with Honneth's philosophy, I intend to bring in the element of the social nature of Man treated in a fashion different from that presented by Jaspers in his discussion of communication (Jaspers 1969). While Jaspers establishes the need for communication as that which is indispensable for human transcendence, Honneth's account of the social renders itself better to the explanation of metaphysical guilt as originating from inter-human solidarity on the level of day-to-day practicalities of life. Secondly, I focus on the fact that, despite the seeming universality of metaphysical guilt, situations occur when people seem immune

1 This paper aims at establishing the general connection between metaphysical guilt, misrecognition, and dehumanisation. A paper bringing these findings to the South African context is in the pipeline.

to it. Considering this, and deriving from Honneth's concept of misrecognition, I explain how, by the act of dehumanisation of the object of wrongdoing, Jaspers's inter-human solidarity loses its *raison d'être* and thus metaphysical guilt does not take place. In order to achieve this, I define dehumanisation, show how it manifests itself, and why it is employed. This leads me to the conclusion that dehumanisation is, on the one hand, comparable to Honneth's misrecognition and, on the other, to the denial which Jaspers discusses as one of the possible reactions to guilt as a boundary situation.

Jaspers's concept of metaphysical guilt

Metaphysical guilt

In the *Question of German guilt* (Jaspers 2000), Jaspers takes up a question of extremely high relevance for Germany of the time as well as the German nation, viz., the question of 'German guilt', a collective emotion ostensibly appropriate to be experienced by all Germans after the atrocities committed by the Nazis. In his reflections, Jaspers establishes four types of guilt, viz. criminal, political, moral, and metaphysical. For Jaspers, "[t]he guilt question is more than a question put to us by others, it is one we put to ourselves" (Jaspers 2000: 22). In line with this statement, Jaspers carries out his distinction on the basis of who experiences the guilt and under whose jurisdiction the deed falls. It thus allows for a basic division of the four types into those where the jurisdiction is external to the subject and those where the judgment is internally apportioned (Jaspers 2000: 33; see also Olson 2008).

Thus, to sum up, criminal guilt occurs when a person violates the established laws, with courts of law being the jurisdiction. Political guilt is understood as the responsibility or co-responsibility (Jaspers 2000: 25) of all citizens for the actions of their governments. Moral guilt entails the guilt of conscience. In terms of jurisdiction, despite finally emerging from within, it calls upon the 'communication with my friends and intimates' (Jaspers 2000: 26). Finally, Jaspers moves to metaphysical guilt. This he defines as a kind of 'solidarity among men as human beings that makes each co-responsible for every wrong and every injustice in the world' (Jaspers 2000: 26). He further explains that this kind of guilt stems from the witnessing of an atrocity and failing to do everything possible in order to prevent it from happening.

From the above, it is clear that Jaspers's overall understanding of guilt is neither completely relative, i.e. particular to a culture, nor universal. The first three types, viz. criminal, political, and moral guilt appeal to 'the social' as underpinned by the various cultural and socio-political constructs, thus rendering these types of guilt

relative to a particular group's understanding of the legal, the right, or the good. It is the fourth type, metaphysical guilt, that has a universal appeal. Nevertheless, it, too, is strongly grounded in the social, with the stress now falling on to the pan- and inter-human.

Jaspers grounds his four concepts of guilt in three components, viz. force, right, and mercy (Jaspers 2000: 31). "Force is what decides between men, unless they reach agreement" (Jaspers 2000: 31). In this sense, it leads to the establishing of the Hegelian-like opposites, the victor and the vanquished, the presence of which is, for Jaspers, the prerequisite of guilt ever arising. I find that the component of force is mostly applicable to the first three concepts of guilt.

Right is the next stage, once force is put aside. In Jaspers's own words, "[w] herever men become aware of their humanity and recognize man as man, they grasp human rights and base themselves on a natural law to which both victor and vanquished may appeal (...)" (Jaspers 2000: 31). Thus, according to Jaspers, right arises as a natural consequence of the recognition of one's own humanity as well as the humanity of others. Right, in this understanding, underpins criminal and political guilt but may also, through its appeal to co-humanity, give rise to metaphysical guilt.

Mercy, according to Jaspers (2000: 32), "is what tempers the effect of undiluted right and of destructive force". It is a "higher truth" which makes up for the flaws of justice stemming from both force and right. It does so through the appeal to the "humanity of man", the human being's magnanimity, nobility, fairness, and generosity and is mostly responsible for metaphysical guilt.

