Lost Worlds: Evil, Genocide and the Limits of Recognition

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Over the past decade ever-increasing public, political and scholarly attention has focused on the theme of evil and its moral and political manifestations. Evocations of evil have been associated particularly with global terrorism (often in overtly racialized terms) (see Wieviorka 2012), yet this attention has also generated wider questions about the seemingly enigmatic nature of, and the boundaries between, right and wrong in a turbulent global environment beset as much by confusion, uncertainty and conflict as by integration, interdependence and cooperation (Hayden 2009; Jeffery 2008; Vetlesen 2005). During the same period similarly increasing attention has been devoted to theories of recognition from scholars working on issues within international politics. A crucial insight of this growing body of work is that recognition is central to the dynamics of social interaction and conflict from the interpersonal to the international, and is equally fundamental to local and global processes of how we experience moral injury within the legal, political and economic, as well as cultural spheres (Burns and Thompson 2013; Weber and Berger 2009).

Despite the enhanced interest in evil and in recognition from many quarters, the debates surrounding both have failed to generate a common conceptual ground from which efforts at understanding the worst of human wrongdoing might be based. In this chapter, I explore the possibility of formulating linkages between recognition and the problem of political evil by paying particular attention to the world, rather than the self or the other. The main point of departure for this project revolves around distinguishing between evil and non-evil harms, given a shift in emphasis from dyadic interpersonal relationships to triadic intermediations with the worldly contexts that enable recognition. The chapter proceeds in three sections. In the first section, I examine some of the key

features of contemporary recognition frameworks that attempt to make sense of human vulnerability and harm, and outline how these frameworks, in contrast to Hegel's philosophy, stop short of the phenomenon of evil. In the second section, I move on to discuss how Hegel's insight into evil as the annihilation or 'voiding' of a shared world at the limits of recognition opens up an alternative paradigm, informed by Hannah Arendt's thinking, that moves recognition outward towards the third term of a common world. I finish, in the third section, by considering some of the ways that genocide can be said to constitute a special type of harm, appropriately considered evil, which aims at and results in the irretrievable loss of plural human worlds.

Recognition and its limits: From harm to evil

Human vulnerability and the problem of harm have been ascendant in recent international political thought. The influential work of Andrew Linklater is illustrative of the turn to vulnerability and harm. Although Linklater treats the existence of a principle to avoid serious mental and physical harm as a given of every functioning society and thus as possessing transnational if not universal recognition, different contexts and periods offer competing outlooks on how to define and respond to unjustifiable harm. On the one hand, he acknowledges that no single *a priori* answer to the question of harm is possible. Yet Linklater (2011: 261) also claims that a transculturally shared moral point of view can be attained through the dialogical 'development of universal structures of consciousness with significant cosmopolitan potential'. This moral point of view is oriented towards the fact of 'the body and its vulnerabilities' (Linklater 2011: 106). While disavowing rationalist forms of morality, Linklater (2011: 107–8) believes that increasing awareness of the shared vulnerabilities of the human condition has the potential to nourish a form of universal normativity that opposes unnecessary cruelty, suffering, humiliation, degradation and injury. Examples of this universal normativity include 'cosmopolitan harm conventions', frequently enshrined in the language of human rights, which proscribe reprehensible harmful behaviour such as torture, slavery and genocide.

The current conversation about vulnerability and harm is shaped by a variety of theoretical approaches that repeatedly cast harm, sometimes explicitly and sometimes implicitly, as a problem of recognition (see Beattie and Schick 2013; Clark 2013). Whether done for reasons of race, gender, religion, ethnicity or sexuality, or because of political beliefs, class status or social membership, or

simply due to negligence and indifference, one feature common to the diverse work in the turn to vulnerability and harm is the belief that serious harm is an affliction arising from, or connected with, the failure to acknowledge, not so much the pain and suffering of other human beings, as those other human beings themselves. Recognition of harm is possible only on the basis of the recognition of other human beings who are vulnerable to harm (Turner 2006: 54). Emerging from the Hegelian tradition, contemporary recognition theory also argues that identity and self-realization are premised on the recognition that others give to individuals and groups, and therefore that constraints on mutual recognition have numerous deleterious ethical and political effects. As Charles Taylor (1994: 1) puts it, the denial of recognition 'can inflict harm, can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being'.

For Axel Honneth and Nancy Fraser, this focus on the harms that misrecognition can inflict on vulnerable others appears especially useful to a transcultural or global account of justice, calling on us to concern ourselves with the fates of others through the deeply relational view of struggles for recognition against unjust forms of exclusion, assimilation and subordination. On this view the harms of misrecognition are not simply 'applied' to pre-existing autonomous subjects but, since they are relational modes of deprivation, extend into the very constitution of embodied subjects, both individuals and groups. In their respective writings, Honneth and Fraser call for regarding 'each other reciprocally as vulnerable and threatened beings' (Anderson and Honneth 2005; Honneth 1995: 48). Both Honneth and Fraser offer an array of examples to support their claims that misrecognition is at the root of a seemingly diffuse set of harms ranging from injustice, degradation and disrespect, to inequality, insult and injury (Fraser and Honneth 2003). Honneth (1995: 131ff.; also see Honneth 2007) writes that asymmetric relations of misrecognition foster social, economic and political inequalities that violate self-confidence, self-respect and self-esteem, thereby generating moral experiences of humiliation within processes of identity-formation and self-realization. Fraser (2008a, 2008b) cites many instances of the intertwining of forms of misrecognition predicated on racial, national, sexual and gender status orders and forms of exclusion through maldistribution and socio-economic inequalities.

