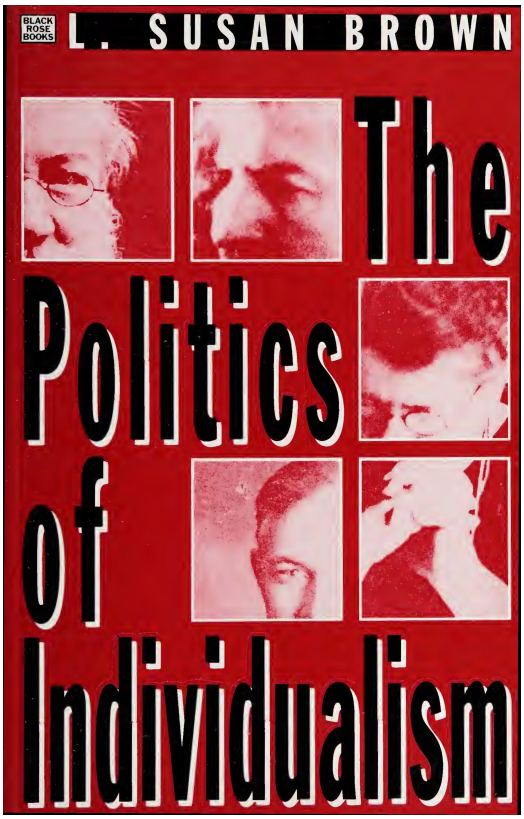
The Politics of Individualism

Liberalism, Liberal Feminism, and Anarchism

L. Susan Brown



1993

Contents

This work focuses specifically on the similarities and differences of liberal and anarchist political philosophies. The main contribution of this work is its original argument that anarcho-communism and liberalism (and their feminist offshoots) are first and foremost *individualist* in nature, and therefore share certain assumptions and understandings.

To illustrate this argument, the works of John Stuart Mill, Betty Friedan and Janet Radcliffe Richards are critically examined, with special attention paid to such issues as employment, education, marriage and the family, and governmental politics. These works are then compared and contrasted to the anarcho-feminism of Emma Goldman. Finally, feminism as a whole movement is subjected to a rigorous critique in terms of its overall liberatory potential.

L. Susan Brown holds a Ph.D. from the University of Toronto where she is currently a post-doctoral fellow in the Department of Political Science. She has published many articles on the political philosophy of anarchism and feminism, and has had her work translated into French and German.

To Steve Karpik, with love.

Preface

I first became interested in anarchist political theory over ten years ago when I was finishing my B.A. at Queen's University at Kingston, Ontario. I have not always been an anarchist. After becoming disillusioned with the broken promises of my liberal upbringing, I encountered at Queen's University a marvelous introduction to Marxist criticism through the teachings of a passionate and committed sociologist, Friedrich Sixel. I was exposed to a way of looking at the world — a way of making sense of the world — that accounted for the uneasiness I had always felt when I considered our society. The Marxism I embraced was a humanistic vision of society, one that critically revealed inherent contradictions in liberal capitalism and promised a new world where the human individual could be fully realized.

During my fourth year as an undergraduate I happened across an essay by Emma Goldman in a collection of writings on American thought. Her impassioned discussion of anarchism captured both my heart and my mind. She claimed that "the new social order rests, of course, on the materialistic basis of life; but while all Anarchists agree that the main evil today is an economic one, they maintain that the solution of that evil can be brought about only through the consideration of *every phase* of life, — individual, as well as the collective; the internal, as well as the external phases"[1] (original emphasis). At that time, Goldman's anarchism appeared to me to be simply a widening of traditional Marxist thought to include issues beyond the mere economic. I began to seek out more anarchist writing, by Goldman, Berkman and others. For me there was no contradiction between being both an anarchist and a Marxist — each movement sought to create a new world where everyone could develop to his or her full potential. Marx and Engels argued in *The Communist Manifesto* that "in place of the old bourgeois society, with its classes and class antagonisms, we shall have an association, in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all.[2] This seemed to me to be fully compatible with anarchist political philosophy. Anarchism, I then believed, was simply a humanist variation of Marxism.

However, my Marxist comrades scoffed at my foray into anarchist history and thought — "bourgeois liberalism," they cried when I broached the subject. "Nonsense," I replied — anarchism is simply Marxism carried out of the realm of macroeconomics and applied to the situation of the individual. It was at this juncture that I became aware of certain historical and theoretical incompatibilities between Marxism and anarchism. While each aims for a "free association" among people, I became increasingly troubled by the occasional coercive undertone in Marxist thought and practice. This intensified my commitment to and interest in anarchism. I became more intimately involved in the anarchist movement by writing for and helping to produce two Toronto-based anarchist newspapers, *Strike!* and *Kick It Over.* The experience of working collec-

[1] Emma Goldman, "Anarchism," in *The American Mind,* Volume H, edited by H. R. Warfel, R. H. Gabriel, and S. T. Williams (New York: American Book Company, 1937), p. 1015.

[2] Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (Middlesex: Penguin, 1968), p. 105.

tively with other anarchists and settling differences by consensus was a very valuable one, and certainly has greatly influenced my thought.

I also became interested in the feminist movement. The Sociology Department at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) offered a wide range of courses on feminist theory, and it was in this context that I was able, during my doctoral studies, to benefit from discussions and debates with professors and other students. In feminism I saw a vital and powerful movement for liberation; however, I also encountered instances of censorship and repression by feminists against others, both feminist and nonfeminist alike. One woman confessed to me that she felt so intimidated by the dominant feminist ideology at OISE that she would take her wedding ring off before coming to school. I found myself drawn back to the humanism of anarchism as I recoiled against the often blind anger of feminism.

I decided nearly four years ago to fashion my research around a critical consideration of the political philosophy of liberal feminism. At that time I immersed myself in the liberal feminist work of John Stuart Mill. What fascinated me most about Mill was how entire passages of his work could have been written by an anarchist, while other parts were not anarchistic in the least. It occurred to me then that my old Marxist comrades were perhaps right; maybe anarchism was "bourgeois liberalism," or at least maybe it shared certain ideas with liberal thought.

I found it puzzling that liberal feminism sounded anarchistic at certain times but not at others. I turned to C. B. Macpherson's idea of liberalism as possessive to help me understand this situation. I noticed that liberal possessive individualism contains characteristics that anarchists believe in (those that I call "existential individualism") as well as characteristics that anarchists oppose (those that I call "instrumental individualism"). This analytical framework allowed me to understand the similarities and differences in liberal and anarchist individualism as applied to the problem of women's subordination.

It became clear to me that if one could replace liberalism's instrumentally competitive aspects with free and voluntary association, anarchism would be the result. Anarchism, as I understand it here, is a way of organizing society to best allow for the free expression of individuals. It is not chaos and disorder, neither is it atomistic, asocial individualism; rather, it is an understanding of individuals within society that argues for the organization of society around non-authoritarian principles. Anarchy is, indeed, order — it is the search for a social order that accommodates the expression of individual free will.

This book is a work of social theory — an example of what the feminist theorist Mary O'Brien calls "traditional theory" — and its purpose is to explore a new way of looking at certain social movements in order that fresh insights into them may be gained. Traditional theorizing, however, has a bad reputation in the social sciences. As Mary O'Brien argues:

> What is of concern to us is the fate of traditional theorizing under the onslaught of triumphant scientism. For traditional theory took quite a shellacking. It was argued that theory of this kind did not relate to anything real, but was largely high-class daydreaming with little or no practical application. It was argued that science is objective and describes what is, whereas traditional theory is subjective and describes what ought to be, and why should any one person's theory of what ought to be be any better than any other person's? Theory is not only inexact, but elitist, favouring intellectualism over common sense.[3]

[3] Mary O'Brien, *The Politics of Reproduction* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981), p. 2.

O'Brien, however, defends theory, because only through considered theorizing can we come to better understand the world and therefore be adequately equipped to change it in ways we deem appropriate. O'Brien contends:

> We will never liberate ourselves as women until we develop a systematic theoretical analysis of the roots and grounds and development of male history and male philosophy. For theory is not entirely abstract; it is not the absurdity of attempting to give phony substance to a nothing excised from a nothing. Nor is it only poetic vision. Theory at its best is fundamentally a mode of analyzing human experience which is at the same time a method of organizing that experience.[4]

Once I had decided that I wanted to consider the relationship between liberal and anarchist modes of thought, I needed to develop a way of analyzing and organizing how they viewed the world. C. Wright Mills once argued that one of the main questions the social theorist must ask is "what kinds of 'human nature' are revealed in the conduct and character we observe in this society in this period? And what is the meaning for 'human nature' of each and every feature of society we are examining?"[5] Taking C. Wright Mills' advice, I have endeavoured to answer this question by examining the meaning of "human nature" in anarchist and liberal thought, as well to offer a discussion of the more general ramifications of such underlying assumptions.

It may be asked how the theoretical conceptualizations of the human individual that are explored here relate to the real world of living people. With liberalism, the theoretical tensions that I have identified can be seen in our day-to-day lives. With anarchism a similar comparison is not so easy to make since there is no anarchist society that we can observe. Individuals in our society are constrained by coercive social and political structures. Consequently, we rarely realize our individual potentials. Until we create a society that allows for individual self-determination, we cannot know our true nature. John Stuart Mill makes this point in his essay "The Subjection of Women" when he argues that

> neither does it avail anything to say that the *nature* of the two sexes adapts them to their present functions and position, and renders these appropriate to them. Standing on the ground of common sense and the constitution of the human mind, I deny that any one knows, or can know, the nature of the two sexes, as long as they have only been seen in their present relation to one another. If men had ever been found in society without women, or women without men, or if there had been a society of men and women in which the women were not under the control of the men, something might have been positively known about the mental and moral differences which may be inherent in the nature of each. What is now called the nature of women is an eminently artificial thing — the result of forced repression in some directions, unnatural stimulation in others.[6]

Mill ultimately concludes that in terms of women's true nature, it is "a subject on which nothing final can be known, so long as those who alone can really know it, women themselves,

[4] O'Brien, *The Politics of Reproduction, p. 3.*

[5] C. Wright Mills, *The Sociological Imagination* (London: Oxford University Press, 1959), p. 7.

[6] John Stuart Mill, "The Subjection of Women," in *Essays on Sex Equality,* by John Stuart Mill and Harriet Taylor Mill, edited by Alice S. Rossi (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), p. 148.

have given but little testimony, and that little, mostly suborned."[7] I would like to extend Mill's observations even further: the true nature of the human individual, male or female, will never be known untd all individuals are allowed to live in freedom without external constraints. Only then will we truly know ourselves. Until then, the question of human nature is a matter of speculation, not fact. The argument moves from one of immanent critique to one of political belief. This work contains both a critical analysis of liberalism and an argument that only in removing the bonds of political, economic and social domination can individuals begin to define for themselves what freedom and nature really are. In this sense, my writing is, like all traditional theory, both a description of "what ought to be" and "what could be."

[7] Mill, "The Subjection of Women," p. 150.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Frank Lindenfeld and Thomas Martin for their critical comments and invaluable encouragement throughout the long process of writing this work. Their support saw me through many periods of self-doubt, and without their aid I never would have seen this book through to its completion. Alkis Kontos supported me both intellectually and emotionally during a very trying time, for which I am grateful. Dimitri Roussopoulos helped me in true anarchist fashion, which I deeply appreciate. Friedrich Sixel and Luiz and Sulamita Costa-Pinto have over many years been both teachers and dear friends, and have taught me more than they will ever know. Bob Nicholls first introduced me to existentialism with rare and uncompromising wisdom.

Graeme Nicholson graciously sat on my doctoral supervisory committee, and never wavered in his staunch critical support of my work, giving me the courage I needed to defend it. My supervisor, Malcolm Levin, supported me through thick and thin, and never lost faith in me. I owe him my deepest gratitude. Marsha Hewitt and Dieter Misgeld kindly agreed to sit on my supervisory committee at a very late stage.

I would also like to thank Nat Klym, production co-ordinator at Black Rose Books, and my editor, Julia Gualtieri, for their professional expertise and cheerful assistance.

Finally, I could never have written this work without the love and support of Steve Karpik. His faith in me never faltered, and the countless discussions we have had over the years about anarchism and feminism provided me with the necessary intellectual and creative inspiration.

I gratefully acknowledge the financial support of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

L. Susan Brown
Toronto, 1993

Chapter One: Anarchist and Liberal Individualism

> lf violence is the midwife of history, then it is ideas that make history pregnant.
>
> Luiz A. Costa-Pinto

The study of ideas and their relationship to one another can reveal much about both history and contemporary society, and can help point the way to the creation of new, more liberatory forms of social organization. Liberalism and anarchism are two political philosophies that are fundamentally concerned with individual freedom yet differ from one another in very distinct ways. Anarchism shares with liberalism a radical commitment to individual freedom while rejecting liberalism's competitive property relations.

Historically, anarchism has often been conceptualized as being most closely related to Marxism. This is due, in part, to the fact that many prominent anarchists share with the Marxists a rejection of private property and an espousal of communist economic relations. For instance, for her communist views, the famous anarchist Emma Goldman was dubbed "Red Emma" by the popular American press. Although Goldman herself rejected this nickname because it suggested ties to Bolsheviks and other authoritarian communists while failing to emphasize her commitment to anarchism, it did, nonetheless, underline her obvious philosophical ties to communism. "No one will dispute that she was foremost an anarchist. Politically, she was a communist-anarchist."[1]

Goldman's lifelong companion, Alexander Berkman, also an anarchist, was as well a committed communist; in his *ABC of Anarchism* he writes that communist anarchism is, in my estimation, the most desirable and practical form oí society. The communist anarchists hold that only under communist conditions could anarchy prosper, and equal liberty, justice and well-being be assured to every one without discrimination."[2] More recently, Murray Bookchin, the most prominent oí contemporary anarchist theorists, pays tribute to his "early Marxian training"[3] in the development of his ecologically based anarchist ideas. However, while Bookchin and other anarchists appreciate Marx for his insightful critique of private property and bourgeois society, they ultimately move away from Marx because of the authoritarian tendencies that have historically plagued political movements based on Marxist ideology. In anarchism, critics of both Marxism and capitalist economic relations find a more humanist approach to the problems of exploitation and domination.

Merely viewing anarchism as a humanist variant of Marxism misses a very important characteristic of anarchist thought, that is, its link to liberal idealism. Both liberalism and anarchism

---

[1] Alix Kates Shulman, "Emma Goldman's Feminism: A Reappraisal," in *Red Emma Speaks,* edited by Alix Kates Shulman (New York: Schocken Books, 1983), p. 5.

[2] Alexander Berkman, *ABC of Anarchism* (London: Freedom Press, 1977), p.29.

[3] Murray Bookchin, *The Ecology of Freedom: The Emergence and Dissolution of Hierarchy* (Palo Alto: Cheshire Books, 1982), p. 1.

share a commitment to individual autonomy and self-determination. Anarchism's concern for individual freedom, unconstrained by any authority or power, is combined with a critique of private property and an advocacy of free communal economic relations.[4] Thus, while much of anarchist theory has been viewed as communist by anarchists and non-anarchists alike, what distinguishes anarchism from other communist philosophies is anarchism's uncompromising and relentless celebration of individual self-determination and autonomy. To be an anarchist — whether communist, individualist, mutualist, syndicalist, or feminist — is to affirm a commitment to the primacy of individual freedom. Human individuals, for the anarchist, are best suited to decide for themselves how to run the affairs of their own lives; they are best served when left unrestrained by authority and unhampered by relationships of domination. The ontological basis for these beliefs is an understanding that individuals are free and responsible agents who are fit to determine their own development. This ontology is shared at least in part by a number of philosophies; however, it has been most fully developed by the existentialists. Consequently, I will use the term *existential individualism* to refer to the individualism of anarchist political philosophy.

Anarchism has more in common with other individualist philosophies like liberalism than is generally recognized. This is evident when the works of liberal thinkers are carefully examined; many statements made by the liberal John Stuart Mill, for instance, contain a spirit of existential individualism. Similar observations can be made of more contemporary liberals; their writing is often couched in terms that place the human individual's freedom at centre stage.

However, liberals are not anarchists; while they assert the importance of individual freedom and autonomy, liberals also maintain that the human individual is a competitive owner of private property, both in terms of real property and in terms of owning "property in the person." The liberal believes that individuals own their bodies and the associated skills and abilities, the "labour power" that accompanies their bodies. Liberal thinkers consider the right to buy and sell labour power as essential, just as they affirm the right to buy and sell real property. In liberal thought, there is no practical difference between owning property and owning oneself.

To treat others and oneself as property objectifies the human individual, denies the unity of subject and object and is a negation of individual will. The human individual, as "property in the person" ceases to reach out in freedom to the world, and becomes instead a means to another's freedom. However, even the freedom gained by the other is compromised by this relationship, for to negate the will of another to achieve one's own freedom destroys the very freedom one sought in the first place. The liberal belief in property, both real and in the person, leads not to freedom but to relationships of domination and subordination. This faith in the appropriateness of owning, buying and selling property, both real and in the person, I call *instrumental individualism.* The term "instrumental" denotes a form of individualism that aims at freedom not as an *end* in and of itself, as is the case with existential individualism, but rather as a *means* to further individual interests. Instrumentalism describes an ontology where an individual uses others to further his or her own self-interest. Individuals treat one another as tools, or "instruments." Relationships based on instrumental individualism are most starkly revealed in the case where a person's skills and capacities are considered to be property that can be bought and sold. At the moment an individual "sells" labour power to another, he/she loses self-determination and instead is treated as a subjectless instrument for the fulfillment of another's will. Existential individualism assumes

[4] Individualist Anarchism, as a specific historical movement, will be discussed later in Chapter Five.

a community where the individual freedom of all is respected; instrumental individualism, with its property owners, pits individuals against one another in a competition that inevitably results in hierarchy and domination.

By recognizing that anarchism is an existentially individualistic philosophy combined with a critique of instrumental property relations and that liberalism is a mixture of existential and instrumental individualism, the similarities and differences between the two streams of thought are more readily identified and understood. The fact that liberalism and anarchism share common existential individualistic views explains why certain passages in liberal thought sound decidedly anarchistic. However, liberals also subscribe to an individualism that is instrumental while anarchist political philosophy stands opposed to instrumental competitive values; for the anarchist, "freedom can exist only in a society where there is no compulsion of any kind,"[5] including the compulsion that accompanies property relations. Thus, liberalism and anarchism part company on some critical issues and problems. Anarchism combines existential individualism with a free and voluntary communism that does not compromise individual freedom. As existential individualism is undermined by the promotion of instrumental property relations within liberalism, liberal ideology is constantly in a state of unresolved crisis. The fact that liberalism holds simultaneously to two conflicting views of the human individual helps to account for fundamental contradictions within liberal thought as a whole.

Some writers assert, however, that liberal thought is best characterized as *abstract* individualism, that is, as an individualism that ignores social context. In Chapter Two, I will show that this critique of liberalism misunderstands the nature of liberal thought and its internal contradictions, and underestimates liberalism's liberatory potential.

C. B. Macpherson articulates a more useful and illuminating analysis of liberal political philosophy in his book *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism.*[6] For Macpherson, liberalism is not abstract; rather it is possessive. The archetypal liberal citizen, according to Macpherson, is the possessive individual — an individual who is free from the will of others, owns both real property and property in the person, and self-interestedly participates in a free market economy. Possessiveness describes relationships between individuals based on property and freedom of will.

Unlike the abstract individualist critique of liberalism, Macpherson's formulation understands liberalism on its own terms. Macpherson identifies the possessive individual as a conceptualization accepted by liberals themselves in both theory and practice; it is simultaneously an idea that is necessary if liberalism is to make sense and it is a notion that encapsulates liberalism's many paradoxes.

Beginning with Macpherson's formulation of possessive individualism, fundamental contradictions can be identified in liberal thought that are related directly to a possessive individualism that contains both existential and instrumental tendencies. Macpherson himself does not make this kind of distinction. However, within the idea of liberal possessive individualism resides an existential individualism in which the expression of free will is inviolable alongside an instrumental self-interested individualism in which competitive ownership of both real property and property in the person is fundamental. The instrumental conceptualization, paradoxically, requires the ex-

[5] Berkman, *ABC of Anarchism,* p. 29.

[6] C. B. Macpherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).

istential, even though the instrumental undermines the existential by establishing relationships based on domination. Liberal feminism shares many of the assumptions of its theoretical roots; this being so, liberal feminism, like traditional liberal theory, holds to a belief in individualism that is both existential and instrumental. How, then, is this possessive individualism, comprised as it is of two opposing non-resolvable dimensions, manifested in liberal feminist thought?

The nineteenth-century utilitarian, John Stuart Mill, was the first liberal thinker to address systematically the issue of women's oppression. In "The Subjection of Women" Mill laid the theoretical groundwork for today's liberal feminism.[7] According to Jennifer Ring "the work was a pioneering effort, rightly honored as one of the first essays to discuss the inequality of women as a political problem and to consider its sources and solutions in a scholarly manner."[8] Judith McArthur notes that many scholars regard "The Subjection of Women" as "the most significant manifesto in the emergence of feminist theory."[9]

However, scholars outside the feminist milieu have all but ignored Mill's work on women. Gail Tulloch points out that "The Subjection of Women" "is something of an anomaly, in that it has been regarded as an aberration or a mere grace note to Mill's better-known works, and has not been taken seriously by philosophers, or given what I regard as its due place in the Mill corpus."[10] Tulloch argues that not only does Mill's liberalism colour his feminism, but also that it is impossible to fully understand his liberal ideas without appreciating the centrality of his feminist commitment.

"The Subjection of Women" is not an easy work from which to draw clear interpretations and conclusions. Like much of Mill's writing, it is fraught with contradictions. Rather than understanding these contradictions as merely idiosyncratic to Mill himself, it is more informative to view these problems as symptoms of deeper unresolved difficulties within the whole of liberal thought. These difficulties concern the nature of the human individual. It is the fundamental contradiction between the instrumental and the existential in liberal possessive individualism that accounts for these inconsistencies in Mill's work. This dual conceptualization of the human individual is clearly evident in "The Subjection of Women", and will be explored in depth in Chapter Three.

As modern liberal feminism has emerged out of nineteenthcentury liberalism, one expects to find parallels between contemporary liberal feminism and its earlier liberal roots. Chapter Four will provide a discussion of how modern liberal feminism still relies on a dualistic conceptualization of the human individual. To illustrate this point, the work of Betty Friedan and Janet Radcliffe Richards will be discussed,[11] and it will be shown that modern liberal feminism simultaneously affirms a woman's free will and her self-interested right to own property, both real and in the person. Modern liberal feminists see the liberation of women both as a problem of self-determination and as a matter of women taking their rightful place beside men in the competitive labour market. Existential and instrumental individualism still coexist in uneasy tension

[7] John Stuart Mill, "The Subjection of Women," in *Essays on Sex Equality: John Stuart Mill and Harriet Taylor Mill,* edited with an introduction by Alice S. Rossi (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), pp. 125–242.

[8] Jennifer Ring, "Mill's 'The Subjection of Women': The Methodological Limits of Liberal Feminism," *The Review of Politics,* Vol. 47, No. 1, 1985, p. 27.

[9] Judith N. McArthur, "Utilitarians and the Woman Problem," *The Social Science Journal,* Vol. 22, No. 3, July 1985, p. 57.

[10] Gail Tulloch, *Mill and Sexual Equality* (Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1989), p. 3.

[11] Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: Dell, 1974) and Janet Radcliffe Richards, *The Sceptical Feminist* (Middlesex: Penguin, 1980).

in modern liberal feminist thought. The contradictions identified in Mill's writing continue to plague liberal feminists after more than one hundred and twenty years.

Given the theoretical problems encountered by liberal possessive individualism — problems that occur as a result of simultaneously holding both an existential and an instrumental conceptualization of the human individual — it is tempting to turn away from individualism altogether in the search for an appropriate theory of women's liberation. Abandoning individualism completely, however, is to throw the baby out with the bath water. It is not individualism *per se* that is at fault, but rather it is the instrumental aspect of possessive individualism that hampers the movement towards the liberation of women. Instrumental individualism and existential individualism are distinct world views that contain conflicting values; each promotes a vision of society that is incompatible with the other. However, existential individualism combined with free voluntary communism as manifested in anarchist political philosophy is both consistent and coherent; it is a perspective that asserts a belief in the primacy of the individual and affirms free will and self-determination.

Anarchism, like liberalism, understands the individual in existential terms. Anarchism, however, rejects instrumental values that are central to liberalism and is therefore free of many of the problems that plague liberalism and liberal feminism. In anarchist theory, the human individual is affirmed. Free will is understood as inviolable, and because instrumental possessiveness is denied and replaced instead with free communism, relations of domination and subordination are not introduced via real property or property in the person.

The emphasis on property in this context is not, of course, intended to imply that other forms of social and cultural factors are not significant as well. Domination and subordination have many sources, and the struggle for existential freedom, for individual freedom not as a means but rather as an end in itself, involves much more than eliminating property relations. Anarchist political philosophy understands this, and opposes not just domination that arises out of property, both real and in the person, but domination in all its forms. Chapter Five will offer a discussion of various anarchist works, particularly those of Emma Goldman, which will demonstrate that anarchist thought avoids the fundamental liberal contradiction between existential and instrumental individualism.

Many anarchist writers, however, while being committed to existential individualism, will often refer to "naturally" co-operative relationships between existentially free individuals to buttress their political views. In Chapter Six this tendency will be discussed as a throwback to the nineteenth-century roots of anarchism. Such outdated roots must be abandoned in favour of the more fluid and self-created "nature" proposed by existentialist philosophy if anarchism is to be relevant into the twenty-first century.

Finally, in Chapter Seven, the possibilities and limitations of feminism as a liberatory political strategy will be explored. As feminism as a whole movement lacks an inherent, general critique of power and domination, anarchism's implicit anti-authoritarianism makes anarchism a more appropriate politics of liberation.

Chapter Two: Liberalism and Theories of Individualism

One way to approach social theories of liberation is to consider how such theories deal with the human individual. Some theories make the individual their focus; they start with the fundamental premise that the human individual is of primary importance in the struggle for liberation. Human rights and freedom are the substance of these theories. Liberalism, existentialism and anarchism are examples of movements that take the human individual as a central unit of analysis. Other theoretical traditions de-emphasize the individual and instead concentrate their attention on social change as a collective phenomenon. Classes, masses, groups and collectivities are the conceptual matter that such theories contemplate. Marxism exemplifies this tradition. These two tendencies, which for convenience I will call the *individualist* and the *collectivist,* struggle against each other in their theoretical skirmishes, debating and examining, sometimes baiting and maligning, while they contest the theoretical terrain of liberation. The dispute is over the place of the individual in social life. It concerns the very nature of what it means to be human. While no political theory is exclusively one or the other, most theories of liberation will usually fall into either one of these two camps.

Theories that concern themselves with the liberation of women are no different than other liberatory theories in this respect. A feminist theory will either assume that the individual is of primary importance or it will instead concentrate on larger units of analysis like *gender* or *class.* Liberal feminism falls into the former category, while socialist, Marxist, and radical feminism fall into the latter.

The struggle between individualists and collectivists goes beyond the question of whether the individual is the appropriate unit o£ analysis; the two approaches differ quite significantly over the issue of whether an individual is an irreducible subject who acts on the world or whether the social and natural environment creates the individual. In the latter case, the idea of an authentic and self-determined will is decried as an ideological fiction. Individual freedom, then, becomes a non-issue for those collectivists who deny the epistemological status of the individual. The individual is not self-motivated, but rather is determined by the social and natural world. For collectivists, individuals become what society makes of them. Freedom and free will are unimportant. For individualists, on the other hand, precisely because the human individual is understood as valuable in and of itself, the freedom of the individual is of paramount importance. Thus, on one level while the debate between collectivists and individualists is merely concerned with whether to emphasize or de-emphasize the human individual, on another level the deeper question emerges of whether human individuals can be free to create their world or whether the world creates the individual.