This 'survivor's guilt', as it is often popularly referred to, stems, according to Jaspers, from the human "capacity to live only together or not at all" (Jaspers 2000: 26). For Jaspers (2000: 26) this is because "therein consists the substance of their being", i.e. that such guilt, and, by implication, such solidarity, are essential to human existence. However, as pointed out before, Jaspers does not demonstrate from where the inter-human solidarity arises or, if it does not, what is responsible for its lack. The response to this query will be dealt with in the Honneth section below.

Having established the grounds on which Jaspers's metaphysical guilt is based, it is imperative to demonstrate its place in Jaspers's more general philosophical reflections on guilt. As we shall see below, in Jaspers's earlier philosophy, guilt, and therefore, consequently, metaphysical guilt, is that which occurs in the possible union of *Existenz* and Transcendence (Olson 2008: 15), in the face of a boundary situation.

This, in fact, can be better understood when one considers that Jaspers's interest in guilt dates back to his first philosophical work, *Psychologie der Weltanschauungen* (1919), and the concept of *Grenzsituationen* or *boundary situations* (translated also as ultimate, border, limit, or limiting situations), first presented in this work.

Guilt as a boundary situation

As mentioned above, Jaspers's preoccupation with guilt did not arise solely as a result of the experience of the Nazi regime and World War II. It gets its first mention in the *Psychologie der Weltanschauungen* (1919: 55), a work generally considered as Jaspers's break from psychiatry into philosophy (see Long 1974: 398). A further mention occurs in his second philosophical work, *Philosophy* (see Long 1974: 398), always within the context of a boundary situation, itself a particular instance of Jaspers's understanding of human situatedness.

For Jaspers, I, as existence, am always *in* a situation and I either choose to act or I allow myself to remain passive. A situation is always full of possibilities, openings, and opportunities. Since it is such, it becomes fluid and non-definable. It is important to realise that it is I who produce situations and the goals that arise from them, whether with full consciousness of doing so or not. For Jaspers, “[s]ince existence means to be in situations, I can never get out of one without *entering into another*” since “[s]ituations exist by changing” (Jaspers 1969: 177-178).

Unlike all other situations which are always in the state of flux, there are situations which “*never change, except in appearance*” (Jaspers 1969: 178). These Jaspers calls *Grenzsituationen*, boundary situations. He defines a boundary situation as a situation where I meet with an event that pushes me to a limit which will either stop my development and life journey or which, through my grappling with it, will allow for my further growth and for me to reach the transcendent state of existence (*Existenz*).

He established four instances of such situations, namely, that I am always in a situation, whether I want it or not (the German term *Zufall* indicates the happenstance character of my being in a situation), that my life will always be a struggle (*Kampf*) and suffering (*Leiden*), that I cannot avoid guilt (*Schuld*), and that I (and other humans around me) must die (*Tod*) (Jaspers 1969: 178). They are part of our human condition, part and parcel of existence, inseparable, non-modifiable, and impossible to see beyond. Facing them, we fail, we break down, we founder, but also, we find the strength to go on and grow through and because of them. Jaspers says,

What is characteristic of boundary situations is that they reveal to us the position of a human being as caught up in antinomies. He can be broken by them, but he can also possess the strength to live and to hold on (Jaspers 1919: 280).²

Jaspers conceives of guilt as exactly such an unchangeable situation leading to a possible 'shipwreck' (*Scheitern*). Guilt is a perennial state of human existence. I may know what consequences my deeds in the world have, or there may be some which I cannot possibly conceive of, yet I am scared of them for the pure reason that I know that I caused them. "Every action has such unintended consequences" (Jaspers 1919: 55)³. From this arises my feeling of guilt (Jaspers 1969: 215). In other words, "between action and non-action, and in action between the willed and unavoidable, tossing and turning to and fro, man cannot avoid guilt in any sense" (Jaspers 1919: 274).⁴

What is important, apart from the unavoidable fear of the consequences of my deeds, is how I react to the inevitable guilt. Jaspers distinguishes between the following:

1. First, consciously accepting the consequences of my deeds even if I was not volitionally engaged in making them happen – thus, for a responsible person, being in a boundary situation is therefore tantamount to "a man's readiness to take the guilt upon himself" (Jaspers 1969: 217), thus bearing the consequences and being accountable.
2. Secondly, equally consciously making a choice wishing for certain negative consequences. While it is not stated clearly, it is obvious that the consequences Jaspers mentions are negative for the other human being. This is more clearly stated in *Psychologie der Weltanschauungen* ("an unscrupulous offender") than in *Philosophy*. In this instance, I am, according to Jaspers, unprincipled (Jaspers 1969: 217).
3. Or third, I become passive and indifferent but then, "I am guilty of the consequence of my inaction" (Jaspers 1969: 216).
4. Finally, there is a possibility of a complete denial of guilt.