When theorists today turn to the problem of harm to address contemporary international or global politics, then, they tap into the tradition of recognition. At the same time, another common feature of efforts to specify ethico-political responses suited to shared human vulnerability is that the proliferation of harm talk has neglected to wrestle squarely with the question of evil. For instance,

Linklater (2011: 42), citing the *Oxford English Dictionary*, notes that the idea of evil is central to defining harm, but calls the idea ‘notoriously complex’ and does not address it further throughout the remainder of his analysis of harm. Honneth (2009) refers to suffering and injustice as ‘social and moral evils’ several times in *Pathologies of Reason*, but does not elaborate there and appears not to use the term elsewhere in his writings. Fraser (2013) refers to dominance and subordination as ‘evil’ in *The Fortunes of Feminism*, but I can find no other instances of this in her work.

While the Hegelian influences are undeniable in these strands of thought, recent inquiries into vulnerability and harm also represent something of a contraction of conceptual and political ambitions from Hegel’s own phenomenological affirmation of evil as a symptom of radical non-recognition. Undoubtedly the problem of harm today takes its bearings from a very different set of conditions than those of Hegel’s own time. Yet I suggest that there is still more at issue than injustice, inequality, humiliation and disrespect within the spectrum of harms that arise from the denial of recognition. Insofar as radical non-recognition is based upon the deliberate quality of attempting to annihilate others from a shared moral or political realm, it also offends against the human condition at the ontological level of the world. Such annihilation crosses a threshold between misrecognition that is harmful and non-recognition that is evil. It is true that Hegel’s thought is greatly limited by the suspect metaphysics of the dialectic. Yet if read in conversation with contemporary advocates of the turn to vulnerability and harm, his phenomenological insights alert us to the profound experience of evil that can be wrought by radical non-recognition and gives reason to believe that the question of evil is of great importance, even as he mistakenly subsumes that phenomenon under the force of Providence.

The phenomenon of evil appears in several different registers across Hegel’s philosophy. At the most abstract level, evil appears under the general concept of the negative as the dialectically inseparable contrary to the category of the positive. Evil is manifest in the very process of reality as the negation of the good. World history – the ‘slaughter-bench at which the happiness of peoples, the wisdom of States, and the virtue of individuals have been victimized’ (Hegel 2004: 21) – unfolds in large part through disease, disasters, massacre, slavery, war and other seemingly unintelligible atrocities that appear to overwhelm the beautiful, the good and the true. Yet Hegel (1975: §35) also asserts that evil exists only as a moment within the dialectical movement of the Absolute, which reaches its completeness through the reconciliation of good and evil in the totality, rationality and necessity of the teleological self-becoming of Spirit,

and therefore in a superior positivity. Herein lies Hegel's (in)famous speculative amelioration of the reality of evil in human history, insofar as evil is regarded as the destructive yet necessary moments that fuel the motor of historical progress. In the teleological self-becoming of Spirit, Hegel (2004: 15) holds, reason must confront the negativity of evil in history 'so that the ill that is found in the World may be comprehended, and the thinking Spirit reconciled with the fact of the existence of evil'.

While Hegel's theodical philosophy of history arguably dissolves the full significance of human evil into a kind of 'collateral' misfortune that guarantees reason's inevitable and ultimately progressive triumph,¹ his dubious metaphysics is neither his last nor best word on the phenomenon of evil. Hegel offers a phenomenologically richer and politically deeper insight into the experience of evil on the more concrete intersubjective register. Subjectively, human evil arises through a kind of deformation in the transition from morality (*Moralität*) to ethical life (*Sittlichkeit*). Morality coincides with the actualization of self-consciousness, according to Hegel, insofar as the developmental stage of being conscious of oneself as an individual, and therefore as existing in relation to other free selves, corresponds to the standpoint of the self as a person, that is, an agent that seeks to actualize itself through its own volition and action. Ordinarily, the moral self aims to do what is good in the process of reconciling his or her particular will with the universal implied in the mutual recognition between persons (Hegel 1977: 394). Yet the limitation of morality, in Hegel's view, is that while the subjective concern with one's own volition, actions and the consequences of those actions can accentuate the value of individual freedom, conscience and responsibility, it can also pass over into an egoistic concern with one's desires and interests to the detriment of others. In its most aberrant forms, subjectivism can lead not only to the criminal violation of the rights of others but, at the extreme, to the nullification of the will of all others as moral agents in their own right. Moral evil, in other words, arises from the actions of a subject that elevates his or her own private will to the status of the universal, thereby assuming a kind of radical conviction that absolute self-interest should function as the general norm determining one's choices and actions (Hegel 1967: §139).