Supporters of the individualist approach believe, among other things, that the human individual is capable of exercising free will and that this capacity to make choices defines what it is to be human. As the contemporary libertarian writer William McKercher asserts:

> Freedom is more an attitude of mind than the result of physical circumstances, … it is not so much a form of resistance to external sources, but an affirmation of individual autonomy exemplified by the notion of choice. In the crude first instance, to be able to choose is to be free.[1]

John Stuart Mill argues from such an individualist perspective when he states in *On Liberty* that "in each person's own concerns his individual spontaneity is entitled to free exercise. Considerations to aid his judgment, exhortations to strengthen his will, may be offered to him, even obtruded on him, by others; but he himself is the final judge."[2] Emma Goldman also expresses similar sentiments when she writes:

> Anarchism insists that the center of gravity in society is the individual — that he must think for himself, act freely, and live fully. The aim of Anarchism is that every individual in the world shall be able to do so. If he is to develop freely and fully, he must be relieved from the interference and oppression of others.[3]

What distinguishes this perspective from the collectivist point of view is that individualists believe in the existence of an internally motivated and authentic free will while most collectivists understand the human individual as shaped externally by others — the individual for them is "constructed" by the collective. In the individualist perspective, people are understood to be valuable in and of themselves. They are not simply human flotsam and jetsam swept along in the current of history. They are active human subjects who give meaning to themselves and their world. It is not the group that gives shape to the individual, but rather individuals who give form and content to the group. A group is a collection of individuals, no more and no less; it has no life or consciousness of its own. The questions considered by individualists revolve around the individual. How can the individual be free and yet live with others? Is there any legitimate arena where individual freedom may be curtailed? What kind of society contains the best conditions for individual freedom? How can individuals resist oppression and express their own authentic wills and desires?

Collectivists, on the other hand, stress the social factors that they believe determine the individual. Broad movements in history are understood as conditioning individual consciousness. The human individual is made by society, and not, as individualists believe, the other way around. At issue for collectivists is how various groups relate not only to their own members but also to one another. How do men as a group relate to women? How does capitalism maintain itself when confronted with working class consciousness? How are categories such as black, female, unemployed and homosexual defined by the dominant culture?

It is obvious that there is considerable theoretical distance between collectivists and individualists. Much of Marx's polemics were directed at liberalism and anarchist individualism; at times, Marx even equated the two. For instance, Marx derisively describes the anarchist Proudhon as "a petty-bourgeois utopian."[4] On the other hand, liberals, anarchists and other individualists have

[1] William R. McKercher, *Freedom and Authority* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1989), p. 247.

[2] John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty,* edited with an introduction by Gertrude Himmelfarb (London: Penguin, 1974), p. 143.

[3] Emma Goldman, "Was My Life Worth Living?" in *Red Emma Speaks,* edited by Alix Kates Shulman (New York: Schocken, 1983), p. 442.

[4] Karl Marx, "Marx to L. Kugelman in Hanover," in *Marx, Engels, Lenin: Anarchism and Anarcho-Syndicalism,* edited by N. Y. Kolpinsky (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1972), p. 43.

been critical of the determinism and authoritarianism of Marxist movements,[5] and many modern political theorists in the West denounce communism as it has been historically practised as a system that denies individual freedom.

Today, however, there has been a wholesale rejection of collectivist ideology and its practice by those living under collectivist regimes; in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union individual freedom is now one of the demands of an increasingly discontented population. In their traditional denunciations of individualism, collectivists have clearly underestimated the great appeal that individual freedom holds for most people. One of the main reasons for the crisis in legitimation faced by collectivist regimes today is their practical and theoretical inability to see the human individual as the fundamental basis of society. Human liberation can only come about through the efforts of individuals; freedom inheres in individuals, not in groups. Any political movement that aims at liberation without acknowledging the central importance of the human individual will never succeed. While the collectivists have promised liberation, history has shown that their approach is inadequate to the task.

Certainly, the application of the collectivist "solution" in Eastern Europe and in the former Soviet Union improved, at least initially, the material comforts of their people as a whole. However, the industrial productiveness of a command economy has not over time kept up with the great material gains made by most capitalist economies. The relative poverty of collectivist regimes is surprising, as in theory a centrally controlled command economy should be more efficient than the unplanned chaos of a market driven system. Why has this been proven wrong in practice? While there are obviously many different contributing factors, without fundamental individual freedom the workers in collectivist systems lack the will to work productively. Freedom of expression, freedom of association, the freedom simply to do what one wills, is denied in these countries, and their people are now demonstrating very clearly that such repression is politically, socially, and philosophically intolerable. History has shown concretely what I can only argue theoretically: that the neglect of the human individual is fatal to any political theory of liberation. Thus, those theories that put the human individual at the centre of their analyses are a more appropriate place to start in the discussion about human liberation.

Liberal individualism in particular is gaining popularity in the Eastern bloc as a way to achieve human liberation. Many nations formerly committed to the collectivist tradition are joining Western liberal societies in the philosophical privileging of the human individual. This blossoming of liberalism calls for a reexamination of the role that the human individual plays in liberal thought. The question of how liberal individualism handles the issue of women's subordination is of particular importance, for if women are not free to be self-determined by a liberal approach, then its adequacy as a liberatory theory as a whole is placed in doubt. However, it is not simply a question of intellectual consistency, for if liberalism in general, and liberal feminism in particular, are unable to rise to the task of truly liberating people, then the continued application of liberal principles to the problem of women's subordination is a waste of time and energy and ought to be replaced by a more appropriate political agenda.

While individualism is commonly acknowledged as a defining characteristic of liberal thought, there is little consensus about the implications that individualism has for liberal

[5] Examples of anarchist critiques of Marxism include: David Miller, *Anarchism* (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1984), pp. 78–93; John Clark, *The Anarchist Moment* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1984), pp. 33–116; and J. Frank Harrison, *The Modern State* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1983), pp. 75–121.

political theory and practice. Different conceptual frameworks yield vastly different conclusions about liberal individualism. Some theorists, mostly collectivists, believe liberal individualism to be primarily *abstract,* that is, to be divorced from any social or historical context. Other thinkers, like C. B. Macpherson, identify liberal individualism as mainly *possessive.* While these two points of view are by no means mutually exclusive, they do represent two fundamentally distinct ways of comprehending liberal individualism. Those who believe liberal individualism to be abstract argue that liberals understand the human individual as disconnected from any sense of social, economic or political context. In such a framework, abstractness is seen as a major theoretical deficiency of liberal individualism, and provides the justification for discarding it as a serious philosophical position. The second approach sees liberal individualism as possessive, that is, as characterized primarily by self-interested relationships of ownership of real property and property in the person, and the freedom of will that accompanies such ownership.

In both frameworks, liberal individualism is understood as necessary to the continued existence of capitalism, as well as contributing to its practical and ideological problems. Theorists who see liberal individualism as abstract misinterpret liberalism; possessiveness is a much more accurate characterization of liberal individualism. Although these collectivists argue that liberal thinkers believe in a fictitious abstract individual, their real target is individualism in *any* form. The fact that liberals may not in actuality believe in the individual as abstract does not appear to matter to collectivist critics, however; for them, the very belief in the existence of individual autonomy is a false abstraction. Indeed, the real quarrel these writers have is not with abstract individualism but rather with individualism itself. Seen as not only abstract but unimportant, the human individual is dismissed outright. This collectivist tendency to throw out individualism altogether produces major theoretical problems that cannot be overcome from within the collectivist framework.

If liberal thought contains no substantial evidence to support the claim that human individuals are abstract, why do these collectivist critics come to such a mistaken conclusion? A perception of the individual as abstract is inherent in a viewpoint that focuses exclusively on the collective nature of society; from such a perspective, the human individual appears to be an abstraction from the only "true" reality — the group. If human individuals indeed have no substance or real existence outside their "construction" by the group, then individual self-determination is nothing more than a liberal fantasy, an illusion, an "abstraction." Thus, it is of no consequence to these collectivists that little if any direct evidence of abstract individualism can be found in liberal thought; the fact that liberals believe in the very existence of individual autonomy and free will is to them in itself abstract. The only "concrete" or true reality is that of the collective.

The argument that liberal thought is based on a foundation of abstract individualism is quite prevalent in recent literature, and can be found in many collectivist feminist attacks on liberalism and Uberai feminism. For instance, Alison Jaggar accuses liberal political philosophers of making "the assumption that the essential human characteristics are properties of individuals and are given independently of any particular social context."[6] Naomi Scheman argues that Uberai abstract individualism makes the false assumption that people "exist essentially as separate individuals — with wants, preferences, needs, abilities, pleasures, and pains."[7] Carole Pateman, whose

[6] Alison M. Jaggar, *Feminist Politics and Human Nature* (Sussex: Harvester Press, 1983), p. 42.

[7] Naomi Scheman, "Individualism and the Objects of Psychology," in *Discovering Reality,* edited by Sandra Harding and Merrill B. Hintikka (Dordrecht, Holland: D. Reidel Publishing, 1983), p. 231.

critique of contract theory will be discussed in Chapter Three, perceives the human individual as a patriarchal and liberal abstraction. For her, the liberal notion of the "individual" is problematic because it is abstracted from the groups of masculine and feminine:

> There have been many famous critiques of the abstract character of liberal individualism, but none has ever questioned the most fundamental abstraction of all: the abstraction of the "individual" from the body. In order for the individual to appear in liberal theory as a universal figure, who represents anyone and everyone, the individual must be disembodied.[8]

Pateman argues that "to take embodied identity seriously demands the abandonment of the masculine, unitary individual to open up space for two figures; one masculine, one feminine."[9] Here, she equates the individual with masculinity and contract, and while it can be argued that in certain circumstances the individual has been defined by liberals in terms of sex and property, there are other important aspects of liberal individualism, like a commitment to free expression of will, which are missed by Pateman's narrow analysis. Pateman, in dismissing liberalism as "abstract" and "disembodied" does not fully appreciate this radical thrust of liberal political philosophy.

Zillah Eisenstein accuses liberalism in general, and John Stuart Mill and Harriet Taylor in particular, of embracing abstract individualism. She writes:

> For Mill and Taylor, the essence of individuality appears transhistorical and as part of the nature of any individual within society. They therefore speak of the problem of individual liberty in abstract terms… They view the individual as autonomous, atomistic, and distinct from the social relations of society. Most of the time they envision individual and social life as antagonistic to each other.[10]

Eisenstein is critical of Mill's emphasis on the individual, which she asserts "posits the individual isolated and disconnected from social relations."[11] Catharine MacKinnon states that liberal feminism mistakenly

> takes the individual as the proper unit of analysis and measure of the destructiveness of sexism… Individualism involves one of liberalism's deepest yet also superficially most apparent notions: what it is to be a person is to be a unique individual, which defines itself against, as distinct from, as not reducible to, any group.[12]

These various collectivist criticisms of liberal thought all allege that the liberal conceptualization of the human individual is "abstract," and that liberals fall into the theoretical trap of celebrating the human individual as isolated and separate from any social or historical context.

---

[8] Carole Pateman, "Introduction: The Theoretical Subversiveness of Feminism," in *Feminist Challenges: Social and Political Theory,* edited by Carole Pateman and Elizabeth Gross (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1987), p. 8.

[9] Carole Pateman, *The Sexual Contract* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), p. 224.

[10] Zillah Eisenstein, *The Radical Future of Liberal Feminism* (New York: Longman, 1981), pp. 116–117.

[11] Eisenstein, *The Radical Future,* p. 121.

[12] Catharine MacKinnon, *Toward a Feminist Theory of the State* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989) pp. 40, 45–46.

Such criticisms are misplaced. Liberalism does not require that individuals be abstracted from place and time, and to my knowledge there is little or no evidence in liberal writing that supports this collectivist critique. Even if such evidence exists, however, it cannot be said to be an intrinsic part of liberal thought as a whole. Susan Wendell points out that "liberal ideals of political equality and individual liberty need not be derived from a view of human nature that includes abstract individualism and do not imply such a view…"[13] She also says explicitly of Mill: "Mill did not hold the components of abstract individualism as Jaggar and Scheman describe them."[14] It is not abstract to understand the human individual as not being socially constructed, but rather as capable of expressing free will within a social context.

Will Kymlicka makes a similar point when he argues:

> It has become part of the accepted wisdom that liberalism involves abstract individualism and scepticism about the good. The simplest response is that neither of these assumptions enters anywhere in the theories of Mill or Rawls or Dworkin, and it's remarkable how often this accepted wisdom gets passed on without the least bit of textual support.[15]

Kymlicka contends that liberalism does not deny the social world in favour of abstract individualism, but rather that liberalism understands and encourages the human capacity to question the appropriateness of a particular social context. This liberal belief is based on our own experience of our selves, and to deny or reject it is to violate "our deepest self-understandings."

> We don't consider ourselves trapped by our present attachments, incapable of judging the worth of the goals we inherited (or ourselves chose earlier). No matter how deeply implicated we find ourselves in a social practice or tradition, we feel capable of questioning whether the practice is a valuable one…[16]

Kymlicka points out that, according to the critics of abstract liberalism, individuals are "embedded" in their social context and while they can interpret the meaning of social relationships, they cannot escape or reject them. Kymlicka argues that such a critique is implausible. Individuals *are* capable of questioning and rejecting their social situation. "We can and do make sense of questions not just about the meaning of the roles and attachments we find ourselves in, but also about their value."[17] Liberals don't deny the social, they simply acknowledge that individuals can and do question and challenge the social situations in which they find themselves. This is hardly what one could call abstract, since the human individual is seen as actively involved in a social context.

For liberals, it is the expression of free will within a social context that defines individuals as human; it is the capacity for self-determination in the company of other self-determined individuals that distinguishes the human individual from other animals. As John Stuart Mill states:

---

[13] Susan Wendell, "A (Qualified) Defense of Liberal Feminism," in *Hypatia,* Vol. 2, No. 2, Summer 1987, p. 75.

[14] Wendell, "A (Qualified) Defense," p. 73.

[15] Will Kymlicka, "Liberalism and Communitarianism," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy,* Vol. 18, No. 2, June 1988, p. 184.

[16] Kymlicka, "Liberalism and Communitarianism," p. 191.

[17] Kymlicka, "Liberalism and Communitarianism," p. 194.

> He who lets the world, or his own portion of it, choose his plan of life for him has no need of any other faculty than the ape-like one of imitation. He who chooses his plan for himself employs all his faculties.[18]

This is not a denial of "the world," but rather it is an affirmation of the primary place the individual has *within* the world.

The tendency to deny that the human individual is capable of being self-determining is clearly evident in the thought of many recent feminist collectivists. For example, Jaggar asserts that "it is a conceptual as well as an empirical truth that human interests are acquired only in a social context."[19] For her, human individuals are conceptually and empirically "socially constituted"[20] and she completely rejects the notion of individual free will. She correctly identifies as liberal the "strong belief in the possibility and desirability of individual freedom of choice,"[21] but for her this is abstract nonsense that demands the adoption of "an alternative theory of human nature, one which recognizes the social constitution of human needs, interests and qualities of character."[22]

In her attack against liberal individualism, Jaggar is explicitly critical of the liberal belief in the individual's capacity to determine his or her own desires, knowledge of which is essential to the authentic expression of will. "Liberals view each individual as the expert in identifying her or his own interest, and they eschew any claim to criticize the rationality of an individual's desires except on formal grounds, such as consistency."[23] This liberal attribution to the individual of legitimate self-awareness, a characteristic that forms the basis for exercising free will, is philosophically unacceptable to Jaggar. Self-determination is problematic for her because it takes away the collectivist ability to critique individual action and provides little justification for collective interference in the affairs of individuals. As a collectivist, Jaggar needs to rationalize collective sanctioning of individual actions; she therefore denies the individual any capacity to be self-determined and concerns herself only with groups and the relations between groups.

Scheman likewise argues that human beings are "socially constituted … having emotions, beliefs, abilities, and so on only insofar as they are embedded in a social web of interpretation that serves to give meaning to the bare data of inner experience and behavior…"[24] Scheman argues against the liberal notions of self-definition, free choice, and voluntarism, and maintains that such ideas are simply male psychological illusions created by a system of mother-centred child-rearing.

> The view of a separate, autonomous, sharply individuated self embedded in liberal political and economic ideology and in individualist philosophies of the mind can be seen as a defensive reification of the process of ego development in males raised by women in a patriarchal society.[25]

The female experience is, according to Scheman, more concrete and less abstract than that of the male, but patriarchal culture socializes women to share men's mistaken belief in the in-

[18] Mill, *On Liberty*, p. 123.
[19] Jaggar, *Feminist Politics,* p. 43.
[20] Jaggar, *Feminist Politics,* p. 44.
[21] Jaggar, *Feminist Politics,* p. 86.
[22] Jaggar, *Feminist Politics,* p. 195.
[23] Jaggar, *Feminist Politics,* p. 30.
[24] Scheman, "Individualism," p. 232.
[25] Scheman, "Individualism," pp. 234–235.

dividual as self-determined. Scheman argues that women ought to reject this myth of abstract individualism and instead understand our "interconnectedness" as *women.* According to her:

> We are less likely to speak naturally in voices at once abstractly disembodied and autonomously self-defining. Rather than claim our right to speak in such voices, to transcend our experience as women, I would urge us to speak out of that experience, in part as a way of changing it, but also out of a recognition of what there is to learn from the perspectives on human life that have been distinctly ours.[26]

Like many other collectivists, Scheman ultimately privileges the group over the individual. Pateman rejects the very idea of the human individual when she argues:

> The conclusion is easy to draw that the denial o£ civil equality to women means that the feminist aspiration must be to win acknowledgment for women as "individuals." Such an aspiration can never be fulfilled. The "individual" is a patriarchal category. The individual is masculine and his sexuality is understood accordingly… The patriarchal construction of sexuality, what it means to be a sexual being, is to possess and to have access to sexual property.[27]

Here again there is an understanding of the human individual as socially "constructed." The conceptualization of the human individual as autonomous and self-determining is perceived as an ideological creation of both patriarchy and liberalism. Pateman argues that "women can attain the formal standing of civil individuals but as embodied feminine beings we can never be 'individuals' in the same sense as men."[28] Pateman argues that the whole concept of "individual" must be abandoned in favour of an approach that acknowledges that human beings come in two distinct groups: male and female.

MacKinnon also rejects the individual as insignificant when she argues that we are "socially constituted."[29] She contrasts the truth of her own radical feminist perspective against the falseness of liberal feminism:

> The voluntarism of liberalism consists in its notion that social life is comprised of autonomous, intentional, and self-willed actions, with exceptional constraints or qualifications by society or the state. This aggregation of freely-acting persons as the descriptive and prescriptive model of social action is replaced, in radical feminism, with a complex political determinism. Women and women's actions are complex responses to conditions they did not make or control; they are contextualized and situated.[30]

This radical feminist critique of liberalism clearly borrows from the Marxist tradition; MacKinnon acknowledges this when she writes that radical feminism is "like marxism, at least in its formal dimensions"[31] where "the fact of social construction of the individual is accepted and

[26] Scheman, "Individualism," p. 242.
[27] Pateman, *The Sexual Contract,* pp. 184–185.
[28] Pateman, *The Sexual Contract,* p. 224.
[29] MacKinnon, *Toward a Feminist Theory,* p. 46.
[30] MacKinnon, *Toward a Feminist Theory,* pp. 46–47.
[31] MacKinnon, *Toward a Feminist Theory,* p. 39.

even embraced."[32] As a result, MacKinnon rejects the individual as irrelevant in favour of "the collective 'group called women.'"[33]

In their rush to condemn liberal individualism as abstract, many collectivists deny the significance of the individual. While many collectivists would argue to the contrary, the rejection of the possibility of individual self-determination destroys any chance of achieving human freedom; freedom depends upon the individual, not only to provide the impetus for social change but also as the subject in which freedom resides. A group cannot be liberated — it cannot, as a group, exercise freedom — only individuals can be free. To deny or reject the importance of human individuals is to deny the possibility of human freedom. Liberation requires a celebration of the human individual, not its repudiation. The absence of a truly liberating vision is evident in those collectivists who reject individualism as theoretically and practically unimportant. Such a rejection could only be made by ignoring one's own experience, for as Friedrich Sixel points out, some critics "might say that 'truth', 'spontaneity', 'will', 'human being' are concepts inherited from an outdated agrarian past and of no relevance for today's world anymore. But they can only *say* that, they cannot *live* that"[34] (original emphasis). The result of rejecting the human individual as significant is not the creation of human liberation but, rather, the acquiescence by such theorists to the theoretical and practical inevitability of continued relationships of domination and subordination.

An example of this acquiescence can be found in Jaggar's collectivist point of view. Jaggar's rejection of the significance of the individual ultimately leads her to epistemologically privilege certain groups over others. According to her, knowledge and the ability to make sense belong not to individuals by virtue of their personal qualities, but rather because they are members of an oppressed group. Members of an oppressed group have a privileged relationship to reality because "their pain provides them with a motivation for finding out what is wrong."[35] Thus:

> The standpoint of the oppressed is not just different from that of the ruling class; it is also epistemologically advantageous. It provides the basis for a view of reality that is more impartial than that of the ruling class and also more comprehensive. It is more impartial because it comes closer to representing the interests of society as a whole; whereas the standpoint of the ruling class reflects the interests only of one section of the population, the standpoint of the oppressed represents the interests of the totality in that historical period.[36]

In her rejection of individualism, Jaggar denies the individual any personal judgement about what is real, or what interests he or she might have. For her, an individual's point of view is determined by his or her social and political location: If he or she is a member of an oppressed group he or she has privileged epistemological status. She rejects the possibility of an individual being able to empathize with the position of another, for an individual's consciousness is determined by the group. Thus, Jaggar denies individual freedom and replaces it with the socially constructed "standpoint" of the oppressed group. Since she views this privileged point of view

[32] MacKinnon, *Toward a Feminist Theory,* p. 40.
[33] MacKinnon, *Toward a Feminist Theory,* p. 40.
[34] Friedrich Sixel, *Crisis and Critique: On the 'Logic' of Late Capitalism* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1988), p. 141.
[35] Jaggar, *Feminist Politics,* p. 370.
[36] Jaggar, *Feminist Politics,* pp. 370–371.

as more directly connected to reality, Jaggar sets up a moral basis for the domination of one individual by another by virtue of the groups to which they belong, typically through no choice of their own. Effectively, therefore, Jaggar's framework provides the impetus and justification for one group forcing its will on another.

Scheman, like Jaggar, also presents a politics of domination. Like many other collectivists, Scheman's rejection of all forms of individualism betrays a deep uneasiness with the idea of human freedom. Self-definition, "the freedom to constitute ourselves in any way we choose" bothers Scheman because "this sort of voluntarism (exemplified most starkly by Sartre) makes this ultimate choice irrational and inaccessible to criticism."[37] She experiences a sense of vertigo when faced with this dizzying freedom, and gains her balance only when she exchanges that freedom for an embodied groundedness in the socially constituted group called women. Scheman profoundly misunderstands liberal and existential individualism when she claims that all critical impetus is lost in these individualist political philosophies. Individualism, whether existentialist or liberal, does not mean that "everything goes." On the contrary, as Simone de Beauvoir points out:

> We have to respect freedom only when it is intended for freedom, not when it strays, flees itself, and resigns itself. A freedom which is interested only in denying freedom must be denied. And it is not true that the recognition of the freedom of others limits my own freedom: to be free is not to have the power to do anything you like; it is to be able to surpass the given toward an open future; the existence of others as a freedom defines my situation and is even the condition of my own freedom. I am oppressed if I am thrown into prison, but not if I am kept from throwing my neighbour into prison.[38]

The ability to criticize is not abandoned in individualist philosophies; in fact, there is a very strong critical aspect to individualism since it has as an ethical imperative the constant striving towards freedom. "Only the freedom of others keeps each one of us from hardening in the absurdity of facticity,"[39] Beauvoir reminds us. The ethics demanded by free human existence are ones that reach out to freedom itself. Therefore, it is unethical to deny one's own freedom, to say one has no choice at all. As well, it is unethical to oppress others, for to deny others their freedom is to deny one's own. This ethic of freedom gives to individualist philosophies a critical impetus; Scheman, however, does not acknowledge this in her attack on individualism.

Fundamentally, Scheman's rejection of the liberal ideas of free will and self-definition is based on her repudiation of the psychological idea of individual subjectivity as a male myth. She celebrates the fact that "a girl's sense of self is typically weaker than a boy's; her ego-boundaries are less strong."[40] Mother-centred parenting thus results in women who "are less likely to consider ourselves, or be considered by others, as having an identity, a character, talents, and virtues independent of our particular intimate relationships and of how we are perceived by others."[41] Instead of asserting our "selves," which is, as Scheman assures us, only a figment of the male imagina-

[37] Scheman, "Individualism," p. 233.
[38] Simone de Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity* (Don Mills, Ontario: Citadel, 1948), p. 91.
[39] Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity,* p. 71.
[40] Scheman, "Individualism," p. 238.
[41] Scheman, "Individualism," p. 239.

tion, we must search for and give voice to our female "interconnectedness."[42] This is a reactionary step, and can never result in the liberation of women. As Janet Biehl points out, "marginalized for millennia, passive and receptive for millennia, 'connected' to the point of self-effacement for millennia, women are now striving for subjectivity, precisely for *selfhood* and for full recognition of their subjectivity and selfhood in a new *society*"[43] (original emphasis). Scheman would have us abandon our selves in favour of selfless interconnectedness. This total annihilation of individual freedom represents the epitome of domination.

The collectivist inability to deal adequately with human freedom can also be seen in Pateman's work. She rejects the individual outright as an enslaving ideological construct. From this perspective, she is blind to the radical liberatory potential in liberalism's commitment to the individual. For her, the liberal idea of the human individual is totally instrumental and bound up with contract:

> The sexual contract and the social contract, the "individual" and the state, stand and fall together… The conjuncture of individual freedom and a vast increase in state power is not unexpected.[44]

Thus, for Pateman, the individual has nothing to do with freedom. She argues instead that individual freedom must be limited by the group: "If men's mastery is to be replaced by the mutual autonomy of women and men, individual freedom must be limited by the structure of social relations in which freedom inheres."[45] This is because "freedom requires order, and order requires limits."[46] However, for Pateman, freedom is not individual freedom, as the individual is a patriarchal fiction; rather it is the "mutual autonomy" of two groups — men and women. Pateman does not recognize that freedom only exists in and for individuals; by denying this, she makes the concept of freedom meaningless.

MacKinnon also advocates "collective liberation" and as a result admits oppression into her world view. MacKinnon's denial of the significance of the individual and her assertion that sexuality is socially constructed leads her to conclude that an authentic, nonviolent, heterosexual relationship between two people in our society is impossible: "The assumption that in matters sexual women really want what men want from women, makes male force against women in sex invisible. It makes rape sex."[47] MacKinnon says the same thing of homosexual relationships:

> Some have argued that lesbian sexuality — meaning here simply women having sex with women, not with men — solves the problem of gender by eliminating men from women's voluntary encounters. Yet women's sexuality remains constructed under conditions of male supremacy; women remain socially defined as women in relation to men; the definition of women as men's inferiors remains sexual even if not heterosexual, whether men are present at the time or not. To the extent gay men choose men because they are men, the meaning of masculinity is affirmed as well as under-

[42] Scheman, "Individualism," p. 242.
[43] Janet Biehl, "Ecofeminism and Deep Ecology," *Our Generation*, Vol. 19, No. 2, Spring/Summer 1988, p. 24.
[44] Pateman, *The Sexual Contract,* p. 232.
[45] Pateman, *The Sexual Contract,* p. 232.
[46] Pateman, *The Sexual Contract,* p. 232.
[47] MacKinnon, *Toward a Feminist Theory,* p. 141.

> mined. It may also be that sexuality is so gender marked that it carries dominance and submission with it, whatever the gender of its participants.[48]

Sex is always violent because, claims MacKinnon, in our society that is how sexuality is constructed. She derisively brands as "liberal"[49] anyone who claims to experience sex as liberating or as self-determined; for her, all sexuality in our society, even lesbian sexuality, is predicated on male violence. The individual has no free will or capacity for self-determination in MacKinnon's view — it is only the social construction of men and women with reference to male sexuality that interests her. Like the others discussed above, MacKinnon argues that the self-determining individual is a liberal fiction and, as a consequence of this point of view, she advocates the creation of a feminist State and a widening of State control to counter male sexual power and, ultimately, to end male domination.[50] Of course, if her major premise that male sexuality is in fact synonymous with violence is correct, and if human individuals are not capable of self-determination but are rather "socially constructed," then from this perspective a powerful female-controlled totalitarian State becomes the only means of eliminating male domination.

