

## Individualism: Some Distinctions

As I mentioned in the introduction to 'Feminism and the Problem of Individualism', during the writing of my thesis I became more and more aware of just how crucial the ideology of individualism was to maintaining consent to domination. I also became more and more aware of how much it continued to structure feminist thinking, including my own. As a first step in coming to terms with that, I looked at some well-known feminist critiques of individualism, only to find them unsatisfactory, despite important insights, because they failed to address what I saw as the central question: How does the ideology of individualism serve to maintain domination?

As can be seen from the readers' reports included with 'Feminism and the Problem of Individualism', my arguments in that paper fell on deaf ears. As I argue in my commentary on the readers' reports, the reason for that was the readers' continuing immersion in the very individualistic paradigm I was criticising. That immersion is hardly surprising, given how widespread individualism is, and how seldom (if ever) its influence is acknowledged, much less avoided. Clearly there is a great deal more to be said about individualism.

My use of the term is confined to illegitimate references to individuals, that is, to those occasions where explanations in terms of individuals are inappropriate, misplaced or absurd. Often those references are simply unthinking. So deep-seated is the cultural belief in explanations in terms of individuals that they are readily available. So self-evident are they that the question of their needing argument and evidence never arises. It is taken for granted that everyone will recognise their meaning and truth without any need for further explication.

Several instances of this occurred in the readers' reports on the papers I submitted to the academic journals. One such example was an assertion by Reader A at *Women's Studies International Forum*, in her comments on 'What Does It Mean to Call Feminism White and Middle-Class?' One of the problems she had with that paper was that 'in the author's definition there are almost no feminists (except her)'. Here, her objection to my paper couched the issues I raised in terms of a single individual (me) with opinions contradicting 'much of what has passed for feminist theorising and political action in the last two decades'. Clearly in her view, the idea that a single individual might challenge widely accepted beliefs need not be taken seriously, and there was therefore no need to deal with the substance of the arguments. She went on to say that my argument (as she saw it) that feminism was not 'racist' or at least 'Eurocentric' was wrong because 'most of what has been written and practised in the name of feminism' *was* racist or

Eurocentric. She then went on to reiterate the positions I was challenging as though she hadn't read what I said.

She ignored (or simply failed to see) what I said about the logic and meaning of feminism. If it is true, as this reader asserted, that 'most' of feminism is racist (etc.), the implications are terrible. If people of goodwill are to be able to continue to support feminism, then the accusation that 'most' of it is racist needs to be substantiated (and not simply repeated mindlessly), so that that racism can be identified and eradicated. For if racism cannot be identified and eradicated, feminism is doomed. My investigation of some well-known examples of the charge found they were without foundation because they rested on misinterpretations of the texts being accused. But this reader dealt neither with these arguments nor with the implications for feminism of her own position. She allowed individualism to trump every other argument, and refused even to consider them.

One of the readers for *Signs*, commenting on the same paper, provided another example of individualism. She said: '[the] primary purpose [of the paper] appears to be to defend white feminist authors from critiques by women of color'. This is not what the paper was about. The primary purpose of the paper was not to defend individuals. My purpose was to examine carefully and in detail some influential arguments (not all of them by 'women of color', or not as far as I knew) to the effect that feminism was 'white and middle-class' to see if they stood up to close investigation. I found they did not. My aim was not to defend 'feminist authors' (white or otherwise), but to show that some examples of the charge that feminism was 'white and middle-class' didn't work. I wanted to point out that, if these particular arguments didn't work, then maybe there was something wrong with the charge in general and it needed a re-think. But instead of seeing this argument, this reader focused on individuals, either unjustly treated ('feminists of color') or illegitimately defended ('white feminists').

For both readers, the reliance on individualistic explanations enabled them to ignore what I was really saying. In the case of the first reader, instead of evaluating my arguments for a clearer perception of what feminism means, she accused me of arrogance for trying to formulate one. In the case of the second reader, her focus on kinds of individuals—'feminists of color' or 'white feminists'—enabled her to ignore what those individuals actually said. Both readers entirely missed the point that my question was not 'Who is and is not a feminist?' but 'What is feminism?'