Lesser forms of egoistic hypocrisy, immorality and crime are distinguished from evil inasmuch as they are committed in light of an awareness of the distinction between what is morally right and wrong, while evil acts destroy this distinction by equating the good with any conduct whatsoever that is subjectively willed (Hegel 1967: §140). Subjectively speaking, to be evil is to act on the conviction that nothing that one does can in fact be evil (or even wrong),

and hence one can be completely indifferent to the freedom and integrity of others.² When transferred into the intersubjective realm of ethical life, where the moral agent is meant to assume the character of a concretely situated being for whom reciprocity and accountability facilitate the realization of freedom in relation to others and a system of shared social institutions, evil becomes not only a moral but a political phenomenon as well. Hegel describes how the negativity of a self-consciousness that regards itself as absolute ‘pure inwardness’ and refuses to acknowledge the status of others, to the point of reducing others to non-being on both an individual and collective level, leads to radical non-recognition. Evil in this sense amounts to a negation of particular others from one’s social world, a world that is then defined by its rigid non-relation (or absolute opposition) to those others who are perceived as if they should not be (Hegel 2004: Introduction; Hegel 1967: §341–60). In political terms, what should be a ‘unified’ social world is hollowed out by evil that instead ‘substitutes a void’ (Hegel 1967: §140). Evil, then, is not simply indifference towards others (which may or may not harm them), nor is it a struggle resulting in the submission of the other (which may dominate and injure but not necessarily destroy), but it is the ‘voiding’ – literally, the annihilation to non-existence – of a *shared world* that should be both the constitutive ground and the affirmative outcome of mutual recognition.

World: The third term of recognition

Hegel gestures towards the possible political significance of evil as world annihilation but does not fully conceptualize this dynamic, and the more recent variants of recognition theory inspired by Hegel seem to offer little help in this regard. This underdeveloped but tantalizing aspect of his phenomenology of ‘voiding’ a shared world of recognition is deserving of much greater attention, however. What is needed is further explication of how world annihilation is politically salient for our understanding of evil. How can we make sense of this claim? Hannah Arendt’s work offers the most sustained effort to theorize the value of the concept of ‘world’, formulated as a substantive noun, for contemporary politics. Specifically, she elaborates a phenomenologically inflected account of world that she believes is indispensable to a pluralist conception of political existence. In doing so, she responds to the post-Hegelian invitation to reimagine the experience of evil while trying to show that particular ways of withdrawing recognition from others are sociopolitically dependent on or mediated by worlds

of human coexistence possessing distinctive ontological characteristics. Arendt's relationship to current variants of recognition theory is contentious (see Markell 2003). While recognition is typically cast as a matter of undistorted cognition of the particular socially embedded identities carried by self and other, Arendt takes a dim view of any theoretical subordination of the political to identity, above all when identity is reified in terms of certain inherent (biological, racial, national, sexual) qualities. Alternatively, recognition is formulated as a normative standard of the requirements of justice, but again Arendt is notoriously dismissive of any view that equates politics with the implementation of (deductively derived) theories of justice. At the same time, however, Arendt (2004: 380) provides a powerful analysis of the plight of stateless persons that exposes the hollowness of human rights guarantees based on 'the abstract nakedness of being nothing but human', that is, on the presumption of an ahistorical human essence that meaningfully persists independently of public recognition. Arendt's notion of the 'right to have rights' thus presupposes a process of extending mutual recognition as constitutive of legal personality and political equality, one that entails political struggle with others and yet whose precariousness can ensure nothing permanently (Arendt 2004: 381–3). More than that, for Arendt mutual recognition cannot take place in isolation from a common and factual reality, that is, a common world.

Arendt's account of world as the ground of recognition and hence of political coexistence provides us, I suggest, with yet another way to grasp not merely vulnerability and harm but, further, evil as the obliteration of a common world altogether. But how does she interpret 'world', and how exactly can it help us both to better understand evil and to effectively address the limits of recognition? It is the phenomenological-existential emphasis on how world is central to human sociality that leads Arendt to think that recognition should focus our attention not so much on identity as on the conditions of a shared world fit for human habitation. For Husserl, 'world' refers to the perceptual circuit of intentional consciousness to meaning. World is shaped by perceptual phenomena in the sense that the apprehension of objects as they appear in experience is synonymous with the apprehension of meaning. The subject lives in an intersubjective 'lifeworld' (*Lebenswelt*) of historically and culturally preconstituted meanings which serve as an abiding 'horizon' for all knowledge, interpretation and action (Husserl 1970: 49–50, 142). As Husserl suggests, the interpersonal lifeworld is linked intimately to what makes common experience and its historical transmission possible. This dimension of Husserlian phenomenology is developed by Heidegger, even though the latter distances his own understanding of world

from the investigation of consciousness and situates it instead in relation to the question of Being. Heidegger (1982: 297) emphasizes that 'self and the world belong together...not two beings, like subject and object', but 'the unity of Being-in-the-world'. Human being (or *Dasein*) 'primordially' encounters the world instrumentally, as a totality of 'equipment' and conditions for practical engagement, but the intimacy that characterizes the unity of self and world also manifests as the horizon of all possible meaning and action and therefore of taking care (*Sorge*) of the world. The binding power of being-in-the-world is, for Heidegger of course, language, which belongs elementally to the world as a 'sign-structure' or 'referential totality' that discloses the meaningful experience of 'any entity whatsoever' (Heidegger 1962: 49–51, §17).

The complex intertwining of phenomenal reality, the interpersonal and world is elevated to a position of much greater political import in the work of Arendt. There are three main elements to Arendt's account of *world as the space of public appearance*: the guiding vision of human artifice, the relationship between plurality and identity, and the disjunctive synthesis between people (individually and collectively). The vision of human artifice Arendt advances resonates strongly with the classical conception of the public realm. The concept of world she advocates is characterized by practical activities that build and shape the objective conditions, as distinguished from the natural environment, in which humans live – through instrumental praxes such as labour and work, which produce objects for consumption as well as endow the social structure with relative durability and stability, but also through the initiation of freely undertaken action that begins something new whose outcome is uncertain and unpredictable. In this way, goods are produced for consumption, artefacts (cultural, aesthetic, technological, educational) are invented that confer relative durability and stability on the social fabric, and associative practices and institutions based on mutual respect and equality are created that cultivate opportunities for collective interaction and foster diverse opinions about the character of public coexistence (Arendt 1958: 7–11, 22–33). While all three activities are interdependent, Arendt believes it is through action that a world acquires properly human significance and reality since it manifests a public, and paradigmatically political, aspect of togetherness that no other activity can give it.