MacKinnon further justifies increasing the power of the (feminist) State by criticizing traditional liberal values such as freedom and individual will as serving men and, therefore, implicitly supporting male supremacy. For instance, she argues that the liberal principle of freedom of expression promotes pornography and that the principle itself is male (and therefore violent). "The male state, hegemonically liberal whether in the hands of conservatives or of liberals, actually protects pornography."[51] It does this because it is male: "In the epistemologically hermetic doublethink of the male point of view, prohibiting advances towards sex equality under law is state neutrality. From the male standpoint, it looks neutral because the state mirrors the inequality of the social world. Under the aegis of this neutrality, state protection of pornography becomes official policy."[52]

However, it is not the State itself that MacKinnon objects to — it is the *male* State. She is therefore not at all interested in "the avoidance of state intervention as such,"[53] but insists that in the case of pornography "first, the abuse must be stopped."[54] She means, presumably, that censorship is not only justifiable but also a necessary component of a State that truly takes women's interests into account.

MacKinnon sees only the limitations of liberalism in her consideration of sexuality and the law. In a limited sense, some of her criticisms of liberalism are valid as there can be no doubt that, like many other political philosophies, liberalism encounters major philosophical difficulties in deciding where to draw the line between public and private, between the sphere where government intervention is legitimate, and the realm which should be free from State interference. However, because MacKinnon rejects the liberal idea that human individuals can be free, that they are capable of acting authentically and not just as they are conditioned or "constructed," she is left with no alternative but to advocate a broadening of the legitimate arena of State control. MacKinnon "solves" the public/private dilemma by doing away with the private; the State has

[48] MacKinnon, *Toward a Feminist Theory*, p. 142.
[49] MacKinnon, *Toward a Feminist Theory*, p. 150.
[50] MacKinnon, *Toward a Feminist Theory*, pp. 237–249.
[51] MacKinnon, *Toward a Feminist Theory*, p. 213.
[52] MacKinnon, *Toward a Feminist Theory*, p. 213.
[53] MacKinnon, *Toward a Feminist Theory*, p. 247.
[54] MacKinnon, *Toward a Feminist Theory*, p. 247.

the responsibility to dominate every aspect of our lives in its fight to "reconstruct" male sexuality along more egalitarian lines.

In rejecting everything liberal as male, MacKinnon cannot understand that it is precisely because human individuals have free will that liberation is possible. Inflating the public and shrinking the private is not the way to solve problems of violence and domination — in fact, increasing State control over individuals *is* domination. In rejecting the liberal concept of individual will, MacKinnon falls back upon domination by the State to solve the problem of male violence and domination. In doing so, she simply substitutes one form of domination and violence for another.

The collectivist perspective upon which many recent critiques of liberal individualism are based encounters serious theoretical difficulties through its acceptance of relations of domination and subordination, not only because it rejects the human individual as a unit of analysis, but also because it understands individual self-determination as nonexistent — as a liberal fiction. Human liberation cannot come about through the rejection or denial of individual autonomy, but only by the affirmation of individual freedom. Domination and subordination are the ultimate products of the collectivist position. While liberalism has its own problems as a political theory, it correctly assumes that all human individuals are free to make independent judgements about their social context, and are capable of accepting, rejecting and even changing it. It is this capacity that allows for the possibility of human individuals to achieve freedom. The collectivist critique of liberal individualism not only misunderstands liberalism, but, perhaps more importantly, by privileging the group and denying the individual it upholds domination as necessary and unavoidable.

C. B. Macpherson's *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke* provides an alternative framework with which to understand liberal political theory. Macpherson argues that the liberal commitment to the individual is tied to the liberal belief in private property. He posits that the foundation of liberal individualism is the belief that the individual is free to own "property in the person" as well as real property. That is, individuals own their physical bodies with their attendant capacities and skills, and can sell their "labour power" to others on the open market. He calls this concept "possessive individualism."

Macpherson outlines seven propositions with respect to possessive individualism:

> (i) What makes a man human is freedom from dependence on the will of others.
>
> (ii) Freedom from dependence on others means freedom from any relations with others except those relations which the individual enters voluntarily with a view to his own interest.
>
> (iii) The individual is essentially the proprietor of his own person and capacities, for which he owes nothing to society.
>
> (iv) Although the individual cannot alienate the whole of his property in his own person, he may alienate his capacity to labour.
>
> (v) Human society consists of a series of market relations.
>
> (vi) Since freedom from the wills of others is what makes a man human, each individual's freedom can rightfully be limited only by such obligations and rules as are necessary to secure the same freedom for others.

> (vii) Political society is a human contrivance for the protection of the individual's property in his person and goods, and (therefore) for the maintenance of orderly relations of exchange between individuals regarded as proprietors of themselves.[55]

In an examination of the works of Hobbes, the Levellers, Harrington and Locke, Macpherson shows how the belief that the human individual is proprietor of property in the person is a key assumption made by all these early liberal thinkers. Not only does Macpherson see possessive individualism as characterizing early liberal thought, but he also sees it as a useful theoretical tool for understanding liberal thought as a whole, from its inception to the present.[56] He contends that the idea that human individuals are possessive was essential for the development of a market economy. Briefly, Macpherson argues that in order for a full market society to exist, the right to hold private property must be affirmed, and, additionally, individuals must be free to sell their labour power to others. In order to sell labour power, it is necessary that an individual owns that labour power in the first place. Individuals were thus required to be owners of property in their persons, but in order to do so they had to be free, or self-determining. Macpherson argues that much of liberal thought is devoted to legitimating, in one way or another, the capacity of individuals to be free and to own property in the person. Without this capacity, bourgeois society could not exist.

Macpherson's intent in developing his theory of possessive individualism is to better understand liberal thought. He writes:

> Some time ago I suggested that English political thought from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries had an underlying unity which deserved notice. I called the unifying assumption "possessive individualism" and suggested that central difficulties of liberal-democratic thought from John Stuart Mill to the present might be better understood if they were seen to have been set by the persistence and deep-rootedness of that assumption.[57]

Possessive individualism, as a unifying assumption serves Macpherson well in his analysis of early liberal thought. It provides him with a tool that "promise(s) to yield a fresh understanding" of liberal political theory, and allows him to resolve "unsettled problems of their meaning."[58] However, this *unifying* principle of liberalism contains a *dualism* that, while providing a coherence to liberalism, also threatens to break liberalism apart.

In order to safeguard both real property and property in the person, the early liberal theorists (who were, after all, the political pundits of rising capitalism) advocate the expression of individual free will. The individual who owns property both real and in the person requires freedom of will in order to make the owning and selling of property meaningful. Thus for the Levellers:

> As to civil and religious liberty, it was plain, first, that property in one's own person required a guaranteed freedom from arbitrary arrest, trial and imprisonment, and the right to due process of law. It was equally plain that property in one's own mental and

[55] C. B. Macpherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 263–264.

[56] Macpherson, *Possessive Individualism,* p. v.

[57] Macpherson, *Possessive Individualism,* p. v.

[58] Macpherson, *Possessive Individualism,* p. v.

> spiritual person required freedom of speech, publication, and religion. All these civil and religious rights were demanded for every one, however dependent by reason of sex or employment. Women were created human beings. Wage earners, although they had alienated their disposal of their own energies, had not entirely alienated their humanity. They were not slaves.[59]

Contrary to Macpherson's assertion that wage earners do not "entirely alienate their humanity," the buying and selling of "labour power" on the market results in the domination of the individual that, while not identical, is not unlike that found under a system of slavery. This point will be discussed more fully later. For now, however, I want only to note that possessive individualism contains within itself all the contradictions of capitalist economic relations. Thus, while the possessive individualism needed by capitalism and theorized by liberal thinkers is *instrumental,* that is, based upon the understanding of human individuals as self-interested proprietors, it also contains within itself an *existential* dimension — human individuals are not only owners, they are *free.*

The conceptualization oí the human individual as free from dependence on the will of others in voluntary association where such freedom must be assured for everyone characterizes existential individualism; and the self-interested property owner contracting out labour in the marketplace protected from others by the State is instrumental. In fact, instrumental individualism depends on freedom of will. Instrumental individualism is based on a belief in freedom as a *means* to achieve individual interests. Freedom is not valued as a desirable end in and of itself, but rather as a means by which to justify competitive self-interestedness. Existential individualism, on the other hand, is founded on the idea that freedom is an inherently valuable *end* in itself; self-determination and individual autonomy are desirable for themselves, and need no other justification. While instrumental individualism needs existential individualism, existential individualism is annihilated by instrumentalism. Seeing freedom merely as a means for individual self-promotion destroys any possibility of ever achieving freedom as an end. Freedom, as an end in itself, depends on social respect and co-operation: all must be free if one is to be free. Competition between self-interested owners of real property and property in the person can never result in the freedom of all because it inevitably results in relations of domination and subordination. Existential and instrumental individualism are intrinsically incompatible.

While Macpherson does not make explicit this dual aspect of the possessive individual in *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism,* both existential and instrumental tendencies are implicitly present in his analysis. In *The Life and Times of Liberal Democracy,* Macpherson states this duality outright:

> "Liberal" can mean freedom of the stronger to do down the weaker by following market rules; or it can mean equal effective freedom of all to use and develop their capacities. The latter freedom is inconsistent with the former.
>
> The difficulty is that liberal democracy during most of its life so far ... has tried to combine the two meanings. Its life began in capitalist market societies, and from the beginning it accepted their basic unconscious assumption, which might be paraphrased "Market maketh man". Yet quite early on, as early as John Stuart Mill in

[59] Macpherson, *Possessive Individualism,* pp. 142–143.

> the mid-nineteenth century, it pressed the claim of equal individual rights to self-development, and justified itself largely by that claim. The two ideas of liberal democracy have since then been held together uneasily, each with its ups and downs.[60]

The identification of these two "ideas of liberal democracy," one that understands freedom as manifesting itself instrumentally through the market, the other that understands freedom existentially as the individual's capacity to be self-determining, is useful for two reasons. One, it highlights the existential individualist potential in liberalism, a radical potential that is often lost in most critical examinations; and two, it aids in the understanding of the contradictions found in liberal thought, and of particular interest here, in those that are evident in liberalism's treatment of women. This framework, unlike that of abstract individualism, understands liberalism on its own terms, and is therefore a more appropriate way of comprehending liberal political philosophy.

By explicitly identifying and analytically separating instrumentalism and existential individualism as two intertwining threads that run through possessive individualism, it can be asked whether it is possible to salvage the existential individualism of liberal politics through the abandonment of instrumental individualism. Macpherson argues that "ethical liberals, from Mill on, tried to combine market freedom with self-development freedom, and tried to subordinate the former to the latter. They failed…"[61] He attributes this failure to the liberal commitment to an inherently unequal class system. As a result of this commitment, liberal democracy is always compromised, as the individual freedom of self-determination is undermined by a State whose function is necessarily that of mediating conflicting class interests. Macpherson tries to rescue the "central ethical principle of liberalism — the freedom of the individual to realize his or her human capacities"[62] — by combining participatory democracy with "the replacement of the image of man as consumer, and a great reduction of social and economic inequality."[63] Macpherson is in essence suggesting that instrumental market freedom give way to the existential freedom of self-determining individuals. Unfortunately, his commitment to the need for government, however democratic and participatory, falls seriously short of liberating the self-developing existentially free individual. Government of any kind inherently limits the freedom of the human individual; the admission of authority, governmental or otherwise, into a social scheme is contrary to the spirit of individual self-determination. Macpherson admits this himself in *The Real World of Democracy,* when he states:

> Liberal-democracy, *like any other system,* is a system of power; … it is, indeed, again like any other, a double system of power. It is a system by which people can be *governed,* that is, made to do things they would not otherwise do, and made to refrain from doing things they otherwise might do. Democracy as a system of government is, then, a system by which power is exerted by the state over individuals and groups within it. But more than that, a democratic government, *like any other,* exists to uphold and enforce a certain kind of society, a certain set of relations between individuals, a certain set of rights and claims that people have on each other both

[60] C. B. Macpherson, *The Life and Times of Liberal Democracy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), pp. 1–2.
[61] Macpherson, *The Life and Times of Liberal Democracy,* p. 2.
[62] Macpherson, *The Life and Times of Liberal Democracy,* p. 2.
[63] Macpherson, *The Life and Times of Liberal Democracy,* p. 100.

> directly, and indirectly through their rights to property. These relations themselves are relations of power — they give different people, in different capacities, power over others[64] (emphasis added).

Macpherson admits in his discussion of liberal democracy that all government is based on power that limits the freedom of the individual. That he argues elsewhere that participatory democracy, as a form of government, is compatible with individual human freedom contradicts his own observations about the repressive nature of all government. The only form of government that is consistent with the existentially free human individual is *no government at all.* Mutual aid, social co-operation, and free communist association are forms of social organization which respect the freedom of the individual and are more appropriately suited to the existentially free human individual than any government. While Macpherson commits himself to celebrating the existential and sacrificing the instrumental aspects of liberal individualism, his advocacy of participatory democracy as a means to achieve human liberation compromises the existentially free individual. Macpherson is therefore unable to fully appreciate the revolutionary consequences which would logically follow from the complete realization of the existentially free human individual who lives with others in free and voluntary communism, but who bows to no authority whatsoever.

[64] C. B. Macpherson, *The Real World of Democracy* (Toronto: CBC Publications, 1970), p. 4.

Chapter Three: John Stuart Mill on Women: The Existential and Instrumental Aspects of Liberal Possessive Individualism

The writings o£ John Stuart Mill are of particular interest because, unlike his nineteenth-century contemporaries, he wrote systematically and sympathetically about women's unequal status in an emerging bourgeois society. While the possessive individual provides a unifying theme for liberal thought and practice, two contradictory tendencies within liberal possessive individualism, the existential and the instrumental, present tremendous difficulties for liberalism as a whole. Mill's writing on women demonstrates this tension between existential and instrumental individualism, and this poses insurmountable problems for both his feminism and his liberalism. As Mill has had considerable influence on modern liberal feminist thought, it is important to identify and understand the theoretical contradictions contained in his work.

A careful reading of John Stuart Mill's "The Subjection of Women" reveals two distinct views of the human individual. On one hand, Mill sees the human individual in existential terms: free to choose how to live, without interference. On the other hand, Mill understands the human being as instrumental: self-interested owner of property, both real and as manifested in the person. In Mill's feminist considerations of employment, marriage and the family, and governmental politics, he oscillates between existential and instrumental conceptualizations of the human individual. Also, Mill's reflections on the general nature of women's oppression relies on a combination of existential and instrumental assumptions. That he tries to balance these two fundamentally contradictory views results in a severely compromised liberal feminism that in itself can never lead to liberation. Existential individualism, that is, individualism that stresses freedom as a desirable end in itself, is incompatible with instrumental individualism that sees freedom merely as a means to achieve egocentric competitive interests. Instrumental individualism as an ethic leads to relationships of hierarchy and domination, and therefore destroys the existential individualist commitment to self-determination, and frustrates any possibility of liberation.

In his discussion on women and employment, Mill mixes both existential and instrumental individualism in arguing against the subjection of women. In an existential vein, Mill argues that women, like men, ought to be able to choose whatever jobs appeal to them, according to their own tastes and inclinations. It is only just, argues Mill, that women "choose their occupation (short of injury to others) according to their own preferences, at their own risk."[1] Women therefore ought to be admitted "to all the functions and occupations hitherto retained as the monopoly of the stronger sex."[2]

[1] John Stuart Mill, "The Subjection of Women," in *Essays on Sex Equality: John Stuart Mill and Harriet Taylor Mill,* edited with an introduction by Alice S. Rossi (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), p. 183.

[2] Mill, "The Subjection of Women," p. 181.

Mill argues against the objection that women are incapable of equal participation in jobs by virtue of being naturally inferior by stating:

> No one can safely pronounce that if women's nature were left to choose its direction as freely as men's, and if no artificial bent were attempted to be given to it except that required by the conditions of human society, and given to both sexes alike, there would be any material difference, or perhaps any difference at all, in the character and capacities which would unfold themselves.[3]

Mill points out that some occupational restrictions are due to women's lack of access to good education. To ensure that women have the fullest opportunity to explore their inclinations they must be given the same education as men. Women must have "access to the experience of the human race; general knowledge — exactly the thing which education can best supply."[4] Mill argues that because women are denied the educational and job opportunities that men enjoy, it is impossible to ascertain accurately women's capacities to excel until such time as women can freely pursue their inclinations. "When women have had the preparation which all men now require to be eminently original, it will be time enough to begin judging by experience of the capacity for originality."[5] Mill's argument against any barriers to women's participation in employment and education is existentially individualistic because he affirms the individual's freedom to choose how to live. He condemns the denial of an education for women or the barring of women from certain jobs, both of which limit individual freedom. Mill's existential individualism is evident in his powerful defence of individual self-determination.

However, in Mill's consideration of women and employment, side by side with his existential view of the free individual lays another, less liberating picture. It is that of the instrumental individual, which Mill also extends to women. This individual is the owner of labour power and is "free" by virtue of being able to sell it within a competitive marketplace. The individual is driven by a selfinterestedness and the realities of the competitive marketplace.

> Freedom and competition suffice to make blacksmiths strong-armed men, because the weak-armed can earn more by engaging in occupations for which they are more fit. In consonance with this doctrine, it is felt to be an overstepping of the proper bounds of authority to fix beforehand, on some general presumption, that certain persons are not fit to do certain things.[6]

This type of "natural selection" based on competition does not allow individuals the freedom to choose what they would like to do with their lives, for Mill is stating here that such decisions are not for individuals to make but rather are best left to the cold "logic" of the marketplace. This does not leave room for the individual who likes to do a particular job but does not do well in it, or the individual who does not enjoy doing that in which he or she does excel. What one wants to do is often irrelevant; what skills one can sell is the issue. Individuals are thus discouraged from choosing occupations and activities that are o£ some inherent interest to them, and are instead

[3] Mill, "The Subjection of Women," p. 190.
[4] Mill, "The Subjection of Women," p. 191.
[5] Mill, "The Subjection of Women," p. 206.
[6] Mill, "The Subjection of Women," p. 144.

pushed towards jobs that satisfy a particular market demand. Individual self-determination, the ability to choose freely how to live, is compromised in the name of the competitive market.

Mill would extend this idea of the competitive instrumental individual to include women:

> What [women] can do, but not so well as the men who are their competitors, competition suffices to exclude them from; since nobody asks for protective duties and bounties in favour of women; it is only asked that the present bounties and protective duties in favour of men should be recalled.[7]

Mill argues that it is in the "free play of competition"[8] that women will gain their liberty. Thus, while the idea of choosing one's own occupation is obviously existentially individualist, the notion that one must instrumentally compete for those jobs undermines the existentially free individual. To compete is to win or lose; to win is to frustrate those that lose, to lose is to be frustrated oneself. Competition takes away self-determination and replaces it with subservience to market forces.

Furthermore, the labour contract itself is based on an inherent relationship of domination and subordination. Carole Pateman points out in her work *The Sexual Contract* the implications of understanding freedom as "contract and ownership."[9] Pateman argues that while the fundamental liberal assumption of individuals owning property in their persons is thought of in terms of freedom to contract out one's labour power, the reality is not freedom but rather subordination. Thus:

> The answer to the question of how property in the person can be contracted out is that no such procedure is possible. Labour power, capacities or services, cannot be separated from the person of the worker like pieces of property. The worker's capacities are developed over time and they form an integral part of his self and selfidentity; capacities are internally not externally related to the person. Moreover, capacities or labour power cannot be used without the worker using his will, his understanding and experience, to put them into effect. The use of labour power requires the presence of its "owner", and it remains as mere potential until he acts in the manner necessary to put it into use, or agrees or is compelled so to act; that is, the worker must labour. To contract for the use of labour power is a waste of resources unless it can be used in the way in which the new owner requires. The fiction "labour power" cannot be used; what is required is that the worker labours as demanded. The employment contract must, therefore, create a relationship of command and obedience between employer and worker.[10]

Pateman argues that the contracting out of one's "labour power" inevitably results in a relationship of domination and subordination because the very will of the employee must be subjugated to that of the employer. Pateman's point is well taken; it is difficult to see how an individual can be freely self-determining as an employee. Her critique of the idea of people owning property in their persons goes far beyond outlining mere economic exploitation; it is the domination of

[7] Mill, "The Subjection of Women," p. 154.

[8] Mill, "The Subjection of Women," p. 154.

[9] Carole Pateman, *The Sexual Contract* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), pp. 13–14.

[10] Pateman, *The Sexual Contract,* pp. 150–151.

individuals that is at stake. "The contract in which the worker allegedly sells his labour power is a contract in which, since he cannot be separated from his capacities, he sells command over the use of his body and himself. To obtain the right to the use of another is to be a (civil) master."[11] Thus, the so-called freedom of the marketplace that liberals such as Mill celebrate, calls into being the antithesis of freedom: wage slavery. Mill merely takes this wage slavery further than his liberal colleagues by advocating that women be allowed to dispose of their own property, both real,[12] and in their persons, as they see fit.

When labour power is seen for what it is, a fiction, then the contradiction between the liberal ideal of "freedom from dependence on the will of others"[13] and the notion that the individual is "proprietor of his own person and capacities,"[14] becomes obvious. It is not possible to be free from the wills of others if one contracts out one's labour power, for as Pateman points out, the act of selling one's labour power involves the selling of oneself and the subsequent subordination of one's will to another. This is because it is impossible to separate one's capacities, one's labour power, from oneself. A person is a totality of mind and body, of capacities and will. To contract out only one's labour power while keeping the integrity of one's will intact is impossible. This is true whether one is talking about physical, mental, artistic or sexual labour. The carpenter, professor, sculptor or prostitute all lose the capacity to be self-determined the moment they enter into an employment contract. In capitalism, the only chance individuals have of truly undertaking freely chosen work is "on their own time," when they pursue activities because they want to. As Alexander Berkman points out:

> A person can give the best of himself only when his interest is in his work, when he feels a natural attraction in it, when he likes it. Then he will be industrious and efficient. The things the craftsman produced in the days before modern capitalism were objects of joy and beauty, because the artisan loved his work. Can you expect the modern drudge in the modern factory to make beautiful things? He is part of the machine, a cog in the soulless industry, his labour mechanical, forced. Add to this his feeling that he is not working for himself but for the benefit of someone else, and that he hates his job or at best has no interest in it except that it secures his weekly wage. The result is shirking, inefficiency, laziness.
>
> The need of activity is one of the most fundamental urges of man. Watch the child and see how strong is his instinct for action, for movement, for doing something. Strong and continuous. It is the same with the healthy man. His energy and vitality demand expression. Permit him to do the work of his choice, the thing he loves, and his application will know neither weariness nor shirking. You can observe this in the factory-worker when he is lucky enough to own a garden or a patch of ground to raise some flowers or vegetables on. Tired from his toil as he is, he enjoys the hardest labour for his own benefit, done from free choice.[15]

[11] Pateman, *The Sexual Contract,* p. 151.

[12] Mill, "The Subjection of Women," p. 177.

[13] C. B. Macpherson, *The Political Philosophy of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 263.

[14] Macpherson, *Possessive Individualism,* p. 263.

[15] Alexander Berkman, *ABC of Anarchism* (London: Freedom Press, 1977), pp. 21–22.

Competitive, self-interested owners of labour power do not freely choose their work, but rather are compelled by the demands of the market into work that may not necessarily suit their temperaments. Also, the very nature of the labour contract itself denies the will of the employee by imposing the needs of the employer as paramount. The existential individual is irreconcilable with the instrumental individual, even though in capitalism, paradoxically, the instrumental requires the existential. Allowing women into the "instrumental" category of liberal assumptions, as Mill does in "The Subjection of Women," contradicts his existential individualist arguments about women's right to freedom of will and self-determination, just as the radical promise of liberal capitalism itself is constantly compromised by the instrumental needs of the market economy.

Allowing women to be instrumental, while also affirming their existential freedom, becomes so intertwined in Mill's discussion on employment that even a unitary principle, like that of merit, can be seen to contain both aspects. In countering the restrictive system of ascribed status, wherein to be born a man or a nobleman as opposed to a woman or a peasant determines the character of one's life, Mill asserts the existential freedom of individuals to make their own lives. However, in seeing merit as legitimizing the gain and use of power and authority, Mill once again contradicts his existential individualism in favour of an instrumental view of humanity. Mill argues in favour of a meritocracy in which one's status is gained by instrumental activities. This is evident when Mill states:

> The principle of the modern movement in morals and politics, is that conduct, and conduct alone, entitles to respect: that not what men are, but what they do, constitutes their claim to deference; that, above all, merit, and not birth, is the only rightful claim to power and authority.[16]

If Mill had only used the term "respect" he could have preserved the existential thrust of his argument; respect in itself has no power. To be respected for what you do and not for what you are confirms the individual's choices because even the withdrawal of respect still leaves the individual free. However, Mill does not stop there; he insists that merit can legitimately lay claim to deference, that power and authority are the proper rewards for achievement. While this is quite consistent with an instrumentally individualist stance, it poses grave difficulties for existential individualism. Power and authority are used to deny the wills of others; to legitimate their use is to cripple completely the conceptualization of the individual as existentially free. The exercise of power destroys the freedom of individuals. Thus, within the one principle of merit, Mill packs a dual and obviously contradictory set of assumptions about the human individual.

Mill's consideration of marriage and the family further reveals this tension between the existential and instrumental. He expresses his existential tendency when he criticizes the physical and mental domination of women by men in marriage.

> However brutal a tyrant she may unfortunately be chained to — though she may know that he hates her, though it may be his daily pleasure to torture her, and though she may feel it impossible not to loathe him — he can claim from her and enforce the lowest degradation of a human being, that of being made the instrument of an animal function contrary to her inclinations.[17]

[16] Mill, "The Subjection of Women," p. 220.
[17] Mill, "The Subjection of Women," p. 160.

Mill's frank outrage at this relationship of domination leads him to advocate that marriage be a voluntary association between two equals, with "sympathy in equality, … living together in love, without power on one side or obedience on the other.[18] He rejects the common argument of the day that there must by necessity be only one master in a family when he states:

> It is not true that in all voluntary association between two people, one of them must be absolute master: still less that the law must determine which of them it shall be. The most frequent case of voluntary association, next to marriage, is partnership in business: and it is not found or thought necessary to enact that in every partnership, one partner shall have entire control over the concern, and the others shall be bound to obey his rule.[19]

Equality between men and women in marriage is possible, Mill argues, because equality between men in business is possible. Mill asserts the possibility of men and women relating to one another within a marriage in a non-dominating fashion. This is a radical idea in a society such as Mill's that subsumes the identity and interests of the wife under that of her husband. Mill recognizes that as an individual a woman has the right to self-determination within a marriage relationship. Mill is thus arguing that women be recognized as human beings, which, Macpherson says, for liberals means the capacity to be free from "dependence on the wills of others."[20]

Mill, however, treats marriage not only from this existential individualist point of view, but he also makes instrumental assumptions. For Mill, marriage between a husband and a wife is ideally a partnership, complete with contract. While Mill argues in an existentially individualist manner that wives be allowed to earn their own income, he qualifies the point by saying that this should be the case only in "an unjust state of things."[21] Ideally, that is, in a just state, married women would not need the "protection" of earning their own wages:

> But if marriage were an equal contract, not implying the obligation of obedience; if the connexion were no longer enforced to the oppression of those whom it is purely a mischief, but a separation, on just terms (I do not now speak of a divorce), could be obtained by any woman who was morally entitled to it; and if she would then find all honourable employments as freely open to her as to men; it would not be necessary for her protection, that during marriage she should make this particular use of her faculties.[22]

Mill argues that marriage should be a contract between a man and a woman, and that within this contract it is clearly the wife's obligation to look after the household while the husband participates in public realm activities. "Like a man when he chooses a profession, so, when a woman marries, it may in general be understood that she makes choice of the management of a household, and the bringing up of a family, as the first call upon her exertions…"[23] This contract enforces certain roles and conditions. These conditions are not natural, but are social agreements just like

[18] Mill, "The Subjection of Women," p. 175.
[19] Mill, "The Subjection of Women," p. 168.
[20] Macpherson, *Possessive Individualism,* p. 263.
[21] Mill, "The Subjection of Women," p. 179.
[22] Mill, "The Subjection of Women," p. 179.
[23] Mill, "The Subjection of Women," p. 179.

those concerned with employment. The marriage contract denies the free choice of the individual, choices that emerge from individual whim or predilection, and is therefore anti-existential. By supporting the marriage contract, Mill abandons his existential individualism, with its freedom of choice, in favour of instrumental individualism with its calculating contracts.