But my main interest in individualism involves its ideological function, that is, those references to, depictions of, explanations about, individuals which are inappropriate, misplaced or absurd because they are hiding domination<sup>1</sup> by denying the existence of social structures. The examples described above are not ideological in this sense. Certainly the references to individuals were inappropriate and misplaced, and they allowed the real issues to be avoided. And certainly it can only serve the interests of domination to have some feminists accusing other feminists of racism and to have counter arguments remain unheard. But individualism is so prevalent in the culture that it is instantly available to fend off criticism or perceived threats to the world-taken-for-granted. It's the lazy arguer's easy way out in the face of incomprehension and confusion. So these examples are not ideological in the sense in which I have outlined the term. They are not deflecting attention away from social structures of domination; they are merely bad arguments.<sup>2</sup> Still, they do illustrate the affinity between individualism and bad argument.

At the same time as I reserve for the term 'individualism' its critical function as an indicator of ideology, I also want to retain the possibility that not all references to individuals need be 'individualistic' in the ideological sense. It is important for a theory of domination to be able to distinguish ideological references to individuals from non-ideological references. Connotations of the notion of the 'individual', such as people's sense of themselves as unique and irreplaceable beings, or of entitlement to a dignified standard of living, or of taking control of their own lives and responsibility for their own actions, are not always illusory; nor are they always justificatory apologies for powerful interests. Rather, they are the basic premises of a good society. A politics concerned with challenging domination and the oppression it causes, cannot afford to dispense with the notion of the individual altogether. Used in a positive sense to refer to

<sup>1</sup> For a discussion of the use of the term 'ideology' to designate what serves to reinforce and reproduce domination, see: Thompson, 2001, chapter two.

<sup>2</sup> I originally thought the arguments were *ad hominem* because *ad hominem* arguments are also a form of individualism. *Ad hominem* arguments are those which avoid addressing the substance of the opponent's argument by using references to the opponent's personality characteristics along the lines of 'Well, she would say X, wouldn't she? She's a Y'. This is not what these two readers did. The first one did implicitly accuse me of arrogance, but that was not why she dismissed my argument. Rather, she dismissed my argument because in her view it was inconceivable that a single individual, and an unknown one at that, could be right and so many others wrong. Neither did the individualistic standpoint of the second reader appeal to my (real or imagined) personality characteristics as a way of obviating the need to deal with my arguments. Rather, her individualism consisted in the fact that she couldn't see arguments at all, only individuals.

values espousing the dignity, rights, responsibilities and capabilities of human beings, the notion of the individual is crucial for any emancipatory politics. Although these values originated in liberal thought (or so it is claimed), they can also serve emancipatory ends once their hypocritical exclusions have been dealt with (Eisenstein, 1986). But used in this sense, the notion of the individual contradicts the ideological meaning. The contradiction is normally resolved by ignoring the ideological meaning. My purpose, in contrast, is to rescue the ideological meaning from oblivion and give it exclusive rights over the term insofar as my own discourse is concerned, since there is a pressing need for a term to designate what I have come to believe is one of the chief ideological mechanisms of the age.

It is this other notion of the individual I am attempting to capture with the term 'non-ideological', by which I mean something that might be called 'individuality'. I do not rely on any 'individualism'/'individuality' distinction, however, because the contrast between individualism in the pernicious, ideological sense and what is *not* individualistic cannot be neatly summed up in a single terminological distinction. Instead, when I am discussing individuals non-ideologically, I use terms like 'people' or 'human beings' or just the adjective 'human'. The important point to note is that using 'individualism' to refer only to the ideology is intended both to provide a term with which to identify the ideological usage unequivocally, and to allow for the possibility that not all references to individuals are ideological.

Conventional discussions of 'individualism' cannot make this distinction because they use the term indiscriminately to refer to ideological and non-ideological usages alike; but they engage in this indiscriminate usage because they are oblivious to any need to make the distinction. There is no precedent in the literature for restricting the meaning of 'individualism' in the way I do. Instead, the term is normally used simply to refer to discourses, theories, explanations, etc. about individuals. Nonetheless, in order to identify ideological individualism it is necessary to be able to name it unambiguously.

Steven Lukes' well-known essay, *Individualism*, provides just one of a myriad of examples of discussions of 'individualism' which simply canvass a range of meanings of the term 'individual' without acknowledging the ideological connotations of the word.