It is with reference to this public character of world that the interplay of plurality and identity appears. Arendt's concept of world is pluralist in the dual sense that all phenomena appear through the plurality of perspectives that human beings take on a world, and that human beings appear to one another as a plurality of worldly, situated beings. Arendt (1958: 7) points out, on the

one hand, 'that men, not Man, live on the earth and inhabit the world'; and on the other hand, that 'the reality of the public realm relies on the simultaneous presence of innumerable perspectives and aspects in which the common world presents itself' (1958: 57). The sense of reality is therefore intersubjectively grounded in a shared world of appearances in which our different standpoints on the 'sum total of aspects' presented by the same object are composed by taking on board the views and interests of others. Similarly, identity is intertwined with the manner in which we reveal the distinctiveness or uniqueness of 'who' rather than 'what' we are through the exchange of words and deeds with and amongst others in a world (1958: 179). A world is 'where I appear to others as others appear to me,' Arendt (1958: 177) argues, and in so doing we *become recognizable*; put differently, the achievement of identity and the ability to appear before others are co-constitutive.³ As Jacques Taminiaux (1997: 83) remarks, belonging to and sharing a world with others is the condition that permits a life to be the life of 'someone'. Lastly, with respect to a world's disjunctive synthesis, insofar as it publicly manifests and can be perceived and talked about by all from the myriad perspectives taken upon its appearance, a world serves as an 'in-between' that both connects together and differentiates plural persons. As an intermediary space that arises between people (*inter-est*), a world serves as a kind of phenomenal medium of equilibrium in which people recognize each other simultaneously as worthy of equality, and thus of deserving to appear in public, and also as separate and unique, since too much intimacy or closeness destroys (respect for) worldly plurality (Arendt 1958: 243; 1994: 406).

In her 'Introduction into Politics,' Arendt (2005: 175) makes the controversial claim that '[s]trictly speaking, politics is not so much about human beings as it is about the world that comes into being between them and endures beyond them.' Arendt's point introduces a shift in perspective that both calls into question the conventional dyadic limits of recognition and offers a way to understand the phenomenon of political evil by bringing into view the centrality of world. With this shift in perspective, we can see that a world is an intermediary third dimension that is irreducible to the persons who relate through and to it (Arendt 1968: 4). We can understand a world, in political terms, as a precondition for interpersonal recognition. It is the site, as it were, where recognition is situated. As Taminiaux (1997: 84) notes, 'there must be a world before the life of someone may appear'. World-building establishes a meaningful public context for recognition, and by treating world as having the same ontological status as self and other, existing as a definite and historically specific ensemble of relations between different persons, we place recognition within a triad of self-world-

other. Theorists such as Honneth and Fraser tend to suppose the dyadic presence of one human being to another, which overlooks the world as intermediary third dimension. Recognition, then, is distinguished not only by reciprocity between plural persons but by the presence of an *acknowledged* common world, a third, shared object of concern which serves as the site of political coexistence around which persons are constituted together.

Placing the worldly intermediary at the centre of recognition likewise highlights that worlds are susceptible to loss and even obliteration. Because world is synonymous with human artifice it does not possess a natural permanence (even though it is undeniably bound up with the natural environment). Consisting of both tangible and intangible elements – objects, customs, languages, concepts, institutions, memories, practices, experiences, habits, beliefs, symbols, monuments, narratives and traditions – worlds accumulate a density over time and are remade only through various modes of socio-historical transmission and inheritance (Pitkin 1998: 303 n.93). A world is the collective repository of a past, the meaningful condition of a present and the potential expression of a future. Indeed, if a world is to acquire the quality of publicity then it must ‘survive the coming and going of the generations’ (Arendt 1958: 55). The ability to act within and upon a world, in other words, turns upon there being a common world to begin with. This insight puts into a different light the contemporary recognition account of vulnerability and harm, inasmuch as every world, being a uniquely constructed artifice, is itself vulnerable by definition. And in emphasizing that the phenomenal world is the decisive context for the very possibility of mutual recognition, we better illuminate why radical non-recognition, which casts into the void those refused acknowledgement of sharing the common, corresponds to a sense of political evil as world-annihilation.

Genocide’s evil: World as missing link

In this section I want to elaborate how an understanding of world-annihilating violence can help us make sense of the distinctive evil of genocide. To do so, I first want to turn to a short, but telling, historical vignette. In 1876, the last ‘full-blooded’ Aboriginal Tasmanian, a woman named Truganini, died at the Oyster Cove Aboriginal Station. Of the many case studies of genocide amassed by Raphael Lemkin, the Polish jurist who first defined the term ‘genocide’, he found the plight of the Aboriginal Tasmanians to be particularly troubling.⁴ The Oyster Cove Aboriginal Station was simply the last in a line of internment