What does it mean to advocate that a marriage contract should regulate sexual and family relationships? First, as Carole Pateman points out, "the contractual conception of marriage presupposes the idea of the individual as owner. The marriage contract establishes legitimate access to sexual property in the person."[24] A marriage contract calls into being the instrumental individual. It implies selfinterested property owners making the best "deal" possible. Conversely, the existence of instrumental individuals calls into being the marriage contract; no other form of association would satisfy the self-interestedness of the individual as owner.

Pateman argues that the type of exchange that takes place in a contract relationship

> could take a variety of forms and any kind of property could be exchanged, but the contracts that have a prominent place in social contract theory are not only about material goods, but property in the peculiar sense o£ property in the person, and they involve an exchange o£ obedience for protection.[25]

Despite Mill's belief that marriage can be an "equal contract, not implying the obligation of obedience,"[26] implicit in a codified sexual division of labour between a husband and wife is the exchange of obedience for protection: the husband provides protection through his public realm activities while the wife gives her obedience in the private realm. Mill does not recognize that a contractual sexual division of labour which keeps women in the private sphere is a relationship of domination and subordination.

The implications of a sexual division of labour in the marriage contract are similar to those discussed above with respect to the employment contract. What is being exchanged in a marriage contract where the wife stays at home and the husband works in the public realm? The husband provides food, clothing and shelter — protection, in exchange for the wife's services in the home. These services include housework, child care, and sexual pleasure. As in the employment contract, in a marriage contract that assumes the sexual division of labour, so-called labour power is being exchanged, in this case by the wife. The wife, owning property in the person in the form of labour power, exchanges her labour power for the necessities of life. However, as argued above, labour power is a fiction. Thus, while Mill argues that it is a step forward for women to enter freely into marriage contracts "as men's equals," that is, as instrumental self-interested owners of property in the person, for women to exchange their labour power for support is to be subordinated. For labour power cannot be separated from the individual; regardless of how the contract is worded, while the husband provides protection, what he actually receives from his wife in exchange is obedience. This is inherent in a contract that affirms the current sexual division of labour within an economic system that values only public realm activities; in such a system, the wife truly has no other means to obtain her livelihood except by exchanging her labour power for support. This being the case, Mill's proposed marriage contract which keeps the wife in the home, binds her to obedience, thus denying the independence of her will.

[24] Pateman, *The Sexual Contract,* p. 168.
[25] Pateman, *The Sexual Contract,* p. 58.
[26] Mill, "The Subjection of Women," p. 179.

However, even had Mill not suggested a sexual division of labour between husband and wife, his understanding of marriage as a contract is in itself problematic. A contract is an agreement of exchange in which non-fulfillment is punished in a socially condoned manner. Thus, if one "changes one's mind" and wishes to break the terms of a contract, coercion is justified in enforcing it. A contract is an agreement, therefore, in which the violation of the will of an individual is legitimated. "A naturally free and equal individual must, necessarily, *agree* to be ruled by another";[27] this agreement is called a contract. Such contracts assume equivalent exchange between the contracting parties, with each party trying to "get the best deal." As Robert Graham points out, the whole idea of contract is "based on competition and self-interest."[28] Contract assumes instrumental individualism.

> Instead of regarding other members of society as associates, the individual contractor will regard them as competitors for economic resources and benefits. He may only keep his bargains so long as it is to his advantage, and break them whenever it is not. Sanctions external to the relationship (of contracting) imposed by a hierarchical authority exacerbate this competitive mentality by encouraging moral evaluation based on the likelihood of sanction rather than on the intrinsic merits of a particular course of action (e.g. keeping faith).[29]

Relations governed by contract, which are based upon the conceptualization of the individual as instrumental, are incompatible with the existentially free individual whose will is inviolate. Graham contrasts the kinds of relationships demanded by existential individualism, such as free agreement, with contractual relationships.

> Implicit in the idea of free agreement is some notion of self-assumed obligation, but it is a concept of obligation which is not connected to any concept of equivalent exchange. Through the process of free agreement individuals publicly commit themselves to future courses of conduct voluntarily chosen by them. The underlying model of obligation then is no longer contract, but promising. A promise is an act by which people assume an obligation to do some future act, but this obligation need not be tied to the receipt of some benefit. Promises can be unconditional in this sense, whereas contracts are a conditional form of exchange. One is only obligated under a contract upon the condition that the other party perform its side of the bargain.[30]

Contract is inappropriate if human individuals are conceptualized as existentially free, as contract promotes a self-interestedness that must ultimately result in the exercise of power through the State.

Had Mill been true to his existential individualism, instead of promoting marriage as contract he ought to have argued against marriage altogether. For whether one speaks of traditional marriage sanctioned by the Church or contract-based marriage recognized by the State, the result is the denial of individual freedom. Marriage as such is an institution; it makes social demands on

[27] Pateman, *The Sexual Contract,* p. 40.

[28] Robert Graham, "The Role of Contract in Anarchist Ideology," in *For Anarchism: History, Theory, and Practice,* edited by David Goodway, (London: Routledge, 1989), p. 160.

[29] Graham, "The Role of Contract," p. 161.

[30] Graham, "The Role of Contract," p. 165.

its participants regardless of whether they are truly agreed upon. The terms are set externally, by others, and are not controllable by the will of the individuals involved. The institution of marriage legitimizes some relationships and fails to recognize others; as such, it denies the free will of the individual. The existential individual, the truly free individual, requires no marriage certificate, no modern contract, to validate close intimate relationships. External control of relationships, like that manifested inherently in marriage, is simply at odds with the freedom of the individual. Mill, however, contradicts his commitment to the existentially free individual when he champions the marriage contract as a way to order intimate relationships.

Finally, in his consideration of marriage and the family, Mill's individualism is most strongly instrumental when he performs the ultimate transformation of the person into property: He understands children as the property of their parents. For Mill, the family "will always be a school of obedience for the children, of command for the parents."[31] Of course, to Mill, this is an improvement over the situation of his own time, where children are the property of the father, with the mother having no claim over them whatsoever.

> What is her position in regard to the children in whom she and her master have a joint interest? They are by law *his* children. He alone has any legal rights over them[32] (original emphasis).

Mill's solution is the acknowledgement of the "joint interest" husband and wife have in the property of their children. This is instrumental individualism at its most vulgar. Mill denies children any free will or self-determination. In fact, they are not instrumental individuals because they do not own their own property in their persons, and they are not existentially free individuals because their wills are dependent on others. For Mill, they are not individuals at all. Children are, quite simply, property, and Mill would like to make them the property of not just their fathers but their mothers as well. This is not just a quirk confined to Mill's "The Subjection of Women"; in his famous work *On Liberty*, Mill expressly excludes children from the category of "individual." Mill writes that, "over himself, over his own body and mind, the individual is sovereign."[33] He then qualifies this by stating:

> It is, perhaps, hardly necessary to say that this doctrine is meant to apply only to human beings in the maturity of their faculties. We are not speaking of children or of young persons below the age which the law may fix as that of manhood or womanhood.[34]

While the treatment of human beings as property, whether they be children or not, is consistent with instrumental individualism, it clearly annihilates individual freedom and, therefore, compromises any commitment Mill makes to existential individualism.

Mill's dual conceptualization of the human individual is also evident in his discussion of women and government. It is clear that Mill wants it both ways for women; he would like women

[31] Mill, "The Subjection of Women," p. 175.

[32] Mill, "The Subjection of Women," p. 160.

[33] John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*, edited with an introduction by Gertrude Himmelfarb (London: Penguin Books, 1974), p. 69.

[34] Mill, *On Liberty*, p. 69.

to be able to have a say in the running of their lives while he also advocates the need for government. The former assumes an existential individualist view while the latter arises out of his conceptualization of the individual as instrumental. Mill tries to combine the two of them in his consideration of women:

> To have a voice in choosing those by whom one is to be governed, is a means of self-protection due to every one… Under whatever conditions, and within whatever limits, men are admitted to the suffrage, there is not a shadow of justification for not admitting women under the same.[35]

Thus, Mill argues for women's suffrage. In fact, Mill's commitment to women's suffrage is so strong that he believes by gaining the vote all other aspects of women's liberation will automatically follow. With respect to women's suffrage, Mill writes:

> I believe it will be positively easier to obtain this reform than to obtain any single one of the others, all of which must inevitably follow from it. To prefer to sweep away any of these others first is as though one were to prefer to cut away branch after branch, giving more labour to each branch than one need do to the trunk of the tree.[36]

He also argues that women ought to be able to hold elected office.[37] On the one hand, these demands are clearly evocative of existential individualism; individuals ought to be able to make the many political decisions that affect their lives. Existential individualism demands individual decision making in the political realm; anything less would obviously constitute a violation of individual wills. However, in advocating a government at all, Mill assumes the individual as instrumental and thereby destroys the existential individual.

Existential individualism calls for no government, for any government is an imposition of some wills over others. Robert Paul Wolff asserts this when he writes:

> I can neither find nor think o£ a way o£ making majority rule compatible with the moral autonomy of the individual. The problem is always the same: Either the minority submit to the majority, thereby conforming to laws which they think are bad and against which they voted; or else the minority reserve to themselves the right to defy those laws which they consider too evil, in which case the fundamental authority of the state is negated.[38]

Democratic rule is still rule. While it allows for more individual participation in government than monarchy or totalitarian dictatorships, it still inherently involves the repression of the wills of some people. This is obviously at odds with the existential individual, who must maintain the integrity of will in order to *be* existentially free. Mill, however, commits himself to a democratic form of government, and argues that women be given a voice within that institution.

---

[35] Mill, "The Subjection of Women," pp. 184–185.

[36] J. S. Mill, Letter to Florence Nightingale, quoted in Gail Tulloch, *Mill and Sexual Equality* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1989), p. 108.

[37] Mill, "The Subjection of Women," p. 185.

[38] Robert Paul Wolff, "Four Questions on the Draft," in *Philosophy: A Modern Encounter,* edited by Robert Paul Wolff (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1971), p. 412.

Mill's conceptualization of the individual as instrumental leads him to his acceptance of government. As noted above, the instrumental individual is a self-interested property owner who competes with others in the marketplace. Government is necessary to prevent individuals from harming one another in this self-interested competition. Thus, Mill spells out the legitimate arena of government power in *On Liberty:*

> The sole end for which mankind are warranted, individually or collectively, in interfering with the liberty of action of any of their number is self-protection. That the only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilized community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others.[39]

In assuming the instrumental position, Mill legitimizes certain violations of individual will. The problem with this is that in allowing the exercise of power in *some* circumstances, Mill must immediately face the question of where to draw the line between the legitimate and illegitimate uses o£ power, a line which is impossible to draw and still preserve a commitment to existential individualism. Mill tries to do justice to his existential tendency by limiting the exercise of power; however, to be true to his existential individualism, the exercise of power must not only be limited but eliminated. His instrumental individualism, however, calls into being a world where individuals are self-interested, and as such must be restrained from hurting one another. Competitive behaviour forms the ethic of instrumental individualism; the selfish pursuit of one's own interests is its practice. It is clear that in this competitive struggle some individuals are bound to hurt others; the need to temper the instrumentalism of some calls into existence the State. Instrumental individualism is not only antisocial in its competitiveness, but ontologically speaking, as demonstrated above, it creates relationships of domination and subordination. The State is therefore necessary to patch things up and hold things together. Macpherson recognizes this aspect of possessive individualism when he writes that in the liberal framework "political society is a human contrivance for the protection of the individual's property in his person and goods, and (therefore) for the maintenance of orderly relations of exchange between individuals regarded as proprietors of themselves."[40] Thus, the tension between existential and instrumental individualism means that the State is ever present but always problematic. Bringing women into government through the franchise and elected office as Mill argues does not counter this tension, it merely universalizes it.

Additionally, this tension also pervades Mill's general analysis of the problem of women's subordination and can be seen in his consideration of the nature of women's oppression itself, when he states:

> That the principle which regulates the existing social relations between the two sexes — the legal subordination of one sex to the other — is wrong in itself, and now one of the chief hindrances to human improvement; and that it ought to be replaced by a principle of perfect equality, admitting no power or privilege on the one side, nor disability on the other.[41]

[39] Mill, *On Liberty,* p. 68.
[40] Macpherson, *Possessive Individualism,* p. 264.
[41] Mill, "The Subjection of Women," p. 125.

There is a passionate humanism in Mill's assertion that sexual subordination is wrong in itself. The human individual has freedom and dignity, whether man or woman. The individual should not suffer disability nor exercise power by virtue of sex — this is truly a radical vision of humanity. Mill pursues this existential individualist liberatory stance by outlining the very real subordination experienced by women at the hands of men. "In the case of women, each individual of the subject class is in a chronic state of bribery and intimidation combined."[42] He argues against the naturalness of such subordination, pointing to the ideological nature of such a belief: "But was there ever any domination which did not appear natural to those who possessed it?"[43] Neither is sexual inequality consensual: "a great number of women do not accept it."[44] For Mill, sexual inequality is an anachronism, harking back to an earlier time. "The social subordination of women thus stands out an isolated fact in modern social institutions; a solitary breach of what has become their fundamental law; a single relic of an old world of thought and practice exploded in everything else…"[45] The principle that Mill sees as distinguishing the modern from all that preceded it is:

> That things in which the individual is the person directly interested, never go right but as they are left to his own discretion; and that any regulation of them by authority, except to protect the rights of others, is sure to be mischievous.[46]

This principle embodies the existentially free individual; it demands that human individuals be self-determining and free from the authority of others. Mill argues that this most modern of principles, that which I call existential individualism, be extended to women. It is only through self-determination that women will reveal who they are. "Until women have told all they have to tell,"[47] men will not know them. "For according to all the principles involved in modern society, the question rests with women themselves — to be decided by their own experience, and by the use of their own faculties."[48] For Mill, the freedom of the individual is paramount. Freedom is, for him, a defining characteristic of what it means to be human: "After the primary necessities of food and raiment, freedom is the first and strongest want of human nature."[49] Mill sees no reason to deny women freedom. Reason itself demands this:

> The communities in which the reason has been most cultivated, and in which the idea of social duty has been most powerful, are those which have most strongly asserted the freedom of action of the individual — the liberty of each to govern his conduct by his own feelings of duty, and by such laws and social restraints as his own conscience can subscribe to.[50]

To be fully human is to create one's own life freely; it is to be self-determined. Mill's great liberatory vision comes in recognizing the primacy of the individual and in arguing passionately

[42] Mill, "The Subjection of Women," p. 137.
[43] Mill, "The Subjection of Women," p. 137.
[44] Mill, "The Subjection of Women," p. 139.
[45] Mill, "The Subjection of Women," p. 146.
[46] Mill, "The Subjection of Women," p. 144.
[47] Mill, "The Subjection of Women," p. 152.
[48] Mill, "The Subjection of Women," p. 154.
[49] Mill, "The Subjection of Women," p. 236.
[50] Mill, "The Subjection of Women," p. 236.

for the individual's right to express free will. According to Mill, women and men, as individuals, ought to be free to follow their own inclinations, to choose how to best run their lives, regardless of sex. This is the radical dimension of Mill's thought.

Mill, however, makes a very important assumption that contradicts his commitment to existential individualism: He predicates the social subordination of women on their "legal subordination."[51] This privileging of the law is essential to an instrumental individualist view of humanity. What does it mean to be equal before the law? As discussed above, Mill argues that women are not men's legal equals — not in employment, marriage, or governmental politics. To create equality between the sexes, women ought to be legally permitted to compete with men for jobs, they should be equal in civil marriage and be able legally to own property — both real and in the person, and they ought to by law be granted the right to vote.

Intimately linked to the State, the law is problematic. The law is the mechanism by which the State restrains individuals; it also spells out the legitimate arena in which State power can be used against the individual. Mill's critique of the legal inequalities faced by women is existentially individualistic; indeed, women lack any status as individuals at all when the law forcibly keeps them from participating in society. Existential individualism demands the dropping of such legal restrictions. However, Mill does not argue for the elimination of law entirely (a strategy that follows logically from his existential individualism), but rather he contends that women must join men as equals before the law. Law is necessary, according to Mill, because individuals would harm one another otherwise. "Laws and institutions require to be adapted, not to good men, but to bad."[52]

> The real dependence of morality must always be upon its penal sanctions — its power to deter from evil. The security of society cannot rest on merely rendering honour to right, a motive so comparatively weak in all but a few, and which on very many does not operate at all.[53]

Mill thus sees the law and its capacity to penalize individuals as necessary for society's security. The instrumental individual always runs the risk of violating the wills of others in the competitive pursuit of self-interest; the State must intervene to protect each competitive individual from others who are equally self-interested. However, the law presents very obvious problems for the existentially free individual, for to be bound by the law is to imply that one's own will is violable.

Macpherson, in speaking of liberal theories which share a possessive conceptualization of the human individual, notes that "the strength of each [liberal] theory is due to its having incorporated these assumptions, and the weakness of each to its having failed to deal with some of their implications."[54] That "The Subjection of Women" is today still compelling is a testament to Mill's skill at successfully incorporating these individualist assumptions into his work on women. Liberal ideas of free will and instrumental selfinterest are still as relevant and necessary to modern capitalist society as they were in Mill's day. That Mill was able to go beyond his contemporaries and extend these concepts to women is indicative of an intellect unafraid to test the boundaries

[51] Mill, "The Subjection of Women," p. 125.
[52] Mill, "The Subjection of Women," p. 163.
[53] Mill, "The Subjection of Women," p. 225.
[54] Macpherson, *Possessive Individualism,* p. 264.

of convention. However, Mill's failure to deal with the implications of his theoretical position represents a major weakness of his work.

What are the implications of Mill's incorporation of the individual as both instrumental and existential in his consideration of women's oppression? Mill does not adopt these two points of view thoughtlessly, or because he is "unwilling to commit himself definitively to one line of thought."[55] To believe so would be to seriously underestimate his power as a political philosopher. Mill commits himself to these assumptions because he is perceptive enough to see that the new capitalist order is itself based on them, and he believes the new order to be an improvement over the old, paternalistic order. Certainly it is progressive that individuals are no longer tied to one another by birth, but rather have the possibility to change their status through their own efforts. This appears to Mill to be more reasonable than the old feudal system, which treated people not as individuals but rather as members of groups. It also seems to Mill to be against all reason that women are still treated as a group instead of as individuals; it is, quite literally, a throwback to an old, obsolete system, based not on reason but simply on force.

Thus, Mill finds his inspiration in the humanism of rising capitalism; men, at least, are no longer bound, but are finally free as individuals. Women deserve as much. However, coupled with this free individual is the individual as self-interested owner — of both real property and property in the person. Owning real property allows for capital accumulation; owning property in the person allows for the creation of a new individual, the wage labourer, that person who can sell labour power. That the selling of labour power as separate from the person is impossible is conveniently overlooked by Mill and his fellow theorists; what appeals to them is that human individuals are finally free of the old bonds tying them irrevocably to the group. In his treatment of women, Mill celebrates the freedom of the individual by expanding the newfound freedom of men to include women.

However, Mill does not see that the new instrumentalism, which accompanies and relies on the existential freedom of the individual, ultimately destroys that existential freedom. The aspect of the instrumental individual that Mill fails to comprehend is that such an individual is, inherently, either a dominator or dominated — in either case the instrumental individual is unfree. To be free is to be not dependent on the wills of others; to be dominated is to lose that freedom. Even to dominate someone else is to lose one's own freedom, for to dominate is to sanction relations of dependence that ultimately endanger the freedom of the dominator. The instrumental individual is either dominated or a dominator; self-interested competition can result in nothing else. Thus, the existential individualism that Mill advocates is destroyed by the instrumental individualism to which he also holds. Women's subjection, then, is both broken and reknotted by Mill's double-threaded individualism: Women are torn free of the old bonds of collective ascription and bound tight once again in the new selfinterested ties of individual ownership of property, both real and in the person. The elimination of the subjection of the human individual, either male or female, is therefore not possible within Mill's Uberai feminist framework. This is the implication with which Mill ultimately fails to deal.

[55] Julia Annas, "Mill and the Subjection of Women," *Philosophy,* Vol. 52, 1977, p. 180.

Chapter Four: Contemporary Liberal Feminism: Existential and Instrumental Individualism Unresolved

Late twentieth-century liberal feminism is an elusive political movement to pin down. The fact that we live in a liberal democratic society means that any feminism which adopts liberal values tends to appear simply as feminism pure and simple, with its liberalism blending into the background of the dominant ideology. Thus, liberal feminist writers often present their arguments as politically neutral, when in fact they are laden with the liberal assumptions of the society out of which they emerge. While other brands of feminism make explicit their political commitments, liberal feminists will often deny any political content to their work at all. This makes the task of analyzing liberal feminism difficult for the social theorist — there is no *Liberal Feminist Manifesto* or *ABC of Liberal Feminism* to turn to when looking for examples of modern liberal feminist thought. In fact, while much of the feminist theory and practice in our society today is liberal feminist, it is not self-consciously so, and therefore must be identified as liberal feminist through more subtle means.

It is liberalism's commitment to the individual and, in particular, to the possessive individual, that uniquely characterizes liberal thought. Liberal feminism can be distinguished from other forms of feminism in the same way. Two modern feminist thinkers who have contributed important liberal feminist works during the past thirty years are Betty Friedan and Janet Radcliffe Richards. In considering women, both writers posit the possessive individual and the accompanying ideology of liberalism as the basis upon which they construct their analyses of society. Friedan's work, *Tbe Feminine Mystique,* stands out as being the first popularization of liberal feminism during the second wave of feminist activism in this century. Friedan has been credited with "raising the consciousness of an entire generation of women"[1] as well as being "the prophet of women's emancipation in America."[2] Richards' more recent, *The Sceptical Feminist,* is one of the few rigorously philosophical treatises on feminism by a contemporary liberal thinker. Based "on a liberal social theory indebted to J. S. Mill and John Rawls" it is "the first full-length book applying the methods of academic philosophical analysis to the problems of feminist theory."[3]

Friedan wrote *The Feminine Mystique* because in the late 1950s she was puzzled by what she saw as a discontinuity between society's idea of womanhood and the reality of most women's lives. This disjunction between women's experience and what Friedan came to call "the feminine mystique" resulted in a whole generation of neurotic women who felt guilty because they were unfulfilled in their roles as wives and mothers. Friedan launches a scathing critique of the

[1] Judith Finlayson, "Friedan Keeps Up the Battle," in *The Globe and Mail,* Saturday, November 9, 1985, p. D20.

[2] Sandra Dijkstra, "Simone de Beauvoir and Betty Friedan: The Politics of Omission," in *Feminist Studies* 6, No. 2, Summer 1980, p. 290.

[3] "Review of *The Sceptical Feminist* by Janet Radcliffe Richards," *Choice,* Vol. 18, No. 9, May 1981, p. 1279.

"experts," medical and scientific, who in the 1950s blamed women for their discontent, never questioning the appropriateness of confining half the human race to house and home. The social and psychological barriers that prevent women from joining men as full members of the race are condemned by Friedan as both unjust and unjustifiable.

The moral outrage that is evident throughout the pages of *The Feminine Mystique* emerges out of Friedan's realization that American society shuts women out of the liberal category of "individual." Women, Friedan argues, are not allowed to be either self-determined or competitive; they are not, in fact, treated as human individuals at all. This exclusion leads to many different consequences, not the least of which is a population of emotionally warped, intellectually stunted women. According to Friedan, women must be allowed to take their place beside men as freely self-determined, competitive individuals. Only then will women cease to be neurotic.

Friedan's argument rests squarely upon the liberal assumption of the possessive individual and, as such, encounters the same contradictions and problems which plague other liberals like John Stuart Mill. Macpherson's idea of the possessive individual highlights the unity of liberal thought, while also providing insight into the constant and unresolvable problem which threatens to tear liberalism apart: the irreconcilable dualism between the existential and the instrumental. For all its popularity, *The Feminine Mystique* could not offer a "solution" to the problem of women's inequality that would liberate all women. The instrumental assumptions of liberal thought justify a highly stratified society; Friedan simply advocates adding women to the echelons of power instead of trying to counter power as a liberatory politics demands. Friedan's liberal feminism falters by tying women into the competitive marketplace as proprietors of both real property and property in the person. Thus, while Friedan's existential individualism provides the possibility for liberation, like other liberals she constantly undermines this possibility by insisting that women ought to join men as instrumental individuals competing against others in the marketplace for money, prestige and, ultimately, power.

This struggle between the instrumental and the existential individual is played out in *The Feminine Mystique* again and again, without resolution. For instance, Friedan's existential individualism is clear right from the beginning of *The Feminine Mystique;* in the Preface she writes that she believes "that, in the end, a woman, as a man, has the power to choose, and to make her own heaven or hell."[4] This sentiment is both individualistic and existential: individualistic because it focuses not on groups but rather places its emphasis on the individual, whether male or female; existential because it asserts the individual's capacity to exercise his/her will freely. Given the fact that women are by nature existentially free individuals, the major question Friedan sets out to answer is why then do they continue to suffer domination by virtue of their sex? She answers this by identifying a "feminine mystique," which works to keep women from realizing their full potential as human individuals.

> It is my thesis that the core of the problem for women today is not sexual but a problem of identity — a stunting or evasion of growth that is perpetuated by the feminine mystique. It is my thesis that as Victorian culture did not permit women to accept or gratify their basic sexual needs, our culture does not permit women to accept or gratify their basic need to grow and fulfill their potentialities as human beings, a need which is not solely defined by their sexual role.[5]

[4] Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique,* (New York: Dell), p. 10.
[5] Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique,* p. 69.

It is only with the defeat of the feminine mystique and the consequent self-determination of women as individuals that we will be able to finally "know" women. Friedan echoes John Stuart Mill's existential individualism when she asks:

> Who knows what women can be when they are finally free to become themselves? Who knows what women's intelligence will contribute when it can be nourished without denying love? Who knows of the possibilities of love when men and women share not only children, home, and garden, not only the fulfillment of their biological roles, but the responsibilities and passions of the work that creates the human future and the full human knowledge of who they are?[6]

Friedan, true to her liberal roots, recognizes the self-determination of individuals as being part of what makes them human. This existential individualism is key to her political stance; her entire treatise is based on advocating that women be allowed to take their place alongside men as free individuals. However, according to Friedan, not only must women be self-determining, they must also be instrumentally competitive in order to achieve liberation. They must compete for jobs, compete for money, compete for power. To do anything else would be to deny woman's status as a free human individual, for to be an individual for Friedan means to compete.[7] Certainly Friedan is correct in the context of a capitalist society; those who are outside of the competitive marketplace, those who do not own either real property or property in the person, are non-persons. However, Friedan does not question capitalism's claim to define the human individual in its instrumentally tainted image; neither does she question the wisdom of adopting instrumental values as an ethical basis for society. Friedan accepts the image of the human individual that capitalism requires; she accepts the demands of the marketplace as legitimate; her only quarrel is with denying women's place within capitalism's competitive marketplace.

Friedan, like other liberal thinkers, does not reconcile these two opposing views of the human individual. Capitalism depends upon an individual who is instrumentally competitive to provide the economic impetus for the system. However, the competitive capitalist marketplace needs the existentially free individual, for only free individuals can *agree* to subjugate themselves in the marketplace and thus legitimize a system inherently based on domination and subordination. The existentially free individual is constantly violated by the logic of the instrumental individual. This is the paradox of liberal possessive individualism. Like other liberal thinkers, Friedan cannot escape this problem and still remain a liberal — it is inherent to the tradition.