The latter is an option to which, curiously, Jaspers gives very little attention and yet one which, as we shall see later, may be crucial to the explanation why, at certain instances, metaphysical guilt does not arise.

2 My translation.

3 My translation.

4 My translation.

But how does this description of guilt as boundary situation affect the understanding of metaphysical guilt? If I assume that Jaspers is consistent as a philosopher and if I assume that what he says about guilt in general applies to the classification of guilt in the *Question of German guilt*, then metaphysical guilt, too, is a boundary situation. Yet, while what we know of guilt as a boundary situation does tell us that guilt is part of our existence, it does not provide a response to the assertion made in the *Question of German guilt* that metaphysical guilt arises because we solidarise with the other human being in their suffering; nor does Jaspers clarify how it happens that one may remain guiltless in the face of having caused or having not prevented horrible events occurring to others.

The explanation of the former is provided below through the introduction of Honneth's concept of recognition. The clarification of the latter, on the other hand, lies in the lack of attention given to the option of completely extricating oneself from the seeming inevitability of guilt, i.e. to denial. In the case of defence against the boundary situation of metaphysical guilt, this denial takes the form of dehumanisation of the subjects of the committed atrocities, i.e., the treatment of a certain group of human beings as *per definitionem* inferior and thus less human or even non-human and thus not deserving of the treatment reserved for superior human beings, a position motivated for further in this paper.

Honneth, recognition, and misrecognition

Recognition

My application of Honneth's concept of recognition serves the purpose of complementing Jaspers's interpretation of guilt by providing the necessary account of the social nature of Man and, consequently, the capacity for inter-human solidarity. This follows from the understanding of self as a "socially instituted and temporally mediated reflexive process" with the subject "'turning back' upon themselves (...) to view themselves from 'outside' or, rather, as another would view them" (Crossley 1996: 55), as well as the view that "[s]ociety is conceived of not as 'social fact', but as an aggregate of socialised individuals" (Deranty 2005: 170).

From such a view on an individual and society, it follows that recognition is that which a person strives for in order to assert their humanity. Honneth (1995: 92ff) focuses on three modes of recognition, i.e. love, rights, and solidarity, which are related to social settings (Honneth 1995: 122) responsible, in turn, for self-relations. The relationships can be very briefly summarised as follows: Love is the source of emotional support which gives rise to self-confidence. Rights result from receiving cognitive respect, i.e. recognition of one's intellectual capacity,

and thus allow for self-respect. Finally, from the inter-human solidarity arises esteem granted to the other which, in turn, allows for self-respect to form.

Love for Honneth is, initially, a “symbiotic fusion” (Allen 2015: 313-314) that only later allows for the emergence of distinct entities, still dependent on love as recognition of their humanity (self-assurance). This understanding of love (and its opposite) allows, to my mind, for the empathy needed for Jaspers’s metaphysical guilt. The self-relations and their social settings are hierarchical in nature. Thus, as Thompson states, without love, the other two self-relations, i.e. “respect and esteem are impossible” (Thompson 2006: 20). Rights are “a stance of cognitive respect toward a larger group” (Presbey 2003: 543), a social recognition of membership of the group (also see Honneth 1995: 109-10, 119-20, 133). Finally, solidarity is the provision of social esteem. According to Presbey, “[i]n solidarity, one has a felt concern for what is unique in the other person (not just passive tolerance)” (Presbey 2003: 545). It is a shared idea of the value of the other person’s abilities, an idea responsible for status, esteem, and honour and, through dignity, leading to integrity (Honneth 1995: 171ff). It is esteem based not just in labour relations but situated “in the horizon of values of a particular culture” (Anderson 1995: xvii).