camps established by the colonial authorities for the purpose of resocializing the Aborigines into a 'civilized', European mode of existence: from their clothing, to their diet, housing, education, labour, family structure and religion, Aborigines were forbidden to partake in and reproduce the existential foundations of their distinctive worldly coexistence. When the British imperial government established its first permanent settlement on Tasmania in 1803, the precolonial Tasmanian communities had formed a rich and enduring society over a period of thousands of years. Approximately 5,000 Aborigines – representing nine tribes and more than fifty bands, two languages and multiple dialects, and diverse cultural practices – inhabited the island at the time of British settlement (Ryan 1996: 11–14), and they soon experienced numerous lethal and non-lethal efforts to destroy both them and their world. Between 1803 and 1818, more than half the Aboriginal population died from a combination of massacres committed by settlers and Royal Marines, and starvation caused by dispossession of their hunting grounds (Kiernan 2007: 265). By 1832, following a brief period of armed resistance against British military forces, only 300 Aborigines remained alive. Subsequent to the campaign of military 'pacification', the colonial government devised a plan to transplant the surviving Aborigines into a reserve – first on Flinders Island and then at Oyster Cove – in order to conduct a 'civilizing' experiment under the direction of the builder and missionary, George Augustus Robinson. Motivated not by genocidal intent but rather by a 'misguided kindness' to save the Tasmanians through assimilation (Lemkin 2005: 179), Robinson pursued the complete 'eradication of their beliefs, customs, and even identities' (Brantlinger 2003: 126). The Aborigines learned English and Christianity, adopted European names and dress, cut their hair, studied European trades and occupations, and women and girls were married to settlers. They also suffered severe mental illness, depression, apathy, alcoholism and disease amid the complete collapse of existing community relationships. Despite the absence of direct physical force against the Tasmanians during this period, by 1876, Lemkin (2005: 195) reports, they were 'civilized off the face of the earth'. Involuntarily placed in a position of being compelled to renounce ties to their land, to their language and culture, and to each other – indeed, forced even to deny their own historical reality, that is, their world as a shared repository of memory and experience – the Tasmanians ceased to be able to present themselves and their unique world for the acknowledgement of others. Here was a process of annihilation that utterly destroyed one world – effectively disintegrating the preconditions for a meaningful coexistence long before Truganini's death – and casually imposed another as if the first had never existed.

The civilizing extermination of the aboriginal Tasmanians, on the face of it, would seem to fit within the terms of the 1948 UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. British settler, religious and secular authorities collaborated with the explicit intent, at times at least, of destroying a distinct group. Yet beneath this surface simplicity, the annihilation of the Tasmanians exposes some deeper complexities and questions involved by introducing the concept of 'world' into the dynamic of non-recognition, since the extermination of the Aborigines enacted a relational process of destruction whose effects are irreducible to a singular intended object of harm.

My goal here is not to offer a comprehensive theory of genocide that would attempt to explain why it occurs, through which methods and what, if anything, can be done to prevent it. Rather I want to explore the meaning of the question of what makes genocide so morally and politically damaging that the ordinary language of injury and injustice fails to capture its severity and which therefore compels us to resort to the language of evil. What is generally overlooked in this regard, I want to suggest, is the way in which the idea and the reality of an enduring, sharable world becomes an object seriously compromised and even destroyed within the genocidal process.

The 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly as the official international commitment to 'liberate mankind from such an odious scourge', embodies the legal definition of genocide. But what exactly does this 'odious scourge' signify? How should we interpret, in other words, the broader meaning of genocidal annihilation as a form of political evil? Although the Genocide Convention defines, it does not conceptualize. In order to begin to make sense of these questions we should turn to the crucial work of the Polish jurist Raphael Lemkin.

Lemkin coined the neologism 'genocide' in his 1944 book, *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe*, and his conception is worth quoting at length:

By 'genocide' we mean the destruction of a nation or an ethnic group Generally speaking, genocide does not necessarily mean the immediate destruction of a nation, except when accomplished by mass killings of all members 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. The objectives 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. Genocide is directed against the national group as an entity, and the actions involved are directed against individuals, not in their individual capacity, but as members of the national group.... Genocide has two phases: one, destruction of the national pattern of the oppressed group; the other the imposition of the national pattern of the oppressor. This imposition, in turn, may be made upon the oppressed population which is allowed to remain, or upon the territory alone, after removal of the population and the colonization of the area by the oppressor's own nationals. (Lemkin 2008: 79; also see Lemkin 1946: 228)

As Lemkin (1947: 147) reiterated elsewhere, the first distinctive characteristic of the harm of genocide is that it is 'directed against groups, as such, with individuals selected for destruction only because they belong to these groups.' The notion that, first and foremost, groups are the victims of genocide was codified in the Genocide Convention, whose second article ascribes to genocide 'the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such'. Both Lemkin and the Convention make clear that genocide differs from wars of mass extermination and mass murder. What marks genocide as a distinctive harm is the effort to 'destroy' or 'annihilate' a group in its specificity. Neither Lemkin nor the Convention limit the term 'genocide' to directly *killing* members of a national, ethnic, racial or religious group, although killing may of course be one method by which destruction is pursued. As Lemkin stresses, a group might be destroyed by 'disintegrating' its existential foundations (culture, language, institutions, heritage, economy), and sections (b) to (e) of Article II of the Convention adopt a similar (though less expansive) view: causing mental and bodily harm, subjecting groups to destructive conditions, preventing births and forcibly transferring children are all forms of genocidal conduct. Importantly, the non-lethal attempt to destroy the existential foundations of a group is no less genocidal than direct killing. In addition, Lemkin and the Convention maintain that acts designed to destroy groups in part, as well as in whole, should be regarded as genocidal; destruction need not be total, nor directed at every group member, in order to threaten group annihilation. Despite continuing disputes about what shared features constitute a potential target group, as well as about which groups qualify as potential victims (delimited by the Convention to national, ethnic, racial and religious groups), the conception that genocide is a group-level harm – related to the special vulnerabilities of groups as such – is now deeply engrained in international law. This assumption is also widely reflected in the scholarly literature. Prominent definitions, for instance, describe the aim of genocide as the 'destruction of a collectivity' (Fein 1990: 24) and

the ‘destruction of civilian social groups’ (Shaw 2007: 154). Nonetheless, there remains much confusion about why group destruction counts as a moral-political harm; in other words, how should the special status of genocide’s wrongness, its distinctive evil, be understood?