According to Lukes, the term, '*individualisme*' (in French), was first used at the end of the eighteenth century by conservative opponents of the French revolution. It was used as a pejorative term condemning beliefs in 'the Rights of Man' and the ideas of the

Enlightenment on the grounds that they were likely to lead to chaos and anarchy. It referred to ideas seen to threaten 'the commonwealth' by dispersing it into "'the dust and powder of individuality ... an unsocial, uncivil, unconnected chaos of elementary principles'", in the words of Edmund Burke (quoted in Lukes, 1973: 3). This meaning has by no means vanished. 'Individualism' is still being used in this pejorative sense to refer to an ethos seen to undermine communal life and lead to 'moral and social fragmentation' (Gelpi, 1989: vii). But although my usage is also pejorative (in the sense that it refers to meanings and values to which I am opposed) it differs from this usage. The conservative usage condemns 'individualism' because it (supposedly) denies the social bonds of community. My own objection is that it denies the existence of the social structures of domination. My argument resembles the conservative one in that both arguments point to the part played by individualism in the denial of a collective reality. My argument differs from the conservative one, however, in the kind of collective which is being denied, 'community' in the case of the conservative argument, 'domination' in the case of my own.

None of the many meanings Lukes discussed was the ideological one I use. His account came closest to what I call 'the ideology of individualism' with the concepts of 'the abstract individual' and 'methodological individualism', although even here the acknowledgement of social domination was absent from the account. He characterised the concept of 'the abstract individual' (which he attributed to Marx) as follows:

According to this conception, individuals are pictured abstractly as given, with given interests, wants, purposes, needs, etc.; while society and the state are pictured as sets of actual or possible social arrangements which respond more or less adequately to those individuals' requirements ... The crucial point about this conception is that the relevant features of individuals determining the ends which social arrangements are held (actually or ideally) to fulfil, whether these features are called instincts, faculties, needs, desires, rights, etc., are assumed as given, independently of a social context. (Lukes, 1973: 73)

The concept of 'methodological individualism' (the first clear articulation of which Lukes attributed to Hobbes) he characterised as 'a doctrine about explanation which asserts that all attempts to explain social (or individual) phenomena are to be rejected (or, according to a current, more sophisticated version, rejected as "rock-bottom" explanations) unless they are couched wholly in terms of facts about individuals'

(p.110). By pointing to the elision of the social which results from depicting individuals as given and from restricting explanation to facts about individuals, these two concepts go part of the way towards characterising individualism in the ideological sense. Lukes had no discussion of the ways in which the obliteration of the social serves to deny domination. He did not ask *why* discourses might 'picture individuals as given' or 'reject explanations not couched wholly in terms of facts about individuals', what purpose might be served by such restrictions.

It was not Lukes' intention to comment on the ideas he was presenting, simply to give an overview of how they have been used in the literature. Still, there is a critique of individualism in the literature somewhat along the lines I am proposing here, in Marxism especially (See Marx's critique of 'egoistic man'—Marx, 1843: 224; Marx, 1867: 280). But instead of quoting Marx on this critique, he quoted him on *individuality* (in the sense of the distinction I made above), that is, on Marx's positive notion of how human beings would flourish under communism. While this is an important emphasis, given how many vile things have been done to people in Marx's name, it is not all Marx had to say on the notion of the individual. He was also aware of its ideological uses, an awareness that seems to have been subsequently lost to the Marxist tradition.

Lukes' account of 'individualism' is seemingly neutral. He is merely reporting on the ideas he has found, without discussing them in any depth. As a consequence his account (unlike Marx's) does not distinguish between ideological and non-ideological usages, and itself remains partly immured in ideology. Like liberalism more generally, Lukes' account is idealist in the Marxist sense, that is, it discusses ideas while saying nothing about how, or even whether, those ideas are expressed in the social world. He presents what he refers to as the four 'basic ideas of individualism'—'the dignity of man' [sic], 'autonomy', 'privacy' and 'self-development'—while ignoring the question of the extent to which those ideas have or have not been played out in practice.

Given that he later refers to these ideas as 'values or ideals' (Lukes, 1973: 73), it might be assumed that the question of whether or not they had ever existed in practice was irrelevant. The validity of values or ideals does not depend on their actual existence. Indeed, there is a sense in which insisting on values and ideals is *more* necessary the *less* they appear in the social world. There is no point, for example, in emphasising human dignity when everybody is already treated with respect. It is only when the value of human dignity is violated that it is necessary to insist on the wrongness of the violations

and assert the possibility of another reality. But Lukes does not mention any violations, and we are left with the impression that the existence of the values or ideals he describes is unproblematic. Since domination operates through the violations, his account is ideological to the extent that he ignores the systematic ways in which the ideals he describes are flouted in the real world.