The contradiction between the existential and the instrumental individual can be seen in Friedan's consideration of employment, education, marriage and the family, and governmental politics. In employment for example, Friedan believes with Mill that women should not be prevented from undertaking whichever jobs appeal to their tastes and inclinations. However, while Mill was writing during a period in history when women were *legally* barred from certain types of work, the women of the 1950s when Friedan was writing, faced no such formal barriers and yet were still underrepresented in many fields and occupations. Women were defined in terms of home and family, and this excluded them from full participation in the public realm. "In the second half of the twentieth century in America, woman's world was confined to her own body and beauty, the charming of man, the bearing of babies, and the physical care and serving of

[6] Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique,* p. 364.
[7] Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique,* pp. 360–361.

husband, children, and home."[8] This confinement of women to the private sphere was not legally enforced; it was based, as Friedan notes, on expectation and convention, or what she calls the "feminine mystique":

> Why, with the removal of all the legal, political, economic, and educational barriers that once kept women from being man's equal, a person in her own right, an individual free to develop her own potential, should she accept this new image which insists she is not a person but a "woman," by definition barred from the freedom of human existence and a voice in human destiny?
>
> The feminine mystique is so powerful that women grow up no longer knowing that they have the desires and capacities the mystique forbids.[9]

This type of informal restriction on women is more insidious than the legal restrictions fought by Mill one hundred years earlier. The ideological nature of the oppression makes it hard to identify and even harder to fight.

Friedan opposes these kinds of social expectations as they prevent individual women from freely choosing their occupations. To be kept out of certain occupations because they are considered "unfeminine" is to deny women their individual freedom and, as such, is to relegate them to less-than-human status. For the liberal believes that to be fully human one must be free; deny the latter and the former is compromised. Mill asserts this sentiment when he writes that "after the primary necessities of food and raiment, freedom is the first and strongest want of human nature."[10] Friedan takes this ultimate valuing of human freedom for granted in her consideration of women's oppression; for her, the "unique mark of the human being" is contained in the "capacity to transcend the present and to act in the light of the possible, the mysterious capacity to shape the future."[11] This capacity "to live one's life by purposes stretching into the future — to live not at the mercy of the world, but as a builder and designer of that world" — is what distinguishes the animal from the human.[12]

Friedan makes the argument that "the only way for a woman, as for a man, to find herself, to know herself as a person, is by creative work of her own."[13] This creative work must be something that "she can take seriously as pan of a life plan, work in which she can grow as part of society."[14] Such work must be freely chosen, and such a life must be self-determined. It is only in "that lonely, frightened feeling that comes with freedom"[15] that work becomes meaningful and human individuals realize their human potential. Any restriction on women by virtue of their sex is not compatible with this existential individualism.

However, Friedan found herself faced with a society in which women were "paid half what a man would have been paid for the job, or always … passed over for promotion."[16] Women

[8] Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique,* p. 31.

[9] Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique,* pp. 60–61.

[10] John Stuart Mill, "The Subjection of Women," in *Essays on Sex Equality: John Stuart Mill and Harriet Taylor Mill,* edited with an introduction by Alice S. Rossi (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), p. 236.

[11] Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique,* p. 301.

[12] Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique,* p. 301.

[13] Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique,* p. 332.

[14] Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique,* p. 333.

[15] Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique,* p. 300.

[16] Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique,* pp. 2–3.

were in fact *not* given the opportunity to express themselves through freely chosen creative work, but encountered barriers and discrimination because of their sex at every turn. To counter such discrimination, Friedan founded the National Organization for Women (NOW) in 1965. She established NOW in order to "take *action* to bring women into full participation in the mainstream of American society now, exercising all the privileges and responsibilities thereof, in truly equal partnership with men"[17] (original emphasis). NOW's basic goal is to allow women choice as individuals, not as women; choice with respect to employment, among other things. Women ought to have the freedom to choose the jobs that best suit their temperament, without being subject to discriminatory hiring practices or negative public opinion. Friedan's fight for women's freedom of occupational choice emerges out of the more fundamental liberal commitment to women's self-determination.

However, Friedan's treatment of employment also contains an instrumental conceptualization of the human individual, one which affirms the individual as owning property, both real and in the person. As is the case with other liberal thought, this instrumentalism undermines Friedan's existential individualism by creating relations of domination and subordination.

For Friedan, to be a free human individual is to be competitive. For women to join men as individuals, then, they will have to compete.

> If an able American woman does not use her human energy and ability in some meaningful pursuit (which necessarily means competition, for there is competition in every serious pursuit of our society), she will fritter away her energy in neurotic symptoms, or unproductive exercise, or destructive "love."[18]

Woman "must learn to compete, then, not as a woman, but as a human being."[19] Indeed, competing for jobs and status in the public realm will make for healthier mothers and wives in the private:

> When women take their education and their abilities seriously and put them to use, ultimately they have to compete with men. It is better for a woman to compete impersonally in society, as men do, than to compete for dominance in her own home with her husband, compete with her neighbors for empty status, and so smother her son that he cannot compete at all.[20]

Friedan sees that women are excluded from the category of human individual when they are confined to the home and denied the chance to choose their own occupation; her critique of this type of restriction on women is an affirmation of her existential individualism. However, her understanding of the human individual is also instrumental because she believes that competition is what makes work meaningful.

For Friedan, women will be true individuals only when they are allowed to own property in their persons and by extension be able to sell their labour power in the marketplace alongside men. Women who join men in competition for employment, who sell their labour power, forfeit their self-determination and thus compromise their existential freedom. An employee *is not free,*

[17] Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique,* p. 370.
[18] Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique,* p. 360.
[19] Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique, p. 361.*
[20] Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique,* p. 360.

but rather lacks self-determination and autonomy. Inherent in the employee/employer relationship is the subjugation of the former to the latter; an employee lacks what Macpherson calls "freedom from dependence on the will of others."[21]

Friedan's "solution" to women's inequality is no solution at all. Women who enter the competitive marketplace do not become free, but rather simply join men in chains. As Noam Chomsky points out, "in a perfectly functioning capitalist democracy, with no illegitimate abuse of power, freedom will be in effect a kind of commodity; effectively, a person will have as much of it as he can buy."[22] Some will be able to afford more freedom, some less; many will not be able to afford any freedom at all, but instead will be forced to "sell" their freedom as property in the person to others. Not only is this strategy a problem because it supports a system of domination and subordination, but it also contradicts Friedan's own existential individualism, which insists that women be autonomous and self-determined. An employee is neither autonomous or self-determined.

In her discussion of women and employment, Friedan's liberal feminism encounters the same problems that plague John Stuart Mill; the existential ideas of choice, autonomy and self-determination are overturned and overwhelmed by the instrumental notions of competition and owning property in the person. Friedan, like other liberals before her, is unable to reconcile the two conceptualizations of the human individual, and the contradictions between the existential and instrumental continue to dog liberal feminist political theory.

Coupled with the existential commitment to the individual freedom of each woman to choose whatever profession best suits her inclinations is Friedan's belief in education for women that is free, open, and intellectually challenging. Like Mill, Friedan understands that the freedom to choose one's life work is dependent on access to education of the highest possible quality. However, while in Mill's time women were barred from higher education and he was fighting to gain women entrance into the hallowed halls of learning, in the 1950s Friedan is faced with a different problem: A curriculum meant specifically to sell to women the idea that ultimately their place is in the home. Friedan condemns "sex-directed education" as little more than propaganda designed to keep women down:

> Instead of opening new horizons and wider worlds to able women, the sex-directed educator moved in to teach them adjustment within the world of home and children. Instead of teaching truths to counter the popular prejudices of the past, or critical ways of thinking against which prejudice cannot survive, the sex-directed educator handed girls a sophisticated soup of uncritical prescriptions and presentiments, far more binding on the mind and prejudicial to the future than all the traditional do's and don'ts.[23]

For Friedan, this type of so-called "education" is damaging for women, as it takes away their capacity to be critical thinkers and self-determining adults. Education should not be aimed at creating and maintaining "femininity" in women; to do so only perpetuates inequality. True education, education which aims at self-discovery and individual autonomy, "does make [women]

[21] C. B. Macpherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 263.

[22] Noam Chomsky, *The Chomsky Reader,* edited by James Peck (New York: Pantheon Books, 1987), p. 189.

[23] Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique,* p. 149.

less feminine, less adjusted — but it makes them grow."[24] What a woman needs "is training for creative work of her own."[25]

> For women as well as men, education is and must be the matrix of human evolution. If today American women are finally breaking out of the housewife trap in search of new identity, it is quite simply because so many women have had a taste of higher education — unfinished, unfocused, but still powerful enough to force them on.
>
> For that last and most important battle *can* be fought in the mind and spirit of woman herself.[26] (original emphasis)

This commitment to an educational program, which teaches autonomy, and aids the individual in learning how to think freely and critically, is fundamental to existential individualism. Such education provides individuals with the capacity to exercise their wills authentically, with full self-awareness and with the necessary knowledge of the world around them.

However, Friedan also conceptualizes education in instrumental terms, as a tool to facilitate the frantic competition in the marketplace, which she urges women to join. Education for the sake of education, for the gaining of self-knowledge and awareness, is not enough. Education must be "serious," that is, it must be instrumentally oriented to the competitive needs of the market. "Liberal education must be planned for serious use, not merely dilettantism or passive appreciation. As boys at Harvard or Yale or Columbia or Chicago go on from the liberal arts core to study architecture, medicine, law, science, girls must be encouraged to go on, to make a life plan."[27] As soon as education is viewed as a means to an end and not as an end in itself, it ceases to serve the autonomous individual and becomes instead a slave to outside forces. Of course there are some skills which may be learned for an express applied purpose; however, such skills acquisition would more properly be called "training" and not education. Liberatory education, education that seeks to expand the critical awareness and self-determination of the individual, must be self-directed and untied to any external demands. Friedan, however, undercuts her commitment to free education when she ties women's educational endeavours to the job market; in so doing, she trades in critical consciousness for the instrumental obedience demanded by the capitalist market.

Not only does Friedan endorse an educational program that caters to the needs of the competitive marketplace, she in no way challenges the competitive nature of the educational system itself. If autonomy and self-development are the aims of an educational system based on the affirmation of human freedom, what happens to these aims if the educational process itself is compulsory, hierarchical and competitive? While the considered assessment of the quality of one's work is compatible with the gaining of knowledge for intrinsic reasons, the relative ranking of students and the differential awards based on such ranking is not. Friedan ignores this issue, and in so doing compromises her own commitment to education as a means to greater individual autonomy and self-awareness.

Friedan's problems go beyond the issues of employment and education; she also encounters difficulty in her consideration of marriage and the family because she values both instrumental

[24] Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique,* p. 166.
[25] Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique,* p. 349.
[26] Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique,* p. 355.
[27] Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique, p. 353.*

and existential individualism. When Friedan was writing in the 1950s women were confronted with great social and legal restrictions in all areas of life, and their subservient place in the family was no exception. Her critique of marriage and the family is existentially based because she condemns the oppressive "loss of identity" which occurs when women are confined to the private realm and denied real control over their lives. For instance, she discusses how women are portrayed in the many women's magazines of her time; in one story, a housewife sacrifices her independence in order to keep her husband:

> The end of the road, in an almost literal sense, is the disappearance of the heroine altogether, as a separate self and the subject of her own story. The end of the road is togetherness, where the woman has no independent self to hide even in guilt; she exists only for and through her husband and children.[28]

Friedan condemns limiting women to their roles as wives and mothers as a fundamental denial of their humanity. The achievement of self-awareness, of identity, is denied when women are forced into the home and must depend on their husbands for support.

> Confined to the home, a child among her children, passive, no part of her existence under her own control, a woman could only exist by pleasing man. She was wholly dependent on his protection in a world that she had no share in making: man's world. She could never grow up to ask the simple human question, "Who am I?
>
> What do I want?"[29]

The sexual division of labour, which ties women to the home and family despite individual inclinations, violates women's freedom of choice and is opposed by Friedan for that reason. She castigates Margaret Mead, for instance, for failing to use her anthropological evidence to pass on "to the popular culture a truly revolutionary vision of women finally free to realize their full capabilities in a society which replaced arbitrary sexual definitions with a recognition of genuine individual gifts as they occur in either sex."[30] Friedan sees marriage and the raising of a family as activities which must be voluntarily assumed by women and men, according to individual will.

Friedan points out that marriage is often mistakenly entered into by women in an attempt to escape responsibility for their own lives. Young women's "flight into marriage is the easiest, quickest way to relieve … stress. To the educator, bent on women's growth to autonomy, such a marriage is 'regressive.' To the sex-directed educator, it is femininity fulfilled."[31] Friedan criticizes this retreat from freedom by women into the safety and dependence of marriage. Only when a woman is free and autonomous can men and women enter into mutually satisfying intimate relationships. The prescriptive categories of "masculine" and "feminine" must be abandoned in favour of the human individual's free choice. Friedan argues that:

> The energy locked up in those obsolete masculine and feminine roles is the social equivalent of the physical energy locked up in the realm of E=MC^ — the force that unleashed the holocaust of Hiroshima. I believe the locked-up sexual energies have

[28] Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique,* p. 41.
[29] Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique, p. 74.*
[30] Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique,* pp. 127–128.
[31] Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique,* p. 167.

> helped to fuel, more than anyone realizes, the terrible violence erupting in the nation and the world during these past ten years. If I am right, the sex-role revolution will liberate these energies from the service of death and will make it really possible for men and women to "make love, not war."[32]

Thus, some aspects of Friedan's consideration of marriage and the family are based on an existential understanding of the human individual. She regards the freedom of women in intimate relationships to be of paramount importance, and roundly condemns any attempts to limit that freedom.

However, Friedan's view of marriage and the family also contains instrumental elements which ultimately undermine her existential perspective. First, she denigrates housework as boring and valueless although necessary, and encourages women to leave the home to pursue more worthwhile competitive activities in the public realm. It is not the monotonous nature of housework and child care that makes it valueless for Friedan; rather, it is the fact that housework is unpaid and is therefore not part of the instrumental competitive marketplace that makes it insignificant. This narrow understanding of what gives work value cannot account for the fact that many people find unpaid work fulfilling and valuable. Existential individualism does not depend on the market to confer value upon work; rather, if work is judged by an individual to be worth doing it becomes valuable simply through that individual's consideration. Also, an existential individualist understanding of work acknowledges that value is unmeasurable and therefore a just economic system cannot be based upon assigning relative value to work. As Alexander Berkman argues:

> "why not give each according to the value of his work?" you ask. Because there is no way by which value can be measured… Value is what a thing is worth… What a thing is worth no one can really tell. Political economists generally claim that the value of a commodity is the amount of labour required to produce it, of "socially necessary labour," as Marx says. But evidently it is not a just standard of measurement. Suppose the carpenter worked three hours to make a kitchen chair, while the surgeon took only half an hour to perform an operation that saved your life. If the amount of labour used determines value, then the chair is worth more than your life. Obvious nonsense, of course. Even if you should count in the years of study and practice the surgeon needed to make him capable of performing the operation, how are you going to decide what "an hour of operating" is worth? The carpenter and mason also had to be trained before they could do their work properly, but you don't figure in those years of apprenticeship when you contract for some work with them. Besides, there is also to be considered the particular ability and aptitude that every worker, writer, artist or physician must exercise in his labours. That is a purely individual personal factor. How are you going to estimate its value?
>
> That is why value cannot be determined. The same thing may be worth a lot to one person while it is worth nothing or very little to another. It may be worth much or little even to the same person, at different times. A diamond, a painting, a book may be worth a great deal to one man and very little to another. A loaf of bread will

[32] Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, p. 380.

> be worth a great deal to you when you are hungry, and much less when you are not. Therefore the real value of a thing cannot be ascertained if it is an unknown quantity.[33]

Price cannot be used as a means by which to discover the value of work, as the "exchange of commodities by means of prices leads to profit making, to taking advantage and exploitation,"[34] which the existential individualist opposes. If value is unknowable, and price objectionable, then the only reasonable form of economic arrangement left to the existential individualist is one where "labour and its products must be exchanged without price, without profit, freely according to necessity."[35] Friedan's instrumental individualism prevents her from seeing that her own existential individualism demands free exchange of labour and its products; instead, she relies on women's increased participation in the paid market to confer value upon women's labour.

For Friedan, housework "is not an adequate substitute for truly challenging work" because it is not "important enough to society to be paid for in its coin."[36] According to her, a task only takes on value if there is paid remuneration, that is, only through the instrumental employment contract can an individual create value.

> Even if a woman does not have to work to eat, she can find identity only in work that is of real value to society — work for which, usually, our society pays. Being paid is, of course, more than a reward — it implies a definite commitment.[37]

This instrumental understanding of work allows Friedan to resolve a major problem that arises when she exhorts women to join men in the competitive public realm: Who is to do the housework? Who is to do the work that Friedan herself believes is so unchallenging that it "'can be capably handled by an eight-year-old child?'"[38] The solution is simple: Pay someone else to do it.[39] This approach to housework is based on instrumental assumptions about the human individual. When placed into the competitive marketplace, housework, work that according to Friedan "presents little challenge to the adult mind,"[40] is transformed into a worthwhile (i.e. paid) job. It is worthwhile inasmuch as it gains legitimacy by virtue of commanding a wage within a competitive market. However, to suggest that some workers should undertake work for pay, which Friedan herself admits "can hardly use the abilities of a woman of average or normal human intelligence,"[41] is to make a mockery of her own commitment to the existentially free individual who autonomously pursues creative, challenging work. Friedan is advocating the creation of a class system based on hierarchy and domination, which "frees" some women but keeps others in chains.

A second instrumental element in Friedan's consideration of marriage and the family is the fact that she advocates marriage at all. To be true to her existential individualism, Friedan should

[33] Alexander Berkman, *ABC of Anarchism* (London: Freedom Press, 1977), p. 19.
[34] Berkman, *ABC of Anarchism,* p. 19.
[35] Berkman, *ABC of Anarchism,* p. 20.
[36] Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique,* p. 237.
[37] Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique,* p. 334.
[38] Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique, p. 245.*
[39] Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique,* pp. 337–338.
[40] Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique, p. 245.*
[41] Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique,* p. 244.

argue for the elimination of marriage altogether. Existential freedom demands that intimate relationships between people be voluntary and selfdefined; the institution of marriage is neither. Certainly, with the relaxation of civil divorce laws, marriage is in a formal sense voluntary; however, the social pressures and expectations inherent in the institution of marriage makes it very inflexible. Marriage collectively legitimizes some relationships and leaves others socially unacknowledged. Lesbian and gay couples, for instance, have been traditionally excluded from formal marriage relationships. Even if these kinds of relationships were to be recognized by Church or State, there would undoubtedly be other intimate relationships which would be formally excluded. The institution of marriage must exclude some intimate relationships as illegitimate in order to retain any meaning. This runs contrary to the existential individualist commitment to autonomy and self-determination; marriage as an institution rises over and above individuals and serves to confine and oppress. While intimate relationships between free individuals must necessarily entail the abolition of marriage as collective sanctioning, the social celebration of significant relationships by those involved is completely compatible with the principle of self-determination. However, while acknowledging that "the next great issue for the women's movement is basic reform of marriage and divorce,"[42] Friedan does not take this as far as abandoning the idea of marriage, as her existential individualism suggests she must.

The contradictions in *The Feminine Mystique* also pervade Friedan's consideration of women, government and power. She laments that, until recently, only men had the vote, which she describes as "the freedom to shape the major decisions of society."[43] She understands the existential importance of the struggle for voting rights for women when she argues that the suffragist's fight involved much more than simple participation in governmental politics; it affirmed woman's status as a free human individual. "The ones who fought that battle won more than empty paper rights. They cast off the shadow of contempt and self-contempt that had degraded women for centuries."[44] That is, the very process of fighting for the vote changed women; it was a political strategy which emphasized their self-worth and autonomy. Friedan has an existentially free individual in mind when she recognizes that the political process of achieving the vote was in itself liberating for women.

However, Friedan's understanding of women and government also has its instrumental side. She writes that women must fight for "our own share of political power."[45] She believes in the inevitability of power and the necessity of government; women must therefore take their place beside men both as voters and as politicians. Friedan's commitment to liberal representative government is embedded firmly in her politics; under Friedan's leadership the main strategies of NOW have involved working within governmental structures to achieve women's legal equality. On this front Friedan claims near victory:

> Most of the agenda of Stage 1 of the sex-role revolution — which is how I now see the women's movement for equality — have been accomplished, or are in the process of being resolved. The Equal Rights Amendment was approved by Congress with hardly a murmur in either house after we organized the National Women's Political Caucus. The amendment's main opponent, Emanuel Celler, has been retired from

[42] Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique,* p. 379.
[43] Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique,* p. *75.*
[44] Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique,* p. 92.
[45] Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique,* p. 376.

> Congress by one of the many new young women who, these days, are running for office instead of looking up Zip Codes. The Supreme Court has ruled that no state can deny a woman her right to choose childbirth or abortion.[46]

History has shown that these "victories" of women's equality granted through and by the State are by no means guaranteed. For instance, the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) failed to achieve the required ratification, and religious fundamentalists have succeeded in many American states in "turning back the clock" by reintroducing restrictions on women's access to abortion and birth control. Friedan's faith in the use of governmental politics to achieve women's equality is mistaken on two counts. First, in a pragmatic sense it vastly underestimates the infinite capacity of politicians to change their minds about an issue depending upon which way the prevailing political wind is blowing. Achievements in women's equality attained even nominally through legislative methods are always vulnerable to the very real possibility that they will at some later point be lost through the whim of whatever government is in power.

Second, on a more philosophical level, Friedan's existential individualism is contradicted by a belief in State power. Friedan implicitly supports the legitimacy of the State through the political strategies of NOW. For instance, in 1970 Friedan "started trying to organize a woman's political caucus" which helped "to get Bella Abzug elected to Congress."[47] Existential individualism demands the absence of the State altogether; the will of an individual is inherently denied by the State, and therefore under any State the individual is unfree. As Emma Goldman once said, "it matters not whether it is government by divine right or majority rule. In every instance its aim is the absolute subordination of the individual."[48] Friedan, like Mill, however, must commit herself to a State because she conceptualizes the human individual as an instrumental competitive owner of both real property and property in the person. This instrumental individual is forced through competition to dominate others, and therefore the State must exist to temper relations in this inherently oppressive system. As Noam Chomsky notes:

> In a predatory capitalist economy, state intervention would be an absolute necessity to preserve human existence and to prevent the destruction of the human environment — I speak optimistically. As Karl Polanyi, for one, has pointed out, the self-adjusting market "could not exist for any length of time without annihilating the human and natural substance of society; it would have physically destroyed man and transformed his surroundings into wilderness."[49]

Friedan, having condoned the competitive instrumental individual struggling within the capitalist market economy, must also accept the State as necessary. She then proceeds to use the State as a means by which to achieve women's equality. However, Friedan does not acknowledge that this implicit acceptance of the State contradicts her commitment to the existential individual, who must be free of the reins of State power. Thus, Friedan's main political strategy, that of winning women's rights through the State machinery, can never lead to anything other than domination.

---

[46] Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique, pp. 377–378.*

[47] Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique,* p. 377.

[48] Emma Goldman, *Anarchism and Other Essays,* with a new introduction by Richard Drinnon (New York: Dover, 1969), p. 56.

[49] Chomsky, *The Chomsky Reader,* p. 151.

Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* was published nearly thirty years ago, and while its influence makes it an appropriate starting place for an analysis of modern liberal feminist thought, it is worthwhile to examine a more recent example of feminist writing that takes liberalism as its point of departure. Janet Radcliffe Richards' *The Sceptical Feminist* is one of the few rigorously theoretical liberal feminist treatises of the past twelve years. Richards does not identify herself as a liberal; in fact, she argues for a view of feminism that is neutral and not "ideologically committed."[50] Nancy Holmstrom notes that while Richards is "operating from within a liberal political-philosophical framework, [she] never makes clear that there are different varieties of feminism reflecting different political ideologies… ,"[51] To this end Richards defines feminism very broadly as "a movement for the elimination of sexbased injustice."[52] She insists that her arguments are outside the realm of ideology because they are based on logic and reason. For instance, she states that one of her conclusions is "simply a matter of logic, and [has] nothing to do with capitalism, or any other, values."[53]

However, Richards fails to acknowledge that her own position is value-laden and that the very concepts of logic, reason and justice are part of the liberal tradition from which she draws. Christa Bausch takes issue with Richards' attempt to ideologically cleanse feminism: "There is no such thing as an absolute feminism."[54] Richards however is able to assert her own feminism's neutrality precisely because it is based on liberal values within a liberal world. Richards falls back on liberal possessive individualism to construct her arguments and, in doing so, she runs into the same problems encountered by Mill and Friedan.

One of the most striking examples of Richards' struggle with the conflict between instrumental and existential individualism is her discussion on human freedom. She states that "freedom can be explained by saying that *people are free to the extent that they are in control of their own destinies, and not controlled by other people or other alien forces"*[55] (original emphasis). She also identifies the issue of freedom as being essential to the feminist project: "The principle of freedom will be taken as fundamental to feminism throughout this book."[56] This attitude demands that the feminist movement commit itself to increasing women's choices. "To give women freedom we must give them more choice, and then if they really do not want the things they are choosing now, like homes and families, those things will just die out without our having to push them."[57] These sentiments are all existentially individualistic; they assume that individual women are best suited to make decisions about their own lives, and must not be interfered with.

Richards makes assumptions about human nature that confirm her commitment to existential individualism. She rejects the antifeminist arguments which attribute different natures to men and women in order to justify women's subordination. She argues, as Mill did over a century earlier, that appeals to human nature to buttress dominant ideology are theoretically suspect.

---

[50] Janet Radcliffe Richards, *The Sceptical Feminist* (Middlesex: Penguin, 1980), pp. 13–15.

[51] Nancy Holmstrom, "Review of *The Sceptical Feminist* by Janet Radcliffe Richards," *Ethics,* Volume 92, No. 2, January 1982, p. 388.

[52] Richards, *The Sceptical Feminist,* p. 16.

[53] Richards, *The Sceptical Feminist,* p. 200.

[54] Christa Bausch, "Review of *The Sceptical Feminist* by Janet Radcliffe Richards," *Sociology and Social Research,* Vol. 69, No. 2, 1985, p. 275.

[55] Richards, *The Sceptical Feminist,* pp. 89–90.

[56] Richards, *The Sceptical Feminist,* p. 99.

[57] Richards, *The Sceptical Feminist,* p. 100.

> Most of the pronouncements about the natures of women and men have been made by men, most of whom can hardly count as disinterested observers. All dominant groups have strong motives for inventing unfounded theories about the people over whom they have the ascendancy, because in that way it is possible to carry on any degree of oppression in the disguise of perfect moral rectitude.[58]

She goes on to argue that it is impossible yet to "know" women's nature, as we have not seen women in enough "different environments" to be able to appreciate the true potential of women's natures. Freely quoting from Mill, Richards argues that we are still in such a state of ignorance about human nature that any conclusions we draw about it must be seen as provisional at best. She also cautions against placing too much weight on the issue, as even if we know what the "raw material" of humanity is, such knowledge in no way determines the values we hold. "The knowledge we have of the natures of things *in no way dictates* what use should be made of the raw material. It does not dictate our values, and even within a set of values there may be enormous scope for different routes to be taken"[59] (original emphasis). Richards theoretically rejects a nature that binds or confines individuals; for her, the human individual has the capacity to *choose* what values and what kind of life to live, and in this way confirms her commitment to the existentially free individual.

However, in considering the issue of human freedom Richards also succumbs to liberal instrumentalism: She casts her discussion of freedom in terms of "possession."[60] She states, "here, then, is an acceptable account of freedom as a possession: you are free to the extent that other people's desires do not come between you and your own."[61] This notion of freedom as possession implies that each and every individual must compete with all others in order to achieve their own freedom. Freedom is thus seen not as an end in itself but rather as a means to satisfy competitive individual interests. This pits each against all in the egocentric struggle for the satisfaction of desires. It also implies that freedom is a commodity that can be bought and sold; the whole concept of possession is predicated on the ability of the possessor to dispose of the possession on a free market. This instrumental conceptualization of human freedom is based on Richards' instrumental view of human nature. She assumes that human individuals are inherently competitive when she admits that "direct social pressure" must sometimes be brought to bear on people because otherwise they would use their "freedom" (as possession) to hurt others. "Many direct pressures seem positively desirable, since society would go to pieces unless it positively tried to prevent people from doing certain kinds of harm."[62]

Thus, Richards confounds her discussion of freedom by alternating between two conflicting and unresolvable views of the human individual, one existential and the other instrumental. The existential individualism of Richards' thought promises a world where people are able to determine the paths of their own lives, without interference, while the instrumental individualism demands interference to counter the competitive domination of the marketplace. The contradictions that arise out of this dualism subvert the liberating potential of Richards' feminism, as they undermine the coherence of all liberal thought.