The damage done by the evil of genocide has been understood in three primary ways. The first possibility emphasizes the collectivist dimension of harm. Under this conception the chief object of harm is the group to which individuals belong. As Steven P. Lee (2010: 341) observes, on ‘a collectivist account, there is intrinsic moral value in the group that is not reducible to the moral value of its members, and it is the harm to that moral value (or the intent to do that harm) that is the distinctive moral wrong of genocide’. On such an account, individuals are harmed only instrumentally, as a means to harm the group itself. The collectivist characterization of genocide as damaging groups as such relies on a notion of ‘groupness’ similar to Michael Walzer’s understanding of a ‘moral community’. Walzer (1977: 53–4) assigns moral value to ‘the reality of the common life’ within a community, which describes the ‘sum of things [its members] value most’, taken on its own. A ‘common life’ does not merely aggregate the rightful moral claims of its members, but adds to them in its own right. What this position brings to our attention is that genocide consists, at least in part, of an attack on the cohesive social relations of an antecedent group to which individuals belong and which they share in common.

Another formulation of genocidal harm characterizes genocide’s distinctive wrongness as harm to individuals who belong to a targeted group. This position does not square easily with the wide acceptance of Lemkin’s characterization of genocide as directed at groups as such. Yet some scholars are uncomfortable with the ontological problems of ‘groupness’, especially when groups are formulated as undifferentiated corporate entities whose moral standing transcends the accumulated interests or rights of their constituent members.⁵ Lon Fuller (1967: 117), for instance, cautioned that ‘we must not suppose that the “thing” [the group] is something more than the sum-total of its properties’, and, more recently, Larry May (2010: 7) warns that ‘groups do not have any value in themselves’. Instead, May contends, genocide is rightly said to target individuals because it destroys various forms of symbolic and material recognition of individual autonomy. Similarly, Claudia Card (2010: 237, 265–6) argues, genocide is reprehensible because it deprives individuals of their capacity to associate with others and acquire a socially recognized identity. Genocide therefore is a non-trivial harm to individuals insofar as individual dignity and moral standing are destroyed as a consequence of the forced loss of a group-based context for interpersonal recognition.

A third possibility claims that genocide damages humanity. This manner of characterizing the distinctive evil of genocide is familiar from the term ‘crime against humanity’ (although technically the legal violation of crime against humanity is broader than that of genocide, since it refers to a family of similar actions that nonetheless lack genocidal intent). Despite its familiarity, however, the term itself does not convey how humanity as a whole can be an object of moral harm. In response, two interpretations are most prevalent. The first interpretation is conceptualized through Kantian (or religious-spiritual) notions of intrinsic human dignity. On this reading, genocide violates ‘humanity in the person’ or the ‘high worth of humanity’ which is independent of, or at least surpasses, the moral standing of its members (understood either as individual persons or groups, or both) (see Kateb 2011; Lang 2005: 5–17; Murphy 1998). The second, empirical interpretation suggests that ‘humanity at large suffers’ from genocidal acts because the destruction of diverse cultures represents a loss to ‘the overall prosperity of humankind as a species’ (Macleod 2012: 201). This interpretation closely follows Lemkin’s own conception of the special moral wrong of genocide. For Lemkin, humanity exists as the collectivity of ‘world culture as a whole’, which is composed by and enriched through the historical contributions made to it by unique constituent cultures. When any group and its contributing culture is destroyed humanity itself is impoverished. ‘The world’, Lemkin (2008: 91) asserts, ‘represents only so much culture and intellectual vigour as are created by its component national groups.... The destruction of a nation, therefore, results in the loss of its future contributions to the world’. Lemkin’s thought here has been vital to genocide jurisprudence. The 2004 ‘Appeal Judgement’ in the case *Prosecutor v. Krstić* (ICTY 2004: §36), for instance, at the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia concludes: ‘Those who devise and implement genocide seek to deprive humanity of the manifold richness its nationalities, races, ethnicities and religions provide. This is a crime against all humankind, its harm being felt not only by the group targeted for destruction, but by all humanity’.

Yet there is a fourth possibility for describing genocidal harm as a distinctive type of moral-political evil which, however, has so far received scant attention. This is the destruction of a phenomenal world as a space of appearance which links us to others. I don’t mean to reject any of the three previous options, since I believe that each captures a plausible aspect of the destructive process of genocide. Nevertheless, one of the principal deficiencies of debate surrounding the question of the special damage wrought by genocide is the conviction that only one type of harm is most fundamental, and only this harm correctly denotes what is genuinely wrong with

genocide. Steven Lee (2010: 354) and Larry May (2010: 7) insist, for example, that the 'chief' objects of harm are the individual members of a group, while William Schabas (2009: 3–8) and Berel Lang (2005: 9) assert that the 'special' harm at the 'core' of genocide is committed only against groups. Similarly, according to Christopher Macleod (2012: 198), what is most distinctive of genocidal harm is that it 'primarily concerns' humanity itself. None of these characterizations of the objects of genocidal harm is incorrect, yet by themselves they are phenomenologically incomplete and normatively weakened by uncharitably assuming that only one type of harm counts as the sum total of what is truly wrong with genocide. To reduce the myriad objects targeted by genocide to a predetermined, context-transcendent account of a single proper harm is problematic not only because such a narrow commitment will inevitably result in exclusions and marginalizations, but also because it runs counter to the way that moral-political judgement of a particular case reflects interpretation from a particular perspective and according to the demands of the specific situation at hand.