In the case of the first of these, one ideological component is immediately obvious—the male supremacist tendency to be concerned only with the human dignity of men. The reality which is being denied is the existence of women. The terminology, ‘man’, does not necessarily mean the exclusion of women from the scope of the human. As many a linguistic conservative has pointed out, ‘man’ can also include women. But in fact women are ‘normally’ (under male supremacist conditions) excluded. Lukes acknowledged this in a later work. In his summing up of a discussion of Marcel Mauss’ 1938 paper, ‘A Category of the Human Mind: The Notion of Person: The Notion of Self’, he admitted that the notion of the individual ‘is exclusively (or virtually so) male’ (Lukes, 1985: 298-9). He quoted Mary Midgley to the effect that ‘the “whole idea of a free, independent, enquiring, choosing individual, an idea central to European thought, has always been essentially the idea of a male ... taking for granted the love and service of non-autonomous females (and indeed often of the less enlightened males as well)”’ (Lukes, 1985: 299; Midgley, 1984: 51). But this acknowledgement was cursory. It did not interfere with the rest of what he had to say about ‘persons’ (nor with what the other contributors to the volume said). The obvious question arising out of the recognition that ‘persons’ are exclusively male is: why, then, is the category of ‘person’ discussed as though it were universal? But this question was not addressed. Instead, it was finessed with that question-begging parenthesis, ‘(or virtually so)’.

Nonetheless, what Lukes has to say about ‘the dignity of man’ (which I will subsequently refer to as ‘human dignity’) need not be ideological. Much of it is also relevant to women. From a feminist standpoint, the problem with ideas about human dignity is not that they are inappropriate or irrelevant in the case of women, but that women (and many men) are systematically denied access to the resources necessary for human dignity. The solution is not to abandon the idea, but to ensure that women too (and everyone else) are included within its scope.

Lukes cited the writings of Kant as ‘the most impressive and systematic expression’ of ideas about human dignity, in particular, Kant’s ethical insistence that human beings

ought to be treated as ends in themselves, and not simply as a means to other ends. He quoted Kant to the effect that “‘man, and in general every rational being, *exists* as an end in himself, *not merely as a means* for arbitrary use by this or that will: he must in all his actions, whether they are directed to himself or to other rational beings, always be viewed *at the same time as an end*’” (Lukes, 1973: 49—emphases in the original). Despite the masculinist language, this is an ethic which ought to apply in the case of women too. Indeed, it is just this ethical stance which motivates feminist politics. The need for it becomes obvious once it is recognised that women’s right to be treated as valuable ends in themselves is violated by requirements that they exist only to service men. Prostitution and pornography are only the most blatant examples of a more widespread tendency to treat women as objects for the use of men. Hence, this ethic of human dignity is a necessary prerequisite for a feminism concerned with struggling for a human status for women.

Lukes’ second basic idea of individualism was ‘autonomy or self-direction’. By this he meant that

an individual’s thought and action is [her] own, and not determined by agencies or causes outside [her] control. In particular, an individual is autonomous (at the social level) to the degree to which [she] subjects the pressures and norms with which [she] is confronted to conscious and critical evaluation, and forms intentions and reaches practical decisions as the result of independent and rational reflection. (Lukes, 1973: 52)

As should be obvious from the interpolated feminine pronouns, this is also an idea of relevance to women. This idea is that it should be possible to make judgements about social arrangements and our own participation, to evaluate the conditions under which we live, to decide between right and wrong, to acquiesce consciously in the good and refuse compliance with the bad.

But it is exactly this kind of autonomy that is forbidden under social conditions where domination is maintained by consent. If we are to consent to domination we cannot be allowed to think for ourselves or act in our own interests. The chief medium for ensuring acquiescence is the pacifying pap poured out by the mass media, especially the advertising industry, which can only continue to inundate the population with its tidal waves of rubbish if people can be made to desire it. There is no autonomy involved in consuming most of what is so copiously provided in the shops of the affluent parts of



the world. Neither is there any autonomy involved in voting for one of two indistinguishable political parties; nor in a job, no matter how well paid, that is not worth doing; nor in a job that is worth doing but is so badly paid and underfunded that it cannot achieve what it is meant to do. (Of course, there is probably not a great deal of consent in these last two instances—either you take the only jobs that are on offer or you go without. And given what happens to those who go without—‘the unemployed’—coercion is a more accurate description of the employment market than consent). Lukes’ account is ideological because he shows no awareness of the pervasive barriers to autonomy under conditions of domination. The problem is not that he speaks as though autonomy already exists. It is possible, after all, to withdraw allegiance from the meanings and values, practices and habits, of domination. The problem is that he speaks as though autonomy were unproblematic, as though it were readily available and a common feature of social life. (I will be saying more about the notion of autonomy later in a section on ‘Determinism’).