---

[58] Richards, *The Sceptical Feminist,* p. 53.
[59] Richards, *The Sceptical Feminist,* p. 85.
[60] Richards, *The Sceptical Feminist,* p. 88.
[61] Richards, *The Sceptical Feminist,* p. 95.
[62] Richards, *The Sceptical Feminist,* p. 171.

In her liberal feminist consideration of employment, Richards argues that women should not be barred from jobs simply because they are women.

> It is never fair to eliminate a group from an area of activity (or to make admission harder for them than for other groups) on grounds which are unconnected with the purpose for which the selection is being made. *It is always unfair to practice selection discrimination against women* or against any other group[63] (original emphasis).

She argues that people must have "equal opportunity to succeed in all areas of activity."[64]

> We know for certain that women have been kept out o£ many kinds of work, and this means that the work is quite likely to be unsuited to them. The most obvious example of this is the incompatibility of most work with the bearing and rearing of children; I am firmly convinced that if women had been fully involved in the running of society from the start they would have *found* a way of arranging work and children to fit each other. Men have had no such motivation, and we can see the results[65] (original emphasis).

These sentiments are existentially individualist because they stress the freedom of individuals to pursue occupations according to their own tastes and inclinations unhindered by law or custom. She condemns the lack of opportunity afforded women because of their historical confinement to the private realm. She proposes that in order to open up more job opportunities for women, "women should be experimenting with kinds of work which might be made compatible with children."[66] Also, "the feminist campaign should be directed towards radical reorganization of child care, designed to give women as many options as possible…"[67] These prescriptions are concerned primarily with the freedom of the individual woman to choose the kind of work that she most wants to undertake, without suffering discrimination or being unduly hampered by child care responsibilities. This forms the existential thrust of her argument about women and employment.

However, like Mill and Friedan, Richards also subscribes to an instrumental individualism in her consideration of women's inequality and employment. One of the basic tenets of Richards' position is that human beings are competitive owners of both real property and property in the person, and that it is essential for women to join men in instrumentally competitive activities. For instance, she clearly sees the competitive marketplace as providing a mechanism to achieve a just society. Drawing on the work of John Rawls, Richards adopts a theory of justice which justifies the inequality produced by a competitive market system. She claims that "the level of well-being for the worst off group is the criterion for deciding which among several possible states of society is the fairest."[68] She argues against communitarian equality in favour of the inequality of the marketplace because she believes that the "worst off group" will be better off in a competitive marketplace.

[63] Richards, *The Sceptical Feminist,* p. 136.
[64] Richards, *The Sceptical Feminist,* p. 180.
[65] Richards, *The Sceptical Feminist,* p. 144.
[66] Richards, *The Sceptical Feminist,* p. 309.
[67] Richards, *The Sceptical Feminist,* p. 310.
[68] Richards, *The Sceptical Feminist,* p. 123.

> The basis of the principle of absolute equality is that it is usually possible for people to share what they have, and where that is possible it should be done. In the last analysis all abilities, strengths, and advantages of situation are accidental; no one deserves more than anyone else, and this should be shared out equally until everyone is equally well off.
>
> That … would probably be acceptable if the amount of good to be shared out were fixed as well as finite. However, it is not. How much there is to share depends on how much is produced, and that in turn depends heavily on social arrangements. It is entirely possible that if you insisted on absolute equality you might make everyone worse off than the *worst off* might have been in a carefully planned system of inequality… It would be better to have an inequality which allowed *everyone, including* the worst off, to be better off than they would be under a system of total equality[69] (original emphasis).

Richards equates justice with material well-being; the aim of a just society is to increase wealth, period. For her, a severely stratified but productive economy will be more just than one based on other, less productive but more egalitarian principles. As long as those at the bottom of a competitive system are better off than they would be in a system of "sharing," then the competitive society is more "just." She thus makes competition into a virtue; it is the only way to achieve justice. Richards does not simply assert that competitive behaviour is natural to human individuals; she believes that it is good. If human individuals are to be just, they must compete.

Of course it could be argued that Richards is merely describing the reality of liberal society, which happens to be based on competition, and that her description is in no way an endorsement of a competitive society. However, *nowhere* in her work does she acknowledge that a just society could be structured around a different principle than that of competition, nor does she recommend any restructuring.

Richards' acceptance of the moral and economic necessity of competitive behaviour forces her into advocating government intervention in the marketplace to protect weaker individuals and groups. Thus, while she argues that *"it is always unfair to practice selection discrimination against women* or against any other group,"[70] (original emphasis) she employs an intellectual sleight of hand to justify the implementation of reverse discrimination to counter the historical tendency of the free market to exclude women. "Transitional injustice is not to be tolerated," Richards contends, "but accusations of injustice must not be allowed to prevent reverse discrimination where that is the best route to a state of justice."[71] She argues:

> A fair scheme of positive discrimination would not allow women to reverse the previous situation and make sure that masses of women were appointed to everything they could think of in preference to overwhelmingly better qualified men; it would aim to give these positions only to some (probably not even all) of the women who would have had them anyway, in fair competition with the men, if the women had had the same advantages as men in the past. But the only men excluded on this sort of principle would be the ones who, as far as we could tell, would not have succeeded

[69] Richards, *The Sceptical Feminist,* pp. 122–123.
[70] Richards, *The Sceptical Feminist,* p. 136.
[71] Richards, *The Sceptical Feminist,* p. 151.

> anyway if the situation had been fair. Therefore their not succeeding cannot be considered unfair. It looks unfair to them only because they expected what was in fact *more* than their fair share[72] (original emphasis).

This qualified endorsement of selection discrimination is necessary to counteract the inherent unfairness of a free, competitive market. Richards is implicitly acknowledging that if the free market were left to its own it would, in the particular case of women, discriminate in favour of men. She is thus forced into the admittedly tricky position of opposing selection criteria on the basis of sex while simultaneously advocating selection discrimination to make the competition more just for women. She must support selection discrimination because she assumes that human individuals are inherently competitive owners of property and property in the person. As certain groups of individuals are weaker competitors, intervention in the marketplace is therefore necessary to protect the weaker from being taken advantage of by the stronger.

This belief in the necessity of competition contradicts Richards' existential individualism. Competition between individuals means that some must inevitably win with the losers forfeiting control over their own lives and wills. As Rudolph Rocker notes:

> Democracy with its motto of "equality of all citizens before the law," and Liberalism with its "right of man over his own person," both shipwrecked on the realities of the capitalist economic form. So long as millions of human beings in every country had to sell their labourpower to a small minority of owners, and to sink into the most wretched misery if they could find no buyers, the so-called "equality before the law" remains merely a pious fraud, since laws are made by those who find themselves in possession of the social wealth. But in the same way there can also be no talk of a "right over one's own person," for that right ends when one is compelled to submit to the economic dictation of another if he does not want to starve.[73]

The employment contract demanded by the competitive marketplace involves the buying and selling of property in the person, and the resulting relationships of domination and subordination are more subtle than the mere tallying up of economic winners and losers. To sell property in the person is to give up one's will; it is to sacrifice the capacity to be self-determined. To work *for* another is to risk working *against* one's own will. Richards' commitment to competition undermines her existential understanding of selfdetermining individuals.

Nowhere is this more evident than in Richards' consideration of prostitution. She argues that prostitution is Eke any other job where an individual sells a service, and therefore should not be denounced as particularly bad. She accepts the idea that individuals own property in their person and that they ought to be able to participate in the competitive marketplace, whether the service being sold is music or sex.

> Women do enter beauty competitions, which are supposed to be run because men enjoy seeing the parade of women. They do earn livings by pleasing men as strippers or prostitutes. If, therefore, there is something bad about the men who want these

[72] Richards, *The Sceptical Feminist,* pp. 149–150.

[73] Rudolph Rocker, *Anarcho-Syndicalism,* with an introduction by Nicolas Walter and a preface by Noam Chomsky (London: Pluto Press, 1989), p.23.

> things and the women who go along with them, why is there not something equally bad about people who are interested in musicians who are happy to go along with that interest, and earn their livings by means of it? Why should it be acceptable to base a relationship on common intellectual interests, but not a common wish for sex? Why should there be prizes for painting pictures, but not faces? Why should it be acceptable to be paid for charming people's ears with beautiful sounds, but not for delighting men's fancies with strip shows and prostitution?[74]

Richards acknowledges that prostitution may indeed be degrading, but she argues that it is not its commercialism that makes it so. She maintains that selling sex is degrading because of social disapproval and the fact that women often resort to prostitution because they have no other way of making a living. This is no reason, she contends, to condemn prostitution as bad in and of itself. It is the social attitudes that must be changed, and then prostitution can be seen for what it really is: the mere selling of a service like any other.

> Other things, like teaching and manual work, have been made degrading by social attitudes, and in cases like that we have tried to remove the degradation rather than persuade people not to do the work. Why should we not also fight the degradation in the case of prostitution and such things, rather than say that men should not want these things or women provide them?
>
> As usual when there are prejudices to defend, excuses proliferate. Sex is said to be cheapened by money. Why should it be, however? Nursing care is a thing which is often given for love, but we don't think nurses cheapen themselves or the profession when they earn a living by it…[75]

Richards is perfectly correct here; *if* we accept that individuals own property in the person and ought to be able to sell their labour power in the marketplace, then prostitution is no different than any other service and ought not to be opposed. However, if the employment contract is understood for what it really is, a relationship of domination and subordination, then *no* service can be justifiably bought and sold. The musician, the teacher and the prostitute are all placed in a subordinate position when they sell their services for money, because as argued earlier the separation of services from the totality of the individual is impossible. Therefore, whether one is a musician or a prostitute makes no difference; the act of considering oneself as an owner of property in the person and selling one's services as such an owner is to have one's own will subverted in favour of the will of another. Richards acknowledges the "weak" position of prostitutes when she quotes from Kate Millett's *The Prostitution Papers:*

> "When they talk about 'niggers' you've just got to go 'uh-huh, uh-huh' and agree with them. That's what I really couldn't stand… That's why it's selling your soul and not selling a service."[76]

---

[74] Richards, *The Sceptical Feminist,* p. 243.

[75] Richards, *The Sceptical Feminist,* p. 244.

[76] Richards, quoting from Kate Millett, editor, *The Prostitution Papers* (St. Albans: Paladin, 1975), p. 36, in *The Sceptical Feminist,* p. 244.

However, Richards attributes this subordination to the general degradation of women and not as endemic to the employment contract itself. Prostitution, *like all work done for pay,* does indeed involve "selling your soul." Richards, like other liberals, does not understand that any system that conceives of the human individual as owning property in the person is fundamentally a system based on domination. To treat one's body and one's services as things that one owns is to act as though subject and object are separable when they are not. The human subject — the will, or "soul," is inseparable from the object — the body. Prostitution is justified by Richards as simply an activity where a human individual (most likely a woman) sells sexual services (usually to a man). As long as this relationship is entered into voluntarily, Richards has no quarrel with prostitutes or their clients. What she fails to see is that, for the prostitute, the service being sold, that is, the sex act itself, becomes disconnected from the prostitute's will at the moment it is bought. Her will is unimportant; it is the customer that must be satisfied. Thus, while a woman may voluntarily work as a prostitute, her will automatically disappears in the servicing of the client. She loses the integrity of an embodied subject, and instead is treated as only a body, without will. This is domination, pure and simple.

Like any other human activity, in order for sex to be liberating it must be undertaken in such a way as to respect the wills of those involved. It is clear that a prostitute must subordinate her will to that of her client, and in so doing she loses her ability to be self-determined. Richards is correct when she does not distinguish between prostitution and other forms of paid labour; however, instead of imbuing prostitution with the respectability that conventional services command, it would be more accurate to see all activities involving the selling of one's labour power as prostitution. At least when put in these terms it is easier to see the employment relationship for what it is: a relationship of domination and subordination.

Richards' defence of prostitution as "just another job" is quite in keeping with her instrumental conceptualization of the human individual. She considers the notion that human bodies and skills are possessions to be freely bought and sold as necessary to creating and maintaining a just society. It is this competition of property owners (both real and in the person) with its attendant inequalities, that allows for the possibility of a system in which *"everyone, including* the worst off, [is] better off than they would be under a system of total equality." This view clearly contradicts Richards' existential individualism, in which the equal worth of each and every human individual is a given. Existential individualism demands that competition as a rationalization of justice, and the inevitable resulting inequality, be abandoned in favour of a more compensatory ethics which recognizes what Murray Bookchin calls the "equality of unequals."[77] It is not justice that existential individualism aims for, but rather freedom.

Individual freedom can only be achieved when it is acknowledged and understood that people are not equal to one another, but rather have different skills and abilities, needs and wants. These differences, however, should not be used as a basis for apportioning wealth, as the liberal conception of justice would have it. Instead, liberalism's own existential individualism suggests that justice must give way to the equal recognition of human dignity and integrity, despite the unequal distribution of human skills and talents. As Bookchin argues, "Equality is inextricably tied to freedom as the recognition of inequality and transcends necessity by establishing a culture and distributive system based on compensation for the stigma of natural 'privilege.'"[78] It is

[77] Murray Bookchin, *The Ecology of Freedom* (Palo Alto: Cheshire Books, 1982), pp. 142–149.
[78] Bookchin, *The Ecology of Freedom,* p. 144.

obvious that this freedom cannot be achieved in a system where individuals own, buy and sell both real property and property in the person; the instrumental individual constantly destroys freedom by negating the wills of others in the endless self-interested struggle to get to the top. Once again, liberalism's existential individualism is sacrificed in favour of the instrumental.

In her examination of women and the family, Richards concludes that it is wrong to confine women to the private realm of housework and childrearing. However, Richards does not blindly recommend that women be forced to abandon their homes in favour of work in the public sphere; to do so would also be coercive. Richards instead takes a strong existential individualist stand by arguing that social affairs should be arranged in such a way as to allow women a wide range of options, without necessarily having to choose between family and career.

> It would be … better if some new arrangement could be made which allowed full care of the child *and* full use of the other abilities.
>
> *That* is the really important feminist point. It is no part of feminism to insist that a woman should work at other things even though her children suffer as a consequence, but it *is* part of feminism to insist that there is something radically wrong with a system which forces so many women to choose between caring properly for their children and using their abilities fully[79] (original emphasis).

Women must be able to choose freely whether and how they are going to bear and raise children. Women must not be forced into childbearing, but must be given the opportunity to make such choices in freedom. This necessitates ready access to safe birth control methods. "Women's demand for safe, effective and readily available birth control can be seen as a demand that women (and good men) should after all this time have the same freedom to combine sex with children or not, as they please."[80] Richards asserts that "if a woman wants sex that is her own concern, and if it is possible to separate sex and pregnancy she should be allowed to."[81] Her commitment to women's reproductive self-determination is further revealed in her consideration of whether men should be able to force women into having children: "Any man whose wife wants no more children (or none at all) is no doubt entitled to find another woman to bear his children if he can, but at no point is he entitled to regard his wife as his property, to do as he likes with."[82] She condemns the fact that women have historically suffered under repressive marriage laws and customs.

> There were all kinds of laws about the legal control of husbands over wives and fathers over daughters… There were appalling sanctions on "fallen women", which kept women bound to a particular man. There were laws which made it pretty well impossible for women to escape from the power of tyrannical husbands, since they would have to sacrifice everything, including their children, in the process.[83]

The general sentiment here is women should be allowed self-determination.

[79] Richards, *The Sceptical Feminist, p. 211.*
[80] Richards, *The Sceptical Feminist,* p. 253.
[81] Richards, *The Sceptical Feminist, p. 254.*
[82] Richards, *The Sceptical Feminist,* p. 255.
[83] Richards, *The Sceptical Feminist,* p. 174.

Richards extends this sensibility to the issue of abortion, which she sees as "not really about the safety of the mother or the rights of the father or society; the real question is about the rights of the mother as compared with those of the unborn child."[84] Richards defends the existential freedom of the mother:

> The important things in life are freedom and the prevention of suffering. From the point of view of freedom the mother's claims are unquestionably paramount. She does not wish to have the child, and the child, at that stage in life, cannot reasonably be said to have any wishes at all. From the point of view of the absence of suffering, much the same is true. The mother is likely to suffer, whether or not she has an abortion, as a result of being pregnant against her wishes, but presumably will suffer less as a result of an abortion than she would through bearing and caring for an unwanted child. At any rate, she ought to be allowed to be the final judge of her own degree of suffering.[85]

Richards' argument in favour of women's reproductive freedom places her squarely on the side of existential individualism. She also argues that child care arrangements should be modified to allow the greatest possible choices for women. To this end, she suggests that we ought to:

> Break down the social stigma suffered by fatherless children, and make unconventional groups of people more socially acceptable, thereby giving people the greatest possible freedom to make child care arrangements to suit themselves.[86]

Richards criticizes the tendency of many feminists to call for universal State-run day care, as she believes that such a move would leave intact the sexist underpinnings of our society.

> The popular idea of universally available twenty-four hour creches is an extremely conservative one because it leaves virtually everything as it now is, with the only exception of making it possible for women to leave their children in the care of others while they go off to join men at work. Much the same is true of schemes of maternity leave. All they do is allow for slightly special treatment of childbearing women, still within the present scheme of things.[87]

Richards' reluctance to depend on State-controlled solutions to the problems associated with child care is based upon her commitment to maximizing individual choice. She points out that since we really do not have any idea what kind of child care arrangements are best, we need to experiment. However, the uniform, large scale methods of the State are inappropriate to the task. She recommends not the "sweeping experiments involving the whole of society, but all kinds of small ones, *increasing people's options* rather than forcing them into new systems, and as many as possible at once so that the successful ones emerge quickly"[88] (emphasis added). Individuals ought to have as much freedom as possible to run their own lives, and large-scale State-supported

[84] Richards, *The Sceptical Feminist,* p. 262.
[85] Richards, *The Sceptical Feminist,* p. 262.
[86] Richards, *The Sceptical Feminist,* p. 305.
[87] Richards, *The Sceptical Feminist,* pp. 292–293.
[88] Richards, *The Sceptical Feminist,* p. 308.

day care would undermine that freedom by closing off other options for women and their children. Richards looks to the individual for solutions to the problem of how to arrange for the care of children, and suggests that a multitude of different approaches become available when individuals are left to decide for themselves. Her anti-Statism is based on an existential individualism that stresses human freedom. This is evident when she argues that "the feminist campaign should be directed towards radical reorganization of child care, designed to give women as many options as possible, and not drift into an unimaginative and restricting pursuit of the all-embracing State-run creche, which leaves the fundamentals of the problem untouched."[89]

Richards' understanding of children also has at its base an existential conceptualization of the individual. She accords them the same individual freedom as adults when she states that "children are of course people, individuals in their own right and as entitled to consideration as anyone else."[90] While Richards does not pursue this line of thought any further, it is certainly consistent with her existential individualist understanding of the family.

While Richards considers the family and intimate sexual relationships in a way that affirms the dignity, freedom and autonomy of the human individual, she also simultaneously casts her discussion in instrumental terms. For instance, in addition to seeing children as individuals "in their own right," she goes on to state that children are "valued possessions of their parents (which is unquestionably one thing they are)."[91] She bounces between these two notions of children, one existential and one instrumental, in her discussion of whether children are the responsibility of their parents or the State. She argues:

> The central feminist problem about children stems from the idea that the burden of producing children falls heavily on women, but that everyone shares in the benefits. In other words, the problem is one which focuses on the idea of children as valuable commodities. People may exclaim in horror at the idea of regarding children in this way, but there is no escaping the fact that that is one thing they are. People want children; children are not born for their own sakes.[92]

Richards struggles with this question, and comes up with different solutions depending on whether she looks at the problem from the point of view of the child or the adult. The issue is further complicated by the fact that she treats both viewpoints — the child's and the adult's — as existential and instrumental. For instance, while she assumes that children are existentially free individuals, she ends up depending on the State to safeguard their interests from their parents: "Children have absolutely fundamental rights of their own: they must not be made to suffer from the selfishness or improvidence of their parents. *It is, therefore, the absolute duty of the state to see that their needs are met"*[93] (original emphasis). This pro-State stance is necessary in Richards' framework in order to compensate for the fact that children, whose rights as free individuals are inviolable, are also considered to be property of their parents, and adults are instrumentally understood to be "selfish and improvident." Certainly the defenselessness of infants and children presents certain practical problems for implementing a form of childrearing free from power or

[89] Richards, *The Sceptical Feminist,* p. 310.
[90] Richards, *The Sceptical Feminist,* p. 294.
[91] Richards, *The Sceptical Feminist,* p. 294.
[92] Richards, *The Sceptical Feminist,* p. 310.
[93] Richards, *The Sceptical Feminist,* p. 312.

domination. However, to depend on the State to provide for children is to risk violating the wills of parents who "own" children, which contradicts the liberal commitment of freedom of will. Also, while State intervention in childrearing may very well lessen the domination of parent over child, State control itself is simply another form of power that denies the child's freedom as an individual.

Richards' existential individualist understanding of children is compromised through her acceptance of the fact that "children are not born for their own sakes." A consistent existential individualism would understand children not as "property" or "commodities" that parents produce, but rather as human beings with their own wills and capacity for self-determination. Existential individualism demands that in principle children be treated as individuals with their own inviolable wills, and not as the property of either the State or the parents.

Richards' instrumentalism is also evident in the way she treats intimate relationships between men and women. She laments what she perceives to be the anti-aesthetic attitude of the feminist movement, and argues that women ought not to be discouraged from making themselves "attractive" to men. She asserts that "beauty is the same sort of thing whether it is in paintings, sunsets or people,"[94] and that feminists who protest against the objectification of women are simply being puritanical. She does not recognize that to separate out and privilege a physical part of a person — how that person appears — from the rest of who that person is — their subjectivity — risks violating the will of that person. Human will is inextricably linked with the subject; to treat human beings as just objects is to deny their subjectivity and hence compromise their will. In defending physical beauty as a major criterion upon which to base intimate relationships, Richards strips away subjectivity from the human individual, leaving a mere object.

This negation of the human individual's subjectivity is most clear when she states:

> The best-judging man alive, confronted with two women identical in all matters of the soul but not equal in beauty, could hardly help choosing the beautiful one… There cannot be a man in existence who would not, other things being equal, prefer a woman with two breasts to a woman with only one, and niceness has absolutely nothing to do with such preferences.[95]

These vulgar pronouncements are based on one major assumption, that the women under consideration are "identical in all matters of the soul." Only by asserting this qualification can Richards come to such base conclusions. She does not consider that such an assumption contradicts her own existential individualism; individuals are never "identical in all matters of the soul," but are rather richly unique in their infinite diversity. Only by ignoring her own individualism can Richards conclude that "all things being equal" a man would prefer a woman who had not undergone breast surgery to one who had.

Framing the issue in this way puts women (and, presumably, men) into a sort of competitive "market" of intimate relations, where appearance and not substance forms the basis of relationships. In this market, "there are … bound to be some people who are more sought after than others. This immediately introduces an element of competition (and therefore of social pressure), since to get the most desirable of the opposite sex you must make yourself as sexually desirable as possible."[96] Richards elaborates on this sexual competition when she writes:

[94] Richards, *The Sceptical Feminist,* p. 232.
[95] Richards, *The Sceptical Feminist,* p. 231, 233.
[96] Richards, *The Sceptical Feminist,* p. 167.

> Whether or not they are actually dependent on men, women are likely to go on wanting them, and if they do not go along with the unreasonable expectations men have inherited from the past they will lose the men to other women who do. To overcome the problem there would have to be an agreement among all women, and that would be quite impracticable; obviously the women who would by nature be rather behind in the race for men would be only too glad to take advantage of some of the front runners' dropping out of the competition, and would have no possible motive for co-operating with them.[97]

Love and respect are not issues for Richards; for her, the selfinterested calculations of which body is more beautiful makes up the cold rationalization of sexual gratification. This is not surprising given Richards' instrumental conceptualization of the human individual; if one "owns" one's body, it makes sense that one should exploit its aesthetic possibilities to the hilt in the frenzied search for human contact.

While the issue of governmental politics (and, more generally, the State) is not a major concern of Richards, she does occasionally touch upon it in an oblique manner. Even such brief considerations of the subject reveal the characteristic liberal dualism of existential and instrumental individualism. For instance, Richards argues that the State has in the past been active in keeping women subordinate to men, and that women were denied access to self-determination through their exclusion from governmental politics.

> The facts are stark, but beyond question. All social arrangements, institutions and customs which defined the relative position of the sexes were designed *to ensure that women should be in the power and service of men.*
>
> This no doubt sounds like pure feminist rant, but it is not. It is proved by many quite incontrovertible facts about the *formal devices* which for most of history were employed by men to make sure that women were kept in their power, and involves no recourse to extravagant assertions about the general moral turpitude of men. There were all kinds of laws about the legal control of husbands over wives and fathers over daughters, and obstacles in the way of women's controlling property… And to ratify it all, women were kept totally out of the making of law, so that until some men were willing to champion their cause there was no hope of their doing anything to change any of it[98] (original emphasis).

Richards is here condemning as wrong the legal curbing of women's self-determination. This is existentially individualistic as it recognizes that individuals are the best judge of how to live their lives and ought to have a say in how society is structured.

Richards also argues against State involvement in individuals' lives:

> People *are* to a greater or lesser degree responsible for what they do. The question at issue here is the very different one of the extent to which they ought to be *held* responsible for it… A state which expected everyone to share the consequences of an individual's carelessness would be one which had little concern for human freedom,

[97] Richards, *The Sceptical Feminist,* p. 182.
[98] Richards, *The Sceptical Feminist,* pp. 173–174.

> because it would be lowering the extent to which what happened to people depended on what they chose to do… Now on the basis of all that has been argued so far in this book, it must obviously be said that if the effect of the state's extricating people from the consequences of their own mistakes is to lower the level of freedom available to everyone, it must not do it[99] (original emphasis).

Richards is clearly concerned here with protecting the freedom of individuals from State interference. She recognizes both that individuals are best suited to controlling their own lives as well as the fact that State interference inhibits individual freedom. Being committed to self-determination necessitates that Richards positions herself against the use of State power.

However, juxtaposed alongside Richards' dislike of State power is her equally strong conviction that the State is a necessary evil. The State, for liberal thinkers such as Richards, must exist because human beings are inherently competitive self-interested owners of real property and property in the person and must be prevented from doing each other in. "One of the functions of society is," according to Richards, "to protect its weaker members."[100] In the liberal framework, society assigns this protective function to the State. Why should "society" or the State have to protect its weak? Because, according to Richards, human individuals relate not to each other through concern, love and co-operation, but rather as self-interested competitors bent on climbing to the top on the backs of the less capable. As cited earlier, Richards believes that "society would go to pieces unless it positively tried to prevent people from doing certain kinds of harm."[101] The State becomes essential for regulating competition among instrumental individuals; without it the instrumental individual would soon become extinct, annihilated by naked greed.

Richards' discussion of justice illustrates her logical dependence on the existence of the State to regulate the instrumental relations among competing individuals. For Richards, the problem of sexual inequality is really a question of injustice, and the notion of justice is therefore central to her discussion of feminism as a whole. She makes a distinction between what she terms *formal* justice and *substantial* justice: "Formal justice consists in applying laws consistently and impartially, whatever those laws happen to be, while substantial justice consists in having just laws."[102] She concludes that "the best state of affairs for any society is one where there are both kinds of justice at once; where there are just laws and they are justly applied."[103] Richards' "ideal" society includes "just laws justly applied." The State is needed to create and administer those laws, laws which provide a minimum safeguard against the competitive egoism of the instrumental individual. This contradicts her own commitment to the existential individual, whose freedom is compromised by the very existence of the State.