Rather than regarding harm to individuals, harm to groups and harm to humanity as three mutually exclusive options, I take it that we should view them as three dimensions of a single, complex continuum of genocidal harm. For this reason such harms should not be compartmentalized abstractly, but instead should be seen as interrelated. If that is the case, an intermediary is required to tie together these various dimensions into a meaningful whole. That intermediary element, I suggest, is the third dimension of world. What is more, while persons and groups can still physically survive when faced with the loss of their distinctive and interwoven worldly conditions – such as their unique languages, links to particular territories, artistic endeavours, cultural symbols and ritual practices – by means of the destruction of such worldly conditions *themselves* an obliterating darkness settles down upon their meaningfully human existence. In annihilating a world, genocide cuts persons and groups off from the very 'public thing' that ensures the relative permanence and reality of existence shared with others.

There are several ways that the addition of world to our spectrum of the objects of genocidal harm supplements the conventional focus on individuals, groups or humanity, when thinking at the limits of recognition. First, while there are a number of theoretical accounts of the harm done to persons in genocide, they tend to overemphasize the ways that genocide is individualistically consequential. In many popular, media, and policy accounts, for instance, persons are instrumental to a moral calculus which quantifies the severity of the overall harm according to the greater number of individuals affected – this is the

familiar 'body count' approach (see Lackey 1986). On this account, genocide matters, or becomes recognizable, only if a sufficient number of individuals are maimed or killed. This framing not only treats the formative conditions underlying genocidal destruction as self-evident, but also obscures the larger contexts shaped by group relationships and the historical interactions and practices around which social worlds are formed. In doing so, it fails to provide an adequate role not only for reciprocal relations of recognition between self and others but also for the deep interplay between self, others and world.

In addition, affirming the phenomenal world as a mediating entity between personal 'I-thou' recognition and collective modes of 'we' recognition facilitates validating this milieu as a core existential foundation of a group while guarding against essentialist ontologies of 'what' a group 'is', such as when 'groupness' is defined in terms of national or racial 'essence'.⁶ Instead of searching for what supposedly is 'in' individuals, groups or humanity, we can instead look at the *recognizable* relationships 'between' them. While much of genocide jurisprudence and theory endorses the idea that genocide harms a previously existing people or community, there is no consensus as to what actually constitutes a group as such (and by extension, for some accounts, of those groups that 'count' as eligible for legal protection) (see ICTY 2004: §50, 'Partially Dissenting Opinion of Judge Shahabudden'). This has a knock-on effect of sowing confusion about how to conceptualize the non-physical, non-lethal destruction of a group. In this light, a worldly concept of group existence – one defined in terms of the relatively fluid web of relationships, beliefs, languages, customs, histories, institutions and shared experiences around which a group coheres rather than in terms of inherent characteristics – allows us to make sense of a peculiar kind of *malrecognition* perpetrated by genocidaires. Thus, many European Jews, Cambodian 'bourgeoisie' and Guatemalan 'communists', for example, may have existed in a meaningful social group only because of the types, intensities and meanings they themselves invested in their heterogeneous and mutable relationships with each other. Yet genocidaires tend to produce the very groups singled out for destruction, often imagining an immutable group into existence and assigning members to it, irrespective of the assigned members' own senses of identity, difference and relationship – even when no special affinity had previously obtained.⁷ This same fateful illusion has led to logical gymnastics within genocide jurisprudence as courts attempt to confine application of the Genocide Convention solely to the four 'protection eligible' groups enumerated on grounds of race, ethnicity, nationality and religion. They do so by relying upon a suspect anthropological metaphysic that rigidly separates supposedly 'stable' or 'objective' groups from

'mobile' or 'subjective' groups, with political and economic groups being the most controversially excluded from legal protection. Thus the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, for example, has held that 'objective' Tutsi ethnicity always trumped 'subjective' political identity in perpetrators' genocidal intent during the Rwandan genocide, even though ethnic identity and political identity were effectively merged as well as historically imposed in Rwanda. Yet the ICTR also held that 'half-caste' victims of mixed heritage, lacking an 'objectively' fixed race or ethnicity, also qualified as part of the protected group simply because they appeared to be Tutsi in the eyes of perpetrators.⁸