Lukes’ third basic idea of individualism is ‘privacy’. By this he means the idea ‘of a private existence within a public world, an area which the individual is or should be left alone by others and able to do and think whatever [she] chooses—to pursue [her] own good in [her] own way, as [John Stuart] Mill put it’ (Lukes, 1973: 59). Feminism has, of course, extensively criticised the public/private distinction. There is a sense in which it is ‘ultimately what the feminist movement is about’, as Carole Pateman has said (although only if the distinction is seen as a social arrangement which ensures women’s subordination to, and servicing and nurturing of, men) (Pateman, 1983: 118. See also: Ortner, 1974; Jaggar, 1983; Eisenstein, 1986; Gatens, 1991; and the ‘domestic labour debate’, e.g. Fox, ed., 1980. For an excellent discussion of feminist arguments against the public/private distinction, see: Okin, 1989: 111, 124-33).

Issues centring around the public/private distinction are the same issues as those flagged by the term ‘sexual politics’ (an oxymoron in conventional politics), and the feminist slogan, ‘the personal is political’.<sup>3</sup> Both are shorthand ways of challenging the social arrangements organised around the distinction. As Zillah Eisenstein has said: ‘The liberal equation of politics with the public sphere excludes an understanding of the relationship between politics and the private realm of sex-class relations ... This liberal

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<sup>3</sup> As I remember it, the slogan ‘the personal is political’ was also a feminist response to attempts on the part of the male left to contain and trivialise feminist demands, by dismissing them as ‘personal’ and ‘private’ issues.

conception of power ... excludes the family ... [and] daily life activity ... from political analysis' (Eisenstein, 1986: 181). But, as Eisenstein also pointed out, at the same time as the liberal democratic state purports to maintain a distinction between public and private/domestic, it also publicly mandates encroachments on the domestic sphere, for example, by laws relating to marriage, access to abortion, etc. (Eisenstein, 1986: 223-4). Hence the distinction operates only as long as it serves masculinist interests to maintain it, while being overridden by those same interests whenever it is expedient to do so, whenever, that is, women's interests in controlling their own lives come into conflict with their 'place' under male supremacist conditions.

The distinction can be overridden in either direction. The 'public' intrudes upon women's private lives, for example, through state regulation of fertility and marital arrangements, and through welfare policies and employment practices. (It also intrudes upon men's private lives, more rarely and reluctantly but also more reasonably, as in the case of the criminalising of domestic violence, father/daughter rape, and rape in marriage). But the 'private' is also surreptitiously introduced into the 'public', to structure the sexual division of labour along lines which transfer women's 'private' servicing, nurturing and subordinate roles into the 'public' world of work. What remains constant throughout all these vicissitudes, however (with some exceptions), is the masculinist interest in maintaining dominion over women.

But to claim women's right to privacy is not the same as that central distinction of liberal ideology, the chief function of which is to maintain and justify the unfettered capitalist accumulation of wealth in the hands of the few. That the separation between public and private spheres also serves to maintain and justify women's subordination to men is not incidental to capitalist accumulation, although as Carole Pateman has pointed out, domestic life is usually 'forgotten' in liberal theorising about 'civil society' (Pateman, 1983: 122). Instead, the separation is seen to operate only within the public sphere, between 'the economy' and 'the state'. While this serves the ideological purpose of reserving for 'the economy' (read: capitalist accumulation) a zone of non-interference and non-regulation by the state, again as Pateman pointed out, it also obscures the distinction's 'patriarchalism' (or, as I would prefer to put it, male supremacy) (Pateman, 1983: 123). For the separation sets men free to engage in their grand projects of unrestrained acquisition, by providing them with a sphere of intimacy, nurturance and support, in short, human relationship, unavailable in the impersonal, competitive public world of capitalism and nation states. As Moira Gatens has put it: 'The relations of

exchange that govern a capitalist economy are, implicitly, relations between *men* that have as their support and guarantee a domestic and familial organisation that defies description in “free” market terms’ (Gatens, 1991: 35-6—her emphasis). To claim for women, then, a right to non-interference by others is to challenge the ‘forgotten’ aspect of the separation, by insisting on women’s right not to be at everyone’s beck and call. It is an aspect of what is involved in the feminist strategy of separatism. By withdrawing allegiance to male supremacist meanings, values and institutions, women claim for themselves the right not to be interfered with.