In terms of understanding what solidarity is, Jaspers and Honneth differ. Honneth places it within the realm of the particular, in the “cultural climate in which the acquisition of self-esteem has become broadly possible” as “some shared concern, interest, or value” (Anderson 1995: xvii). For Honneth, the state of societal solidarity only exists “to the extent to which every member of a society is in a position to esteem himself or herself” (Honneth 1995: 129). In this sense, Honneth’s conditions for solidarity are self-respect or self-esteem, based in the society. Therefore, implicitly, this view places the onus of showing solidarity on those who, by the turn of events and accompanying political power, do possess self-esteem. Honneth therefore, unlike Jaspers, allows for a situation in which inter-human solidarity cannot be experienced, leading to the phenomenon of disrespect and misrecognition.

For Jaspers, solidarity is a pan-human recognition of the value of another human being, thus allowing for metaphysical guilt (Jaspers 2000: 26). He does not assume any societal factors on which such inter-human solidarity is based and views it as an intrinsic human feature and its absence evokes in him not just disappointment but shock.

Also to be noted is that Honneth’s focus is on the party towards whom the deeds resulting in degradation are directed. In other words, he concentrates on the ‘recipient’ of atrocities and not the ‘perpetrator’. This is the person who, depending on whether or not they receive love, respect, and esteem from others,

will be either granted or denied the possibility of development and growth of their own self-confidence, self-respect, and self-esteem. For Honneth, "the experience of being disrespected carries with it the danger of an injury that can bring the identity of the person as a whole to the point of collapse" (Honneth 1995: 131-132). Thus, he identifies with the oppressed and hurt.

Jaspers, on the other hand, takes the standpoint of either the direct perpetrator or the inactive bystander. He focuses on the party who should be experiencing guilt. The reasons for guilt may vary. The person may have violated the other party, committed atrocities, or in any other way actively participated in deeds leading to the humiliation or denigration of other human beings, or simply refrained from action which could have prevented the wrongful deeds. In this sense, Jaspers's focus is on the perpetrator (in all the ways mentioned above), on the executor of the deeds or 'non-deeds' in the case of abstaining from action, as the main subject of enquiry. He concentrates on the 'experiencer' of guilt. The executor (in other words, the oppressor, the persecutor, tyrant, despot, or bully) takes away not the need for recognition, but recognition itself. She not only stands in the way to recognition and actively prohibits another person's reaching of recognition. She actually engages in activities which remove recognition, in either of the understandings shown above, from me⁵.

Regardless of these differences in focus, the concept of recognition is, in particular when it refers to solidarity, an explanation of the social source of Jaspers's metaphysical guilt, thus allowing for further exploitation of the one option regarding guilt which Jaspers seems to gloss over, i.e. denial (Jaspers 1969: 216). This is in particular enabled by Honneth's discussion of misrecognition.

Misrecognition

While Honneth's theory of recognition provides an explanation of the origin of metaphysical guilt, it is the opposite of recognition, i.e. misrecognition, which opens an avenue into understanding why, despite the existence of inter-human solidarity, some humans do not experience metaphysical guilt despite having committed or witnessed deeds that should induce such guilt.

5 There is another aspect to this, viz. that the 'taking away' of recognition may be considered recognition as well. A connection could be made to existentialist psychological theories such as Victor Frankl's logotherapy (Frankl 1984) which advocate viewing any experience as 'experience' of me as a human being on my path to discovering life's meaning – and, which Frankl does not say but which his writings imply – the recognition of a human being in me by my oppressor in the act of oppression.

In Honneth's own words, from this concept of recognition, "an intersubjectivist concept of the person emerges, in which the possibility of an undistorted relation to oneself proves to be dependent on three forms of recognition: love, rights, and esteem" (1995: 1). However, "there are – corresponding to the three forms of recognition – three forms of experience of disrespect" (Honneth 1995: 2). Any deformation of the three forms of recognition leads to their equivalent three forms of disrespect, or "denial of recognition" (Honneth 1995: 131). These three types of social misrecognition, viz. humiliation, denigration, and indifference lead to self-hatred, lack of self-respect, and lack of self-esteem. In this sense, misrecognition, through its effect on self-relations, influences the person's "agentic capacities" (Laitinen 2009: 16). In this way, Honneth's forms of social misrecognition provide for a link between Jaspers's metaphysical guilt, the possibility of its non-existence understood as denial, and dehumanisation, a concept some refer to as a defence mechanism (see Bandura et al. 1975: 255, Haslam et al. 2007: 409-410, Lammers and Stapel 2010: 115, and Waytz and Schroeder 2014: 252).