Finally, stressing the significance of the phenomenal world as a focal point of recognition helps to refine what it means to claim that genocide harms humanity. Specifically, it refers to harming two worldly conditions distinctive to human existence: on the one hand, to plurality as world-constituting and, on the other hand, to reality as world-affirming. In one sense, humanity refers more to what lies *between* plural persons and groups than to what lies *in* them. Humanity, in other words, is an emergent and provisional universal represented only through the plurality of its constituent groups exposed to the unique lives and views of others. The loss of humanity occurs whenever the attempt is made to purify or purge the common world, to produce another type of world untainted by plurality. But to describe humanity in terms of its constituent plurality means something else too. To say that plurality is the central attribute of the world's commonality indicates that our sense of reality is dependent upon a plurality of others to whom and with whom we appear in a shared world. The radical aversion to plurality embodied in genocide should also be understood, then, as an extreme hostility to reality, inasmuch as our sense of reality (both sensate and historical-political) is established only through the exchange of diverse perspectives on a common mediating world. That which cannot be *seen* and *spoken of* by others from at least one different standpoint becomes unreal or 'de-realized'. As Arendt (1958: 58) observes, 'the end of the common world has come when it is seen only under one aspect and is permitted to present itself in only one perspective'. Therefore, if a common world is forcibly 'cleansed' of plurality so too is the fragile fabric of reality rendered increasingly threadbare – to the point, in genocide, where the fantasy of a singular 'Man' annihilates any need for mutual recognition between 'men'. This in turn suggests that genocide should be understood both as a complete refusal to share a world with others and, further, as the tangible attempt to 'void' the reality of a common world in which *any of us* can appear in our variety and uniqueness. No greater evil can be inflicted upon the vulnerable human artifice that is a world.

Conclusion

As the specific case of the Tasmanian Aboriginals illustrates, this example of genocidal destruction reminds us that the problem of evil is tied up with the question of what it is either to *build* or to *annihilate* a world, and thus with particular ways of *acknowledging* or *denying* worlds. Here the perpetrators of genocide sought to find and destroy an other defined not only by skin tone, eye colour or facial features, but also by thoughts, convictions, ceremonies, rituals, narratives and memories carried precariously through time. The perpetrators understood themselves to be destroying something more than a group of individuals; they believed they were up against a world whose difference from their own was so complete that only one of these worlds could survive. For this reason the perpetrator's actions attacked not only individual lives but also the relational bonds of recognition that held together the Aboriginal world itself. In doing so, the common human world was emptied of some measure of plurality *and* reality at the same time.

As I have suggested, recognition is what moors us to one another as well as to a world, but without a world as an intermediary third dimension there would be no dyadic intersubjective recognition at all. Because a world is something both pre-given to, and made anew by human beings through their mutual recognition of *its* appearance between them, it can also be torn apart by the refusal to acknowledge some persons or groups as part of a world that is shared in common. The radical non-recognition to which Hegel gestures is a form of maldistinction that defines an absolute erasure of relations between those whose right to exist is acknowledged, and those whose right to exist, and therefore to be-together-with-others, to inhabit and manifest a world, is not. Keeping this in mind may help us better appreciate the anti-political character of genocide, which destroys the rich variety of plural worlds that serve as the sites and objects of humanizing recognition. Genocide is not simply a two-sided conflict between self and other, but a three-sided relationship of annihilation between self, world and other. Yet all too often, we grasp what is at stake in having a world only when the light of its reality has been extinguished. What I have hoped to show is that when we think about political evil, we need both to recognize the vulnerability of a world in all its plurality and to grapple more thoroughly with questions of the negation of the worldly in-between in which mutual recognition takes place and on which it depends.

Notes

- 1 Perhaps the most unrelenting critic of Hegel in this regard is Theodor Adorno (1973). In the words of Paul Ricoeur (2004: 58), 'the more the system prospers' in Hegel's philosophy of history, 'the more the victims are marginalized' to the point that 'the question of happiness and misfortune is abolished'. For more on how Hegel's philosophy of history 'finds sense inside evil itself', see Neiman (2002: 84–103).
- 2 On this point, Hegel might be read as prefiguring Arendt's notion of the 'banality of evil'. For Arendt (1963), this banality corresponds to 'thoughtlessness' which, rather than being immoral, is amoral insofar as it carries with it a complete lack of awareness of the rightness or wrongness of one's acts. Thoughtlessness thus stands behind an unshakeable belief that anything is permitted.
- 3 Cf. Arendt (1993: 154). To put a further gloss on this point, identity is the *acknowledged* (not 'essential') aspect of one's being – or more accurately the acknowledged aspects, since various aspects of our being – familial, social, ethnic, sexual, economic and so on – are recognized over time although not always in the same way or by the same persons, depending on how and when we reveal ourselves to others. Moreover, our identity may not necessarily become evident at the moment of appearance, but only in the indeterminate time that follows.
- 4 Lemkin spent nearly fifteen years working on a book on the world history of genocide, but it remained incomplete and unpublished at the time of his death in 1959. Lemkin's manuscript included the paper later published as 'Tasmania' (Lemkin 2005).
- 5 For detailed discussions of groups as corporate moral persons see French (1984), and May (1987).
- 6 For a recognition-theoretical discussion of individuation within the processes of shared group experience, in light of tensions between different conceptions of what constitutes a group, see Axel Honneth (2012: Chapter 12).
- 7 Another example would be the Maori, who 'saw themselves simply as belonging to dozens or hundreds of groups with different lineage and relation to natural resources', and who formed a shared and unified group identity only in response to British colonization of New Zealand/*Aotearoa* (Young 1997: 90).
- 8 See ICTR (2003: §56), and (2004: §467). Compare these to ICTY (1999: §70): 'it is more appropriate to evaluate the status of a national, ethnical or racial group from the point of view of those persons who wish to single that group out from the rest of the community'. Weaknesses in the orthodox logic also have been exposed by the ICTR and ICTY landmark decisions (e.g. ICTR 1998) recognizing that rape can constitute genocide, thereby further confounding conventional understandings of gender and sexuality vis-à-vis the binary of 'stable' and 'mobile' group identities.