Lukes’ fourth basic idea of individualism is what he calls ‘self-development’ (the fullest elaboration of which he attributed to the early German Romantics). In this context he mentioned Schlegel, who ‘conceiv[ed] the artist as the supremely creative and self-affirming being’, and quoted him saying, “‘It is just his individuality that is the primary and eternal element in man. To make a cult of the formation and development of this individuality would be a kind of divine egotism’”. He also quoted Schleiermacher saying that “‘each man ought to represent humanity in himself in his own different way, by his own special blending of its elements, so that it should reveal itself in each special manner, and, in the fulness of space and time, should become everything that can emerge as something individual out of the depths of itself’”. He also quoted William von Humboldt saying “‘each strives to develop himself from his own inmost nature, and for his own sake’” (Lukes, 1973: 68).

I am tempted to dismiss this as the rankest ideology (and hypocrisy) since it is not an ideal that has ever been available to women, nor to that majority of men who don’t belong to the ruling class. In fact it isn’t even available to ruling class men because they can’t be genuinely themselves as long as their egos require the dehumanisation of others. But I also feel that this is an ideal which *ought* to be available to everyone and that it becomes ideological only when the reality that it is not generally available, and why, is ignored.

To sum up, then: Unlike most discussions of individualism, my usage is not intended to cover all and any references to individuals, only those which function to deny institutions of domination. I am not concerned with debates about whether notions of ‘the individual’, ‘the self’ or ‘the person’ are peculiar to Western industrialised society, and what meanings such notions have, if any, in non-industrialised societies, debates which are as old as sociology itself (Luhmann, 1986. See also: Carrithers, Collins and

Lukes, eds, 1985; Heller, Sosna and Wellbery, eds, 1986). These debates may or may not be themselves ideological in the sense in which I am using the term, i.e. disguises for domination, but they are certainly oblivious to the problem of domination as I have identified it.

Neither is what I have to say about individualism motivated by communitarian concerns. I do not think that the main problem is that people are isolated from one another by way of some putative absence, deterioration or destruction of community, or of what the authors of *Habits of the Heart* referred to as 'social integuments'. Hence, neither am I concerned to suggest any communitarian solutions to the problem of individualism, such as those suggested by these authors in terms of 'cultural traditions and practices that, without destroying individuality, serve to limit and restrain the destructive side of individualism and provide alternative models for how Americans [or anyone else] might live' (Bellah et al, 1985: viii. See also: Gelpi, ed., 1989; Bell, 1993). Communitarianism, as a recent variant of liberalism, is as oblivious to social domination as its parent framework, and as prone to Panglossian pronouncements and pious wishes. Far from escaping individualism in the ideological sense, it continues to rely on a version of abstract individualism, and remains tied into that individual/society ('community') dichotomy which structures the logic of the ideology of individualism.

In contrast to both these frameworks, I see the converse of individualism as neither 'community' nor 'tradition' (or the 'pre-modern', 'feudal', 'tribal', 'primitive', etc., in the case of the sociological debates), but a notion of the human that is never so isolated, free or transgressive as to be outside the meanings and values of the social, cultural and historical milieu into which we are born, *and* that is never so embedded in that milieu as to be incapable of acting in opposition to its meanings and values, either as criminals or as principled protesters.

I would argue, too, that the extent to which we are so embedded in our social milieu as to see it as natural and outside the realm of human endeavour is the extent to which we are not individuals at all, but mere bearers of social relations. Hence the contrast I would draw is not one between individual and society/community. Instead, I would distinguish between, on the one hand, an 'individualism' which is no such thing because it is an ideological disguise for social relations of domination and misrepresents the rights, responsibilities and potentialities of the individual; and on the other hand, a concept of a kind of genuine individuality which gives due recognition both to what

people can do and to what they cannot, given current social conditions of capitalist male supremacy.

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