Dehumanisation

In order to fully appreciate dehumanisation as a defence mechanism against guilt, one needs to understand what it was that Jaspers witnessed between 1933 (Hitler's ascent to power) and 1946 (the end of the Nuremberg Trials). What he saw was the rise of a political system whose leaders coldly planned and executed mass enslavement and extermination of those humans whom they considered not human enough to live and share the world with *das Herrenvolk* (the 'race of masters') i.e. the *Untermenschen*, such as Jews, Gypsies, Slavs, etc. He also saw how the ideology of racial hierarchy was implanted in people by specific vocabulary use and how it made people desensitised to the horrors such as concentration camps, medical experiments on people, and gas chambers (Bruneau & Kteily 2017: 1).

It also helps us to understand Jaspers's attitude to guilt, knowing that, for him, philosophy is not a system to be studied but rather a path on which one ventures in the search of not only universal truths but also one's own growth and fulfilment. He says,

I consider the person engaged in philosophizing inseparable from his philosophical thought. The philosophizing person, his basic experience, his actions, his world, ... the forces which speak through him, cannot be disregarded when one accompanies him in his thoughts. (Jaspers 1957: 39)

Considering his assumption that every human being is on such a path, it is not surprising that throughout the *Question of German guilt* Jaspers's tone is one not just of shock and surprise at the committed atrocities. It is a tone of horror and disbelief that philosophising human beings, on their path to Transcendence, could commit such deeds. One can almost hear him scream: You must feel guilty, you cannot not feel guilty! How could you do this? How can you be so cold?

So, how could they? The use of language of derision and ridicule aimed at the 'enemy', whoever they may have been, is not new. Demeaning and belittling is a technique applied throughout centuries. Ape-like metaphors have been in use at least since the first contact of European travellers with other peoples and concepts of a 'continuum' on which humans, ape-like beings, and simians can be placed were then suggested (Goff et al. 2008: 292-293, Haslam 2006: 86). But the study of this age-old phenomenon did not start until well after World War II, and it is then that a name was given to it, dehumanisation. The milder forms of dehumanisation that exist are usually referred to as infrahumanisation. Yet, dehumanisation is mostly linked to conflicts leading to genocide (Haslam 2006: 253, Haslam 2014: 49, Smith 2016: 416, Waytz and Schroeder 2014: 251).

Dehumanisation is defined as "a mechanism that imposes degrading attributes on both individuals and entire groups for purposes of massive group destruction, the defining feature of genocide" (Hagan and Raymond-Richmond: 2008: 877), thus becoming "one way in which moral self-sanctions are selectively disengaged" (Haslam 2006: 254; see also Bandura et al. 1975: 255 and Bruneau and Kteily 2017: 2). It is viewed as "denial (...) of the humanity of a person or persons" (Oliver 2011: 86) and "*the perception and/or belief that another person (or group) is relatively less human than the self (or ingroup)*" (Hodson et al. 2014: 87). It ranges from "viewing them (...) as 'subhuman' or 'bad human' (...) to viewing them as nonhuman, as though they were inanimate items or dispensable supplies" (Bernard et al. 2003: 64). As such, their maltreatment or even their destruction may be carried out or acquiesced in with relative freedom from the restraints of conscience or feeling of brotherhood (Bernard et al. 2003: 64).

Thus, if the definition of dehumanisation is, in its minimal form, presented as the denial of humanness to others (or what Honneth would have to understand as lack of recognition or misrecognition) it is prudent now to define what humanness is, in order to understand the denial of humanity occurring in the act/process of dehumanisation. So, what does it mean to be human? Kelman (1973) understands it as being "included in the moral compass that governs human relationships". This means "accord[ing] [them] identity and community" closely linked with "agency" and "communion" (a similarity between Kelman's definition and the thought of Honneth is to be noted) or viewing a person as "individual, independent

and distinguishable from others”, entitled to their own choices, goals and views, capable of making choices, and entitled to live his or her own life on the basis of his or her own goals and values. This also means being “part of an interconnected network of individuals who care for each other, who recognize each other’s individuality, and who respect each other’s rights” (Kelman 1973: 48–49).