Richards, of course, recognizes, at least implicitly, that her reliance on the State presents very real problems for individual freedom. She attempts to overcome these problems by making a distinction between coercive and inducement-oriented State intervention, with the latter presumably preserving individual freedom. This distinction can be seen in her discussion of children and the State:

---

[99] Richards, *The Sceptical Feminist*, pp. 286–287.
[100] Richards, *The Sceptical Feminist*, p. 64.
[101] Richards, *The Sceptical Feminist*, p. 171.
[102] Richards, *The Sceptical Feminist, p. 1Y7.*
[103] Richards, *The Sceptical Feminist*, p. 118.

> Women are exploited in their childbearing when they are coerced into it by the deliberate closing of other options to them. To end the exploitation, the state must allow women to compete freely for everything else. When that is done, the state's exploitation is ended, and if it finds that enough children are produced in a fair system, it is under no obligation to pay women anything more. In fact the position is stronger than that: *it certainly should not pay for anything more.* State resources should be used as a reward to induce people to do, for the general good, things they would not otherwise have chosen to do. It would be an unfair use of public money to pay people additionally for what they had chosen, unconstrained, to do. Of course, if the state did want more children than women chose to produce, it could alter its arrangements and put its resources into making childbearing more attractive, and in that way it would be paying women for having children… The only thing the state need do is decide how many children it wants, and provide incentives until people voluntarily produce enough[104] (original emphasis).

If the State wants more children it should not force women into the home by barring them from public realm activities, as such a move would violate the fundamental freedom of women to choose how to live their own lives. However, Richards' contention that State enticements to childbearing (such as monetary rewards) do not represent an interference in women's lives is suspect at best. If childbearing is an activity a woman would not herself choose to do, then State inducements to bear children are intrusive. Despite her semantic wrangling, Richards is unable to overcome the contradiction between the existence of a State and the preservation of human freedom. In her consideration of one of the most personal and private decisions an individual can make — whether to create a new human life — she admits the legitimacy of State intervention based upon the instrumental competitive nature of the human individual. To predicate birth not on freedom of choice but rather on State sponsored financial inducements is the ultimate renunciation of the existentially free individual.

Neither Mill nor Friedan nor Richards succeed in adequately addressing the problem of women's subordination, because the fundamental principles underlying their arguments preclude the achievement of individual freedom while asserting that such achievement is indeed possible. Liberal political philosophy is at its base contradictory, and so long as feminism is coloured by liberal ideology it will not free women but rather will perpetuate a hierarchical system of power and domination. A different political philosophy is needed, one that focuses on individual freedom but that avoids the problems and pitfalls of instrumentalism.

[104] Richards, *The Sceptical Feminist,* p. 304.

Chapter Five: Anarchism as a Political Philosophy of Existential Individualism: Implications for Feminism

Anarchism means, literally, *without a ruler*. While the popular understanding o£ anarchism is o£ a violent, antiState movement, anarchism is a much more subtle and nuanced tradition than a simple opposition to government power. Anarchists oppose the idea that power and domination are necessary for society, and instead advocate more cooperative, anti-hierarchical forms of social, political and economic organization. Anarchist political philosophy is by no means a unified movement; in fact, anarchism's strong individualism encourages a multitude of views and perspectives, which makes characterizing the anarchist position difficult. Within the anarchist "family" there are mutualists, collectivists, communists, federalists, individualists, socialists, syndicalists, feminists, as well as many others. While each of these strains of anarchist thought emphasize a different strategy for achieving anarchist goals, there are certain fundamental principles to which most anarchists subscribe. As Rudolph Rocker notes, "common to all Anarchists is the desire to free society of all political and social coercive institutions which stand in the way of the development of free humanity."[1] Thus, the various factions within anarchism:

> Mutualism, Collectivism, and Communism are not to be regarded as closed systems permitting no further development, but merely as economic assumptions as to the means of safeguarding a free community. There will even probably be in the society of the future different forms of economic co-operation existing side by side, since any social progress must be associated with that free experimentation and practical testing-out for which in a society of free communities there will be afforded every opportunity.[2]

All anarchists are anti-authoritarian and are opposed to the exercise of power. Peter Marshall argues that "anarchism as a philosophy seeks to dissolve all forms of authority and power, and if possible, wishes their complete abolition."[3] According to him:

> Authority is clearly a manifestation of power, but they are not identical. Power may best be defined as the ability to impose one's will. Power is different from authority for where the latter asserts the right to command and the right to be obeyed, the former is the ability to compel compliance, either through the use or threat of force.[4]

[1] Rudolph Rocker, *Anarcho-Syndicalism,* introduction by Nicolas Walter, preface by Noam Chomsky (London: Pluto Press, 1989), p. 20.

[2] Rocker, *Anarcho-Syndicalism,* pp. 20–21.

[3] Peter Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible: A History of Anarchism* (London: Harper Collins, 1992), p. 47.

[4] Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible,* p. 45.

Anarchists also believe in the inherent dignity and worth of the human individual. In addition, as social and economic relations based on private property are inherently power-laden, many anarchists combine an individualist philosophy with a condemnation of private property and an advocacy of free communism. Unlike their more authoritarian collectivist cousins, anarchists believe that individuals themselves must make the various decisions concerning their own lives. As Peter Kropotkin argues, people are capable of "acting for themselves,"[5] and without exception should be allowed to do so. This individualist anti-authoritarianism results in anarchist opposition to any form of social organization which takes away from the self-determination of the individual: the State, compulsory education, marriage, patriarchy, imperialism, religion, property — all these and more are the target of anarchist critique because they rob the individual of the capacity to live freely, without interference, in voluntary association with others.

The *voluntarism* of anarchism cannot be over-emphasized; unlike many collectivist ideologies that insist on certain forms of compulsory social relationships (if only, in theory, transitionally), anarchists leave it up to individuals themselves to decide how best to live and work. Anarchism is committed to a form of individualism that is unified in its stress on individual freedom within voluntary community with others, and thus avoids the kinds of problems that plague liberalism and liberal feminism.

Anarchist tendencies in history can be traced back as far as ancient Greece and China;[6] however, it is only relatively recently that the term *anarchist was* self-consciously adopted by political theorists interested in creating a world without rulers. In his 1840 work *What is Property?,* Pierre-Joseph Proudhon was the first to use the term anarchist to describe the anti-authoritarian protest against oppression of any kind. Since then a variety of writers from many different countries and backgrounds have adopted the anarchist position as their own. Peter Kropotkin, Mikhail Bakunin, Emma Goldman, Alexander Berkman and Murray Bookchin: The unifying link between them all is a universal condemnation of hierarchy and domination and a willingness to fight for the freedom of the human individual.[7]

Many writers who adopt the anarchist position have first embraced and then rejected Marxism before moving on to anarchist political philosophy. This rejection of Marxism and subsequent turning towards anarchism often occurs as a result of a crisis in faith caused by either subtle or explicit manifestations of power and domination within Marxist theory and practice. Many anarchists recognize Marx's critique of capitalism as a valid assessment of the political and moral bankruptcy of bourgeois society. As well, most anarchists agree with Marx's more humanistic writings, especially those that aim towards the creation of free communism. However, there is much disagreement between anarchists and Marxists about the appropriate strategy needed to achieve desired social and economic change. J. Frank Harrison underlines this tension when he states that "Bakunin was impressed by Marx's economic analysis of bourgeois society and its explanation of the causes of conflict therein, calling *Das Kapital* a 'magnificent work.' What Bakunin was not prepared to accept was the apparent restrictiveness of the Marxian revolutionary programme."[8] As Noam Chomsky points out, "many of the socialist-anarchist intellectuals felt that the Marxists had developed considerable insight and understanding oí the development

[5] Peter Kropotkin, *Act For Yourselves,* edited by Nicolas Walter and Heiner Becker (London: Freedom Press, 1988).

[6] George Woodcock, editor, *The Anarchist Reader* (Glasgow: Collins, 1977), pp. 14–17; Rocker, *Anarcho-Syndicalism,* pp. 12–13.

[7] For a good introduction to a variety of anarchist writing, see Woodcock, *The Anarchist Reader.*

[8] J. Frank Harrison, *The Modern State* (Montreal: Black Rose, 1983), p. 89.

o£ capitalism and capitalist imperialism. But they felt that the Marxists totally misunderstood the prospects for the development of a freer society, or worse, that they would undermine these prospects in their own class interest as state managers and ideologists."[9]

While anarchists have fought against the authoritarian tendencies within Marxism since Marx and Bakunin squared off at the First International in 1868, their critical acceptance of Marx's analysis of capitalism has undeniably left its mark on anarchist thought. One consequence of this commingling of anarchist and Marxist ideas within the anarchist tradition has been the lack of a systematic anarchist critique of capitalism; after all, Marx long ago competently demolished the ideological basis of capitalism. A second consequence of the close historical relationship between anarchism and Marxism is the fact that few anarchists have seriously considered the theoretical links between anarchism and liberalism. This neglect is due to the fact that, even if Marxism's authoritarian tendencies are rejected by anarchist thinkers, the distrust of liberal bourgeois society is not. There is enough Marxist influence within the anarchist tradition that the links between liberalism and anarchism have been to a great extent ignored. As William McKercher writes, "for like most socialist — and particularly Marxist — critics of the concept, the libertarians tend to attach very derogatory connotations to the idea of individualism. They identify individualism with selfishness, atomisation, competition, and small-mindedness — all of which, they believe, constitute the epitome of 'bourgeois liberalism.' This is, in many instances, but crude thinking on their part…"[10] However, it is precisely this theoretical overlap between liberal and anarchist individualism which provides the key for understanding the two strains of thought. By ignoring the clear similarities and differences between liberalism and anarchism, one risks missing entirely both the revolutionary potential within liberalism and the possibility for creating popular support for anarchism within the context of a liberal society.

This is not to say that all anarchist thinkers have ignored the common threads shared by anarchism and liberalism. Rudolph Rocker notes that "in modern Anarchism we have the confluence of the two great currents which during and since the French Revolution have found such characteristic expression in the intellectual life of Europe: Socialism and Liberalism."[11] He elaborates upon this by stating:

> Anarchism has in common with Liberalism the idea that the happiness and prosperity of the individual must be the standard in all social matters. And, in common with the great representatives of Liberal thought, it has also the idea of limiting the functions of government to a minimum. Its supporters have followed this thought to its ultimate logical consequences, and wish to eliminate every institution of political power from the life of society. When Jefferson clothes the basic concept of Liberalism in the words: "That government is best which governs least," then Anarchists say with Thoreau: "That government is best which governs not at all."[12]

Noam Chomsky as well identifies certain similarities between anarchism and liberalism when he points to references in the liberal writings of John Stuart Mill and Wilhelm von Humboldt, which are consistent with anarchist political philosophy.[13] Chomsky argues that Humboldt's lib-

[9] Noam Chomsky, *The Chomsky Reader,* edited by James Peck (New York: Pantheon Books, 1987), pp. 20–21.
[10] William R. McKercher, *Freedom and Authority* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1989), p. 29.
[11] Rocker, *Anarcho-Syndicalism,* p. 21.
[12] Rocker, *Anarcho-Syndicalism,* p. 23.
[13] Chomsky, *The Chomsky Reader,* pp. 147–151.

eral interest in the capacity of the individual to develop "to a complete and consistent whole," and his belief that "freedom is the first and indispensable condition which the possibility of such a development presupposes,"[14] has much in common with the anarchist view of individual freedom. William McKercher notes the similarities and differences between anarchism and liberalism when he writes that "the topic of liberty has many facets, and the concept itself is not a static one, but Mill shares with libertarian thinkers a concern with several of the main issues."[15] Harrison also identifies a certain overlap between liberalism and anarchism when he argues that the "classical liberal position of the 19th century" sees "individuals as being responsible for their own fate." This aspect of liberal individualism, Harrison argues, "contains theoretical elements of considerable radical value (when freed from the unnecessary and distorting association with statism and capitalism)."[16] He examines the writings of anarchists like Godwin and Stirner "in relation to central themes of liberal thought — with which they share many assumptions, but against which they prepare a critique of continuing significance."[17] Finally, David Goodway acknowledges the common elements in anarchism and liberalism by arguing that "it is helpful to view anarchism as combining a socialist critique of capitalism with a liberal critique of socialism."[18]

The issue of women's inequality has interested anarchists only marginally in the past, not unlike most Western political movements. Proudhon, while launching a devastating anarchist critique of private property and the State, endorses the sexism of his day when he writes:

> Between woman and man there may exist love, passion, ties of custom, and the like; but there is no real society. Man and woman are not companions. The difference of the sexes places a barrier between them, like that placed between animals by a difference of race. Consequently, far from advocating what is now called the emancipation of women, I should incline, rather, if there were no other alternative, to exclude her from society.[19]

This is in fact one of the only references Proudhon makes to women in *What is Property?,* and it is relegated to a footnote.

Unlike Proudhon, Mikhail Bakunin's anarchist writings are concerned with more than just a critique of the State and private property; Bakunin opposes power relationships wherever and whenever they arise. The oppressive nature of religion, of bureaucratic science, and of male supremacy also become targets in Bakunin's passionate plea for human freedom.[20] While he does not focus on women in any methodical way, he does state categorically that he is "a partisan of the complete emancipation of women and their social equality with men."[21] He opposes marriage on the grounds that "in abolishing religious, civil, and juridical marriage, we restore life, reality, and morality to natural marriage based solely upon human respect and the freedom

[14] Wilhelm von Humboldt, quoted by Chomsky in *The Chomsky Reader,* p. 148.

[15] McKercher, *Freedom and Authority,* p. 15.

[16] Harrison, *The Modern State,* p. 23.

[17] Harrison, *The Modern State,* p. 30.

[18] David Goodway, "Introduction," in *For Anarchism: History, Theory, and Practice,* edited by David Goodway (London: Routledge, 1989), p. 1.

[19] Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, *What is Property?* (New York: Dover, 1970), p. 246 (fn.).

[20] See, for instance, Michael Bakunin, *God and the State,* with an introduction by Paul Avrich (New York: Dover, 1970); and Michael Bakunin, *Bakunin on Anarchism,* edited by Sam Dolgoff (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1980).

[21] Mikhail Bakunin, *The Political Philosophy of Bakunin,* edited by G. P. Maximoff, with a preface by Bert F. Hoselitz (New York: The Free Press, 1953), p. 326.

of two persons; a man and woman who love each other."[22] While Bakunin's anarchist treatment of women affirms the existential freedom of the human individual, he does not elaborate on women's freedom so much as consistently argue for a free humanity.

Peter Kropotkin's main contribution to anarchist thought is his *Mutual Aid,* a study of co-operative evolutionary behaviour in different species.[23] First published in 1903, *Mutual Aid* counters the social Darwinists of the time by arguing that it is not competition that ensures species survival, but rather that chances of survival are enhanced through co-operation. Challenging laissez-faire economists who interpret Darwin's evolutionary theory as supporting capitalist economic relations, Kropotkin argues that even Darwin himself recognized the survival advantage of co-operation. As an anarchist, Kropotkin opposes relations of domination and subordination;[24] in *Mutual Aid,* he argues that individuals are capable of expressing love and sympathy with respect to others, and are not bound by "natural law" to compete. While his discussions can be applied to both men and women, Kropotkin did not specifically single out women for special consideration.

Thus, the classical "fathers" of anarchism do not in general incorporate an explicit critique of sexism into their theoretical writings. According to Margaret S. Marsh:

> Proudhon had considered the patriarchal family as the fundamental social unit in his society without laws. He also disapproved of divorce and expected that women would always fulfill domestic functions. Kropotkin, while expecting women to engage in active political work, expressed impatience with those women who put feminism ahead of their devotion to the (male) working class. His own family relationships were almost stereotypically conventional. Proudhon, Kropotkin, and the other anarchist theorists who viewed women in such conventional ways argued that certain behavior patterns were natural for each sex. Since nature provided woman with a dependent personality, a nurturing instinct, and a desire for motherhood, to have her act in accord with those feelings would not violate her freedom because they would be an expression of her natural self.[25]

Marsh contends that this "conventional" view of women was challenged by many feminists active in the early anarchist movement. She points out:

> Many anarchist women, from Emma Goldman to the unassuming Helena Born, disagreed with this notion of woman's nature. Dismissing the interpretations of the male theorists, they appropriated for themselves the dogma of absolute individual liberty, reminded their male comrades of their responsibility not to infringe on the liberty of women, and rejected patriarchal as well as governmental authority. In their lives, perhaps as much as in their work, they gave evidence of their determination to apply anarchist tenets equally to men and women.[26]

---

[22] Bakunin, *The Political Philosophy,* p. 326.

[23] Peter Kropotkin, *Mutual Aid* (London: Freedom Press, 1987).

[24] See, for instance, Peter Kropotkin, *Act For Yourselves-,* and Peter Kropotkin, *Anarchism and Anarchist Communism* (London: Freedom Press, 1987).

[25] Margaret S. Marsh, *Anarchist Women, 1870–1920* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1981), pp. 19–20.

[26] Marsh, *Anarchist Women,* p. 20.

Marsh, in her valuable historical study of American anarchist-feminists, examines early anarchist thought as it is applied to the question of women's subordination. She chronicles the writings and lives of a variety of anarchist women, from the well-known Emma Goldman and Voltairine de Cleyre to the more obscure Florence Finch Kelly and Helena Born. Marsh pays particular attention to how these different anarchist thinkers handled the issues and problems surrounding the domination of women, and what strategies they proposed to liberate women. Marsh's work serves as a reminder that the "woman question" is of central concern for anarchist women from as early as 1880.

Emma Goldman, the anarchist activist and polemicist, was perhaps the most famous and best-known of the early anarchists to launch a serious and sustained critique of women's subordination from an anarchist position. Writing and speaking in America from the turn of the century until her illegal deportation to Eastern Europe in 1919, and continuing until her death in exile in Canada in 1940, Emma Goldman championed women's causes throughout her life. Goldman lectured, wrote and published a plethora of material, always motivated by her deep passion for human freedom and dignity.[27] Not only did Goldman write knowledgeably and prolifically about women, but her anarchist condemnation of the domination of women by men remains unequaled even today. While a few contemporary anarchists have on occasion attacked the specific problem of women's oppression, these considerations have been few and far between, and do not seriously rival Goldman's work in breadth or depth. The lack of current anarchist-feminist analysis is the result of several different factors: First, unlike in Goldman's time, polemical writing as a form of radical education has all but disappeared. Most anarchists, including those interested in feminism, do not write, but rather express their politics in activist-oriented ways, like organizing housing co-ops or rape crisis centres, for instance. This modern movement away from political writing, in favour of political activism, is more than a shift in emphasis. Rather, it signals a rejection of the value and legitimacy of theory itself. As one writer proclaims in opposition against men writing about women, anarchist-feminist "herstory/theory is an ongoing dance with our practical lives. It is not a theory that we impose on ourselves, strap ourselves into, and try to live up to. We act our thoughts and think our actions."[28] This anti-theoretical approach has resulted in a political movement largely without an explicit written tradition, beyond that expressed through poetry and the proliferation of clever cartoons.

Second, as Noam Chomsky notes, "there has not been a very substantial anarchist intelligentsia. Anarchism is not a position that appeals to the intellectuals. For one thing, it does not answer to their class interests… Those whom we call 'intellectuals' have tended to see the state as the avenue to power, prestige, and influence."[29] Anarchists have therefore tended to shy away from intellectual activity, making modern anarchist writing a rarity. Those writers who do undertake theoretical studies of anarchist thought and practice tend to concentrate on traditionally "male-centred" problems like the syndicalist trade union movement, as does Daniel Guerin in

[27] For accounts of Goldman's life, see Emma Goldman, *Living My Life,* Volumes I and II (New York: Dover, 1970); Alice Wexler, *Emma Goldman: An Intimate Life* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984); Emma Goldman, *Vision on Fire,* edited with an introduction by David Porter (New Paltz, N.Y.: Commonground Press, 1983); and Richard Drinnon, *Rebel in Paradise: A Biography of Emma Goldman* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964).

[28] "Sidewinding Our Way to Sedition," in *BOA: Bevy of Anarchist/ Feminists,* No. 1, 1987, p. 7.

[29] Chomsky, *The Chomsky Reader, p.* 19.

his classic work *Anarchism?*[30] Other anarchist theorists like John Clark, J. Frank Harrison and Peter Marshall examine more general anarchist questions about power and domination which transcend the specific topic of women's subordination.[31] Of the six hundred and sixty-five pages in Marshall's recent and comprehensive treatment of anarchist theory, only two pages are devoted specifically to anarchist-feminism. Theoretical considerations of anarchist-feminist issues are therefore rare. In terms of anarchist theory, then, Goldman remains one of the main sources on the issue of women's subordination.

As a communist-anarchist, Goldman maintains an unfailing commitment to establishing and maintaining individual freedom. This commitment is demonstrated by her unceasing critique of any form of domination or subordination of the human individual, whether perpetrated by the State, property relations (both real and in the person), customs and traditions, or sexual politics. Goldman shares with all other anarchists a commitment to

> a decentralized and self-regulating society consisting of a federation of voluntary associations of free and equal individuals. The ultimate goal of anarchism is to create a free society which allows all human beings to realize their full potential.[32]

Goldman is viewed as a communist-anarchist because she proposes that in order for individuals to be free, property relations, both real and in the person, must be eliminated. She argues that property as "dominion over things and the denial to others of the use of those things,"[33] can only result in relations of domination and subordination. This is in direct opposition to another stream of anarchist thought, that which is conventionally known as "Individualist Anarchism."[34] Marshall states:

> Individualist anarchism comes closest to classical liberalism, sharing its concepts of private property and economic exchange, as well as its definitions of freedom as the absence of restraint, and justice as the reward of merit. Indeed, the individualist develops the liberal concept of the sovereignty of the individual to such an extent that it becomes incompatible with any form of government or State. Each person is considered to have an inviolable sphere which embraces both his body and his property. Any interference with this private sphere is deemed an invasion: the State with its coercive apparatus of taxation, conscription, and law is the supreme invader. Individuals may thus be said to encounter each other as sovereign on their own territory, regulating their affairs through voluntary contracts.[35]

The critique of liberalism which exposes the inherent contradictions between liberalism's instrumentalism and its commitment to existential freedom is equally applicable to Individualist Anarchism. Wm. Gary Kline argues that "the Individualist Anarchists offered not a genuine

[30] Daniel Guerin, *Anarchism,* with an introduction by Noam Chomsky, translated by Mary Klopper (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1970).

[31] John Clark, *The Anarchist Moment* (Montreal: Black Rose, 1984); Harrison, *The Modern State;* and Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible.*

[32] Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible,* p. 3.

[33] Emma Goldman, *Red Emma Speaks: An Emma Goldman Reader,* edited by Alix Kates Shulman (New York: Schocken, 1983), p. 49.

[34] "Individualist Anarchism" is capitalized to distinguish it as a specific historical tendency within anarchism from my ontological characterization of anarchism as an individualist political philosophy.

[35] Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible,* p. 10.

critique of American society but, rather, an anomalous expression of the liberal tradition in the United States."[36] Kline examines several key American Individualist Anarchist figures in his study of Individualist Anarchism, and shows how their commitment to preserving both private property and property in the person binds them to an essentially liberal framework. Kline outlines two distinct tendencies that Individualist Anarchists share with liberals: One is a celebration of "uniqueness, originality, and self-realization"[37] and the second is a belief that, "insofar as they exist, then, social bonds tend to be tenuous and changeable in response to the priorities of the marketplace where individuals are treated as commodities, units of labor-power that can generally be easily replaced by other such units."[38] In other words, Individualist Anarchism, like liberalism, conceptualizes the human individual in both instrumental and existential terms. Kline argues that the Individualist Anarchist's support of an essentially liberal economic system promotes:

> A belief in private property as part of the individual [that] blinded them to many of the consequences (e.g., an economic model of human nature). The possibility was thus precluded that they would follow their own logic concerning government and society into the realm of property. That is, the [individualist] anarchists denied the right of government or even society to dominate the individual: society for Man, not Man for society. But for their commitment to the liberal conception of property they might well have begun to ask, "Why not the same maxim applied to property? Why should private property sit astride humankind?"
>
> No proscription against alienating one's labor could exist for the Classical Liberal since all things are commodified; society is reduced to a concatenation of competitive, market relationships between otherwise dissociated individuals. Political society becomes a contrivance merely for the protection of property and the maintenance of harmonious market relations; the individual can be justifiably restricted only by such rules or obligations as are required to insure equal freedom for others. The individual is considered free in proportion as he can claim ownership of his own person and capacities; freedom is seen as a function of ownership.[39]

Kline argues that since the "Individualist Anarchists challenged not the premises of the Classical Liberal tradition, but only those practical aspects which they considered to be perversions or distortions of the values at the core at that tradition,"[40] they encounter the same problems of economic domination and subordination which plague liberal political philosophy. Thus, even with an attempt to equalize the labour market through a rejection of "rent, interest, profits, and monopolies,"[41] by clinging to the notions of private property and property in the person the Individualist Anarchists cannot prevent this fact:

> The individual lacking property loses effective control over his own person and labor which was the basis of his equal natural rights. Those without property are left in

[36] Wm. Gary Kline, *The Individualist Anarchists: A Critique of Liberalism* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 1987), p. 3.

[37] Kline, *The Individualist Anarchists,* p. 100.

[38] Kline, *The Individualist Anarchists, pp. 98–99.*

[39] Kline, *The Individualist Anarchists, pp.* 102–103.

[40] Kline, *The Individualist Anarchists,* p. 104.

[41] Kline, *The Individualist Anarchists,* p. 104.

> an unenviable bargaining position vis-à-vis those with substantial property. Where one's bargaining power is weak, typically the case with those who have only their labor power to sell, exchanges tend to magnify inequalities of wealth and power over time rather than working toward an equalization. Thus, the market evolves toward inequalities and away from fair exchanges.[42]

These Individualist Anarchists are therefore not in any substantial way different from liberals. "In the case of Individualist Anarchists we are presented with a radical variant of liberalism and not a fundamental alternative to it."[43] While anarchism is more coherent than liberalism because anarchism combines existential individualism with free communism, this argument does not apply to Individualist Anarchism, but rather only holds for those forms of anarchism that reject instrumental values. Goldman's communistanarchism falls into the latter category and, therefore, unlike the Individualist Anarchists, avoids the problems and contradictions that pervade liberal thought.

Goldman's communist-anarchist treatment of women not only reveals a strong existential individualist commitment, but her analysis is also consistently and explicitly anti-instrumental. In terms of her general examination of the human individual, she clearly adheres to a conceptualization of the individual that is existential. That is, Goldman sees the individual as valuable and worthwhile in and of itself, and understands human freedom not as a means but rather as an end — or, more precisely, *the* end of human existence. Anarchism, says Goldman, is "the philosophy of the sovereignty of the individual."[44] With specific reference to women, Goldman argues that this existential individualism must apply to both sexes and not only to men if true liberation is to be achieved. She maintains that "since woman's greatest misfortune has been that she was looked upon as either angel or devil, her true salvation lies in being considered human, and therefore subject to all human follies and mistakes."[45] To be human is to "think and judge for yourself"[46] — for woman to be human, she must be "free to direct her own destiny."[47] "Emancipation should make it possible for woman to be human in the truest sense. Everything within her that craves assertion and activity should reach its fullest expression; all artificial barriers should be broken, and the road towards greater freedom cleared of every trace of centuries of submission and slavery."[48] The achievement of such freedom can only come about through the efforts of individuals themselves.

> Her development, her freedom, her independence, must come from and through herself. First, by asserting herself as a personality, and not as a sex commodity. Second, by refusing the right to anyone over her body; by refusing to bear children, unless she wants them; by refusing to be a servant to God, the State, society, the husband, the family, etc., by making life simpler, but deeper and richer. That is, by trying to learn the meaning and substance of life in all its complexities, by freeing herself

[42] Kline, *The Individualist Anarchists, p.* 103.

[43] Kline, *The Individualist Anarchists,* p. 91.

[44] Emma Goldman, *Anarchism and Other Essays,* with a new introduction by Richard Drinnon (New York: Dover, 1969), p. 67.