When the denial of humanity, defined as above, happens, people “lose the capacity to evoke compassion and moral emotions, and may be treated as means toward vicious ends” (Haslam 2006: 254; also see Kelman 1973: 48–49, and Waytz and Schroeder 2014: 256). In a statement that sounds like a response to Jaspers, Haslam and Loughnan (2014: 401) describe dehumanisation as “the most striking violation of our belief in a common humanity: our Enlightenment assumption that we are all essentially one and the same” (Haslam and Loughnan 2014: 401).

Thus, dehumanisation may manifest itself as treating others as either animals or objects/machines (Haslam 2014: 50). They are presented as subhuman, with vocabulary such as vermin, ape, cockroach, dog, pig, rat, parasite, or savage being used (Waytz and Schroeder 2014: 254, Costello and Hodson 2009: 3; also see Haslam 2014: 49 and Goff et al. 2008: 292). This creates images of people who are unintelligent, devoid of morals, intellectually and culturally backward, criminal, oversexed, violent, resistant to pain, and lacking self-control (Haslam 2006: 113). Likewise, terms such as pieces (a transport of Jews) (Lammers and Stapel 2010: 113), puppets, or rags (dead Jewish bodies) (Oliver 2001: 89–90) have been used. This points to the limitation of the intrinsic value of a human being while the instrumental value increases (Smith 2016: 424).

People dehumanise others for a variety of reasons. The dehumanising behaviour is explained as a type of defence mechanism which “draws (...) on other well-known defenses, including unconscious denial, repression, depersonalization, isolation of affect, and comparatmentalization (...)” (Bernard et al. 2003: 64). It is used to protect the person against the stress encountered while undergoing an inner conflict since the torture or killing of others “may be carried out or acquiesced in with relative freedom from the restraints of conscience or feeling of brotherhood”, the very brotherhood Jaspers so relies on (Bernard et al. 2003: 64). In other words, “[d]ehumanization is one of several means by which inhibitions against harming others are overridden” (Smith 2016: 426). Put bluntly, it is easier to be cruel to somebody considered non- or sub-human (Haslam et al. 2007; see also Bandura et al. 1975: 255, Lammers and Stapel 2010: 113, Waytz and Schroeder 2014: 252, and Oliver 2001: 3). Another way to diminish guilty feelings is by “misrepresenting the consequences of actions” (Bandura et al. 1975: 255). It feels morally less reproachful if the object of maltreatment cannot feel it (is an animal or a thing) or if the results of actions are not considered very harmful.

Smith (2016: 416) assumes it is the diminishing of the moral status of the victim that matters when dehumanisation occurs. But, the universalisation of metaphysical guilt based on morality, implicit in Jaspers, cannot work unless recognition is based upon not just rights, but also love as distinguished from indifference (Waytz and Schroeder 2014: 251) and solidarity.

Conclusion

It is obvious that, for Jaspers, who sees in every human being a philosophising being on the path to Transcendence, it is unnecessary to go into explaining what mechanisms, exactly, are at play when avoiding guilt is at stake. This paper fills this explanatory gap.

This is despite an objection to theories of recognition such as Honneth's raised by Oliver (2001: 5) who claims that these are based on the assumption of domination of subjects and antagonism as the source of this subjectivity, thus disabling the dialogical possibility between subjects and the dominated objects. However, from what I have pointed out in the section on misrecognition, this objection, while possibly valid when considering the Hegelian Master-Slave antagonism, falls short when launched against Honneth (1995). Much as his theory has its origin in Hegelian concepts, Honneth (1995) adopts a view grounded in recognition understood as a co-existence of love, rights, and solidarity, thus moving beyond the pure Master-Slave antagonism.

Thus, I can conclude that dehumanisation, as a defence mechanism based in, among others, denial, the possible reaction to guilt which Jaspers as good as dismisses, is a theory which, coupled with Honneth's theory of recognition, complements Jaspers's theory of guilt. Dehumanisation is "advantageous" (Smith 2016: 425) to achieving goals, such as, for example, the Nazi *Drang nach Osten* (drive to the East) in order to create *Lebensraum* (living space) for the race of masters. To sum up, dehumanisation is a defence mechanism in order not to feel the 'pain' of guilt. Thus, to answer the imagined horror cry of Jaspers's in the first part of my paper – that's how they 'could'!

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