[45] Goldman, *Anarchism and Other Essays,* p. 199.

[46] Goldman, *Anarchism and Other Essays,* p. 53.

[47] Goldman, *Anarchism and Other Essays,* p. 215.

[48] Goldman, *Anarchism and Other Essays,* p. 214.

> from the fear of public opinion and public condemnation. Only that, and not the ballot, will set woman free, will make her a force hitherto unknown in the world, a force for real love, for peace, for harmony; a force of divine fire, of life-giving; a creator of free men and women.[49]

Goldman's existential individualism places the responsibility for achieving self-determination squarely on the shoulders of individual women. Women must refuse to co-operate in relations of domination and subordination, whether it be in the workplace or in the family, and must strive for autonomy and self-definition as individuals. It is up to women themselves to determine their lives. Goldman's idea of emancipation is an active one, where women individually fight for and create their own freedom. Freedom is therefore not passively assumed but rather actively won.

> True liberty is not a mere scrap of paper called "constitution," "legal right" or "law." It is not an abstraction derived from the non-reality known as "the State." It is not the negative thing of being free from something, because with such freedom you may starve to death. Real freedom, true liberty is positive: it is freedom to something; it is the liberty to be, to do; in short, the liberty of actual and active opportunity.
>
> That sort of liberty is not a gift: it is the natural right of man, of every human being. It cannot be given; it cannot be conferred by any law or government. The need of it, the longing for it, is inherent in the individual. Disobedience to every form of coercion is the instinctive expression of it. Rebellion and revolution are the more or less conscious attempt to achieve it. Those manifestations, individual and social, are fundamentally expressions of the values of man. That those values may be nurtured, the community must realize that its greatest and most lasting asset is the unit — the individual.[50]

Goldman understands the individual as making up society, and not vice versa. "If society is ever to become free, it will be so through liberated individuals, whose free efforts make society."[51] The exercise of free will in a social context is an individual act, for according to Goldman, "the majority cannot reason; it has no judgment."[52] Anarchism stands for the primacy of the human individual, and as such "is the only philosophy of peace, the only theory of the social relationship that values human life above all else."[53] The expansion of individual freedom is what constitutes progress for Goldman. "All progress has been essentially an enlargement of the liberties of the individual with a corresponding decrease of the authority wielded over him by external forces."[54]

For Goldman, the human individual is capable of self-conscious free expression.

> The individual is the true reality in life. A cosmos in himself, he does not exist for the State, nor for that abstraction called "society," or the "nation," which is only a

[49] Goldman, *Anarchism and Other Essays,* p. 211.

[50] Goldman, *Red Emma Speaks,* p. 122. Goldman uses the gender specific term "man" here and in many other places in her writing to refer to all of humanity, as was the custom in her day. She is, of course, concerned with both men and women, and the use of gender specific terms should not be seen as a denial of her passionate humanism.

[51] Goldman, *Anarchism and Other Essays,* p. 44.

[52] Goldman, *Anarchism and Other Essays,* p. 70.

[53] Goldman, *Red Emma Speaks,* p. 59.

[54] Goldman, *Red Emma Speaks,* p. 110.

> collection of individuals. Man, the individual, has always been and necessarily is the sole source and motive power of evolution and progress.[55]

This type of existential individualism stands in contrast to the antiindividualism of those collectivists who understand the human individual as "socially constructed," that is, as created and defined by the social and natural world. The modern collectivists, however, are simply rehashing old dogma, dogma that Goldman critically attacks in 1940 in one of her last published pieces in which she denounces "the advent of dictatorship, right and left":

> Friedrich Nietzsche called the State a cold monster. What would he have called the hideous beast in the garb of modern dictatorship? Not that government had ever allowed much scope to the individual; but the champions of the new State ideology do not grant even that much. "The individual is nothing," they declare, "it is the collectivity which counts." Nothing less than the complete surrender of the individual will satisfy the insatiable appetite of the new deity.[56]

Goldman asserts the polar opposite of those who would deny the fundamental importance of the individual; for her, "the individual is not merely the result of heredity and environment, of cause and effect. He is that and a great deal more, a great deal else. The living man cannot be defined; he is the fountain-head of all life and all values; he is not a part of this or of that; he is a whole, an individual whole, a growing, changing, yet always constant whole."[57] The human individual is irreducible; valuable in and of itself, reaching out towards freedom and self-determination, the individual creates life and meaning.

Goldman contrasts this anarchist celebration of what she calls "individuality" with another, less liberatory tendency, "individualism."

> Individuality is not to be confused with the various ideas and concepts of Individualism; much less with that "rugged individualism" which is only a masked attempt to repress and defeat the individual and his individuality. So-called Individualism is the social and economic *laissez-faire-*, the trickery, spiritual debasement and systematic indoctrination of the servile spirit, which process is known as "education." That corrupt and perverse "individualism" is the strait-jacket of individuality. It has converted life into a degrading race for externals, for possession, for social prestige and supremacy. Its highest wisdom is "the devil take the hindmost."
>
> This "rugged individualism" has inevitably resulted in the greatest modern slavery, the crassest class distinctions, driving millions to the breadline. "Rugged individualism" has meant all the "individualism" for the masters, while the people are regimented into a slave caste to serve a handful of self-seeking "supermen." America is perhaps the best representative of this kind of individualism, in whose name political tyranny and social oppression are defended and held up as virtues; while every aspiration and attempt of man to gain freedom and social opportunity to live is denounced as "un-American" and evil in the name of that same individualism.[58]

[55] Goldman, *Red Emma Speaks,* p. 111.
[56] Goldman, *Red Emma Speaks,* p. 117.
[57] Goldman, *Red Emma Speaks,* pp. 111–112.
[58] Goldman, *Red Emma Speaks,* p. 112.

Goldman's celebration of "individuality" is, in other words, existentially individualistic, while her condemnation of "rugged individualism" is in essence a critique of instrumental individualism. She understands "possession" as undermining the freedom of individuals, and advocates instead a form of individual expression that is non-possessive and anti-authoritarian.

> Man's true liberation, individual and collective, lies in his emancipation from authority and the belief in it. All human evolution has been a struggle in that direction and for that object. It is not invention and mechanics which constitute development. The ability to travel at the rate of 100 miles an hour is no evidence of being civilized. True civilization is to be measured by the individual, the unit of all social life; by his individuality and the extent to which it is free to have its being, to grow and expand unhindered by invasive and coercive authority.[59]

Goldman believes that human individuals gain their humanity through their freedom. To be free is to be human, and vice versa.

> Love of freedom is a universal trait, and no tyranny has thus far succeeded in eradicating it… The very fact… that a person has a consciousness of self, of being different from others, creates a desire to act freely. The craving for liberty and self-expression is a very fundamental and dominant trait.[60]

This sentiment is similar to that expressed by John Stuart Mill when he argues that "after the primary necessities of food and raiment, freedom is the first and strongest want of human nature."[61] Liberal and anarchist thought both share a common vision of the human individual as free — free to be self-determined and autonomous within a social context. Both traditions clearly embrace existential individualist values by understanding individual freedom as an end in itself and as a central defining characteristic of humanness. However, while both liberal and anarchist thought can be seen as subscribing to an individualism that is existential, they part company over instrumental individualism. While liberal thought is committed to both existential and instrumental conceptualizations of the human individual, anarchism rejects instrumentalism and is instead committed to free and voluntary communism. This can be seen in Goldman's condemnation of what she calls "rugged individualism." As an anarchist, Goldman rejects relations of domination and subordination, and she argues that the ethics of rugged individualism can result in nothing else but domination, as under it the "brute struggle for physical existence is kept up."[62] This opposition to instrumental individualism is what distinguishes anarchist thought from liberal ideology.

The anarchist support of existential individualism and its equally adamant denunciation of instrumentalism is clearly evident in Goldman's specific consideration of women and employment. She believes that women must be freed from the wage and property system and allowed the opportunity to choose as individuals how and on what they would like to work. Goldman condemns the current wage system, which she asserts brutalizes women daily.

---

[59] Goldman, *Red Emma Speaks,* p. 120.

[60] Goldman, *Red Emma Speaks,* p. 439.

[61] John Stuart Mill, "The Subjection of Women," in *Essays on Sex Equality: John Stuart Mill and Harriet Taylor Mill,* edited with an introduction by Alice S. Rossi (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), p. 236.

[62] Goldman, *Red Emma Speaks,* p. 118.

> Nowhere is woman treated according to the merit of her work, but rather as a sex. It is therefore almost inevitable that she should pay for her right to exist, to keep a position in whatever line, with sex favors. Thus it is merely a question of degree whether she sells herself to one man, in or out of marriage, or to many men. Whether our reformers admit it or not, the economic and social inferiority of woman is responsible for prostitution.[63]

Goldman is keenly aware of the similarities between a man or woman selling labour power in the marketplace and a woman selling sexual favours — both acts result in domination. She also is struck by the fact that in our society while "woman is being reared as a sex commodity … she is kept in absolute ignorance of the meaning and importance of sex… We need not be surprised if she becomes an easy prey to prostitution, or to any other form of a relationship which degrades her to the position of an object for mere sex gratification."[64] Prostitution is merely the logical extension of a system that considers human skills and capacities as possessions to be sold.

> What is the cause of the trade in women? Not merely white women, but yellow and black women as well. Exploitation, of course; the merciless Moloch of capitalism that fattens on underpaid labor, thus driving thousands of women and girls into prostitution. With Mrs. Warren these girls feel, "Why waste your life working for a few shillings a week in a scullery, eighteen hours a day?"[65]

The prostitute is simply making the best deal possible for herself within a market economy. That supporters of property and the wage system should protest against prostitution is hypocrisy at its worst. As Goldman points out, women in our society routinely sell their sex through marriage:

> To the moralist prostitution does not consist so much in the fact that the woman sells her body, but rather that she sells it out of wedlock. That this is no mere statement is proved by the fact that marriage for monetary considerations is perfectly legitimate, sanctified by law and public opinion, while any other union is condemned and repudiated. Yet a prostitute, if properly defined, means nothing else than "any person for whom sexual relationships are subordinated to gain."[66]

It is instrumental individualism with its ethics of objectification that leads to women's subordination in the marketplace, whether it be in sexual work or otherwise. Women will continue to be dominated in the work place until such time that the wage system is abolished and replaced with a system of free and voluntary association. "As to a thorough eradication of prostitution, nothing can accomplish that save a complete transvaluation of all accepted values especially the moral ones — coupled with the abolition of industrial slavery."[67]

In a general sense, Goldman sees employment as an activity that must be freely chosen according to individual tastes and desires.

---

[63] Goldman, *Anarchism and Other Essays,* p. 179.
[64] Goldman, *Anarchism and Other Essays,* p. 184.
[65] Goldman, *Anarchism and Other Essays,* p. 178.
[66] Goldman, *Anarchism and Other Essays,* p. 185.
[67] Goldman, *Anarchism and Other Essays,* p. 194.

> [Anarchism's] goal is the freest possible expression of all the latent powers of the individual. Oscar Wilde defines a perfect personality as "one who develops under perfect conditions, who is not wounded, maimed, or in danger." A perfect personality, then, is only possible in a state of society where man is free to choose the mode of work, the conditions of work, and the freedom to work.[68]

Both men and women ought to be able to choose freely whatever employment most appeals to them. Anarchism's commitment to the primacy of individual freedom demands that employment be unrestricted by law or custom, and instead be limited only by individual imagination and desire. She states that "man's development, his physical well-being, his latent qualities and innate disposition alone must determine the character and conditions of his work. Similarly will one's physical and mental appreciations and his soul cravings decide how much he can consume."[69] There must therefore be no external limits imposed on what an individual can undertake as work; to do so would violate anarchism's commitment to individual freedom.

Goldman argues that individual freedom is, however, compromised by a system based on private property. She condemns property, both real and in the person, along with the accompanying wage system, as forms of economic organization that are inherently hierarchical and therefore inappropriate for the free development of individuals.

> "Property" means dominion over things and the denial to others of the use of those things… It is private dominion over things that condemns millions of people to be mere nonentities, living corpses without originality or power of initiative, human machines of flesh and blood, who pile up mountains of wealth for others and pay for it with a gray, dull and wretched existence for themselves. I believe that there can be no real wealth, social wealth, so long as it rests on human lives — young lives, old lives and lives in the making.
>
> It is conceded by all radical thinkers that the fundamental cause of this terrible state of affairs is (1) that man must sell his labor; (2) that his inclination and judgment are subordinated to the will of a master.
>
> Anarchism is the only philosophy that can and will do away with this humiliating and degrading situation.[70]

She continues by asserting that "there can be no freedom in the large sense of the word, no harmonious development, so long as mercenary and commercial considerations play an important part in the determination o£ personal conduct."[71] This entails the rejection o£ the employment contract, for as Goldman points out, labour and capital are not equals, and therefore anarchism "cannot consent to an agreement which the one has the power to break, while the other must submit to without redress."[72] There must be, therefore, a "complete overthrow of the wage system."[73] To sell one's labour, whether mental or physical, is to enter into a relationship of domination and subordination.

[68] Goldman, *Anarchism and Other Essays,* p. 55.
[69] Goldman, *Red Emma Speaks,* p. 50.
[70] Goldman, *Red Emma Speaks,* p. 50.
[71] Goldman, *Red Emma Speaks,* p. 50.
[72] Goldman, *Red Emma Speaks,* p. 92.
[73] Goldman, *Red Emma Speaks,* p. 91

> The proletarianization of our time reaches far beyond the field of manual labor; indeed, in the larger sense all those who work for their living, whether with hand or brain, all those who must sell their skill, knowledge, experience and ability, are proletarians. From this point of view, our entire system, excepting a very limited class, has been proletarianized.
>
> Our whole social fabric is maintained by the efforts of mental and physical labor. In return for that, the intellectual proletarians, even as the workers in shop and mine, eke out an insecure and pitiful existence, and are more dependent on the masters than those who work with their hands.[74]

Goldman is here asserting that the very act of selling one's labour, whether manual or mental, is not a "fair exchange" but rather is a betrayal of individual autonomy and self-determination in favour of degradation and bondage. The wage system demands the "surrender of personality," and results in the "strict conformity to definite political policies and opinions," in which the individual loses "all capacity to give anything really vital"[75] to the world.

If property, both real and in the person, and the wage system are inappropriate for the development of free individuals, what kind of economic organization is suitable? Goldman suggests that it is only through free and voluntary association that individuals can reach their human potential to be self-determined and autonomous. Anarchism, therefore, "must consist of voluntary productive and distributive associations, gradually developing into free communism… Anarchism, however, also recognizes the right of the individual, or numbers of individuals, to arrange at all times for other forms of work, in harmony with their tastes and desires."[76] *Individuals* must choose the kind of work they want to undertake, and must decide how that work is to be organized. Thus, while Goldman is a communistanarchist, her communism complements rather than overshadows her commitment to the existentially free individual. She recommends free communism — that is, "from each according to ability, to each according to need" — on a *voluntary* basis. It is up to individuals to decide, voluntarily, how best to live and work together. It is not something imposed on them from above, or dictated by the majority, but rather individuals themselves freely and voluntarily create and recreate the social and economic forms of organization that they desire.

If such free scope were afforded to individuals, Goldman maintains that even the laziest would participate in creating new value, both material and spiritual. "Anarchism aims to strip labour of its deadening, dulling aspect, of its gloom and compulsion. It aims to make work an instrument of joy, of strength, of color, of real harmony, so that the poorest sort of man should find in work both recreation and hope."[77] It does so by allowing free and voluntary participation in both production and consumption, with no bosses to dominate and no capitalist to exploit. Unlike contract-based relationships, free agreement and voluntary association do not rest on any notion of equivalent exchange; rather, as Robert Graham notes, the "underlying model of obligation" is *promising,*

[74] Goldman, *Red Emma Speaks,* p. 222.
[75] Goldman, *Red Emma Speaks,* p. 223.
[76] Goldman, *Anarchism and Other Essays,* p. 56.
[77] Goldman, *Anarchism and Other Essays,* p. 61.

an unconditional form of relationship that is not tied to instrumental, competitive selfinterest.[78] Free agreement involves an ethics of caring, sympathy and co-operation, and assumes

> equal well-being for all and the abolition of all hierarchical social relationships. What they [the anarchists] strove for was to create a society in which, to use Malatesta's words, "everybody has the means to live and act without being subjected to the wishes of others."
>
> Promises to obey, contracts of (wage) slavery, agreements requiring the acceptance of a subordinate status, are all illegitimate and unenforceable, as they do constrict and restrain individual autonomy. But far from justifying the complete rejection of self-assumed obligation, this merely emphasizes the continuing need for people to exercise their critical judgement and choice when deciding whether an obligation ought to be assumed or performed.[79]

Goldman's commitment to individual freedom compels her to reject the contract-based wage and property system in favour of free communism based upon voluntary association. Private property, whether real or in the person, is predicated on relations of domination and subordination, while the wage system and the employment contract institutionalizes inequality.

Goldman's existential individualism is also evident in her discussion on women and education. She understands that if women are to be self-determined, they must know about how their bodies work, especially in terms of sexual matters. Thus, she spoke widely in public about methods of birth control and other sexual matters, for which she was at times arrested and even jailed.[80] Sex education helps to create healthy, happy adults, unafraid to love and care for one another in freedom and respect. "If in childhood both man and woman were taught a beautiful comradeship, it would neutralize the oversexed condition of both and would help woman's emancipation much more than all the laws upon the statute books and her right to vote."[81] She recognizes that keeping women and girls in ignorance about sexual matters makes them vulnerable to sexual exploitation and domination:

> It is a conceded fact that woman is being reared as a sex commodity, and yet she is kept in absolute ignorance of the meaning and importance of sex. Everything dealing with that subject is suppressed, and persons who attempt to bring light into this terrible darkness are persecuted and thrown into prison. Yet it is nevertheless true that so long as a girl is not to know how to take care of herself, not to know the function of the most important part of her life, we need not be surprised if she becomes an easy prey to prostitution, or to any other form of relationship which degrades her to the position of an object for mere sex gratification.[82]

Sex education is therefore important to free women from being treated instrumentally as objects for the satisfaction of another's desires. Goldman is quite consistent on the point of education: Self-development and self-determination are only possible if individuals are allowed free

[78] Robert Graham, "The Role of Contract in Anarchist Ideology," in *For Anarchism: History, Theory, and Practice,* edited by David Goodway (London: Routledge, 1989), p. 165.

[79] Graham, "The Role of Contract," pp. 169–170.

[80] For one account of such an event, see Goldman, *Living My Life,* Volume n, pp. 569–571.

[81] Goldman, *Red Emma Speaks,* p. 149.

[82] Goldman, *Anarchism and Other Essays,* p. 184.

access to knowledge and education. Ignorance leads to domination and subordination, while knowledge and critical thinking prepares the individual for a free and creative life. This is especially true for women, who often suffer subordination because they are kept in a state of abject ignorance about their own bodies. Only free and open discussion of such matters can give to women the knowledge necessary for being self-determined individuals.

Goldman understands true education to be a process of bringing out and developing the student's own inherent interests and abilities, rather than forcing upon the student an external set of values. "All claims of education notwithstanding, the pupil will accept only that which his mind craves."[83] She credits the student with a self-knowledge and self-awareness that if nurtured will blossom into full independent critical thought. Goldman advocates the pedagogical approach of Francisco Ferrar, and approvingly quotes his student-centred philosophy: "All the value of education rests in the respect for the physical, intellectual, and moral will of the child… The real educator is he who can best protect the child against his (the teacher's) own ideas, his peculiar whims; he who can best appeal to the child's own energies."[84] Freedom and spontaneity are the principles which Goldman suggests should guide the student — indeed, such qualities should permeate not only education but all aspects of life. Adults as well as children should benefit from free and open education, and there should be no artificial bounds on the material discussed. She points to the French syndicalists, for instance, as showing the way to new and better educational practices:

> All these Syndicalist activities are permeated with the spirit o£ educational work, carried on systematically by evening classes on all vital subjects treated from an unbiased, libertarian standpoint — not the adulterated "knowledge" with which the minds are stuffed in our public schools. The scope of the education is truly phenomenal, including sex hygiene, the care of women during pregnancy and confinement, the care of home and children, sanitation and general hygiene; in fact, every branch of human knowledge — science, history, art — receives thorough attention, together with the practical application in the established workingmen's libraries, dispensaries, concerts and festivals, in which the greatest artists and litterateurs of Paris consider it an honor to participate.[85]

True education for Goldman, then, is a never-ending uncensored free play with ideas and information which respect the student's will. It's motto should be "not uniformity and discipline but freedom, expansion, good will, and joy for each and all."[86] She explicitly opposes what now often passes in our society as education: the indoctrination of instrumental competitive values aimed at creating a compliant work force.

> The ideal of the average pedagogist is not a complete, well-rounded, original being; rather does he seek that the result of his art or pedagogy shall be automatons of flesh and blood, to best fit into the treadmill of society and the emptiness and dullness of our lives. Every home, school, college and university stands for dry, cold utilitarianism, overflooding the brain of the pupil with a tremendous amount of ideas, handed

[83] Goldman, *Anarchism and Other Essays,* p. 43.
[84] Francisco Ferrar, quoted in Goldman, *Anarchism and Other Essays,* p. 163.
[85] Goldman, *Red Emma Speaks,* p. 98.
[86] Goldman, *Red Emma Speaks,* p. 146.

> down from generations past. "Facts and data," as they are called, constitute a lot of information, well enough perhaps to maintain every form of authority and to create much awe for the importance of possession, but only a great handicap to a true understanding of the human soul and its place in the world.[87]

In contrast to this instrumental conception of education, Goldman instead argues for a pedagogy that informs and illuminates, that answers questions and promotes a critical understanding of the world. Education is not something that makes you fit for a competitive, self-interested work force, but rather is a process that encourages thoughtful experimentation and the creative discovery of new options. Knowledge is seen by Goldman as a good thing, as it allows individuals to have the necessary background for making fully informed decisions on how best to run their own lives. "If education should really mean anything at all, it must insist upon the free growth and development of the innate forces and tendencies of the child."[88] Goldman makes no distinction here between boys and girls, or men and women. All individuals deserve a free and open education, regardless of their age or sex.

Unlike liberal thinkers who instrumentally regard marriage as a contract between two equal self-interested partners, Goldman recognizes that intimate relationships should be based not on selfinterest, but rather on voluntary association between caring and loving individuals. She thus rejects marriage as unnecessary and restrictive. "Marriage and love have nothing in common."[89] Goldman contends:

> Marriage is primarily an economic arrangement, an insurance pact. It differs from the ordinary life insurance agreement only in that it is more binding, more exacting. Its returns are insignificantly small compared with the investments. In taking out an insurance policy one pays for it in dollars and cents, always at liberty to discontinue payments. If, however, woman's premium is a husband, she pays for it with her name, her privacy, her self-respect, her very life, "until death doth part." Moreover, the marriage insurance condemns her to life-long dependency, to parasitism, to complete uselessness, individual as well as social. Man, too, pays his toll, but as his sphere is wider, marriage does not limit him as much as woman. He feels his chains more in an economic sense.[90]

Instead of instrumental marriage forming the basis of our intimate relationships, Goldman advocates love — free love — as the principle that ought to guide individuals in their personal lives. Free love, love given and received as a gift and not by contract, is the only appropriate grounding for intimate relationships between men and women.

> Free love? As if love is anything but free! Man has bought brains, but all the millions in the world have failed to buy love. Man has subdued bodies, but all the power on earth has been unable to subdue love. Man has conquered whole nations, but all his armies could not conquer love. Man has chained and fettered the spirit, but he has been utterly helpless before love. High on a throne, with all the splendor and pomp

[87] Goldman, *Red Emma Speaks,* p. 133.
[88] Goldman, *Red Emma Speaks,* p. 139.
[89] Goldman, *Anarchism and Other Essays,* p. 227.
[90] Goldman, *Anarchism and Other Essays,* p. 228.

> his gold can command, man is yet poor and desolate, if love passes him by. And if it stays, the poorest hovel is radiant with warmth, with life and color. Thus love has the power to make of a beggar a king. Yes, love is free; it can dwell in no other atmosphere. In freedom it gives itself unreservedly, abundantly, completely. All the laws on the statutes, all the courts in the universe, cannot tear it from the soil, once love has taken root. If, however, the soil is sterile, how can marriage make it bear fruit? It is like the last desperate struggle of fleeting life against death.[91]

Goldman argues that for women to be free they must "repudiate marriage as an imposition, a shallow, empty mockery."[92] "Marriage is an institution which furnishes the State and Church with a tremendous revenue and the means of prying into that phase of life which refined people have long considered their own, their very own most sacred affair."[93] Free love provides the existentially free individual with the only appropriate foundation for intimate relationships. Goldman writes that she learned of the "horrors of married life" in her own home. She recounts:

> Father's harsh treatment of Mother, the constant wrangles and bitter scenes that ended in Mother's fainting spells. I had also seen the debasing sordidness of the life of my married aunts and uncles, as well as in the homes of acquaintances in Rochester. Together with my own marital experiences they had convinced me that binding people for life was wrong. The constant proximity in the same house, the same room, the same bed, revolted me.
>
> "If ever I love a man again, I will give myself to him without being bound by the rabbi or the law," I declared, "and when that love dies, I will leave without permission."[94]

Goldman extends her commitment to self-determined freely chosen intimate relationships to include homosexual relationships, a courageous stance for the time. She recounts in her autobiography how her public talks on homosexuality drew criticism from both anarchist and non-anarchist quarters alike. However, her belief in the right of each individual to pursue sexual relationships according to his or her own desires and inclinations prompted her to speak out, despite the moral outrage elicited by her views.[95]

Marriage does not allow women freedom, but rather takes away their autonomy and self-determination and replaces it with subservience and subordination. If this is so, then why do women get married at all? Compared to the brutal economic realities of the marketplace, marriage is often appealing to women as a means to escape the competitive instrumentalism of capitalist relations. "No wonder that hundreds of girls are so willing to accept the first offer of marriage, sick and tired of their 'independence' behind the counter, at the sewing or typewriting machine."[96] However, it is not possible to find freedom in marriage, as its social and economic function is to restrict women's self-determination and make her instead into the property of her husband. *Love,* not marriage, should form the basis for intimate relationships; love, unrestricted and unbounded, concerned not with contract and exchange but with voluntary unconditional support

[91] Goldman, *Anarchism and Other Essays,* pp. 236–237.
[92] Goldman, *Anarchism and Other Essays,* p. 238.
[93] Goldman, *Red Emma Speaks,* p. 57.
[94] Goldman, *Living My Life,* Volume I, p. 36.
[95] Goldman, *Living My Life,* Volume H, pp. 555–556.
[96] Goldman, *Anarchism and Other Essays,* p. 216.

and sympathy, is the only underlying ethical principle appropriate for free individuals. Goldman explicitly condemns instrumental competitive values as destroying the grounding for love. "If love does not know how to give and take without restrictions, it is not love, but a transaction that never fails to lay stress on a plus or a minus."[97]

Marriage, it is often argued, provides protection for women and children. Goldman disputes this, and instead asserts that "love needs no protection; it is its own protection. So long as love begets life no child is deserted, or hungry, or famished for the want of affection."[98] A woman who is free to love without the social and economic chains of marriage will no longer want "to be a party to the production of a race of sickly, feeble, decrepit, wretched human beings, who have neither the strength nor moral courage to throw off the yoke of poverty and slavery. Instead, she desires fewer and better children, begotten and reared in love and through free choice; not by compulsion, as marriage imposes."[99] Goldman sees marriage as a barrier to the exercise of free choice; women in marriage lose the right to choose when, how many and with whom to bear children. Marriage designates certain children as legitimate and others as "bastards"; Goldman argues that *all* children ought to be born through the free choice of their mothers, and ought to all be recognized as valuable individuals in themselves. She thus advocates birth control education and access to safe abortions as means by which to ensure that women bear only those children that they want; the free woman "will become a mother only if she desires the child, and if she can give to the child, even before its birth, all that her nature and intellect can yield: harmony, health, comfort, beauty, and, above all, understanding, reverence, and love, which is the only fertile soil for a new life, a new being."[100]

Goldman's advocacy of "free love," of experimentation and sexual varietism, stands as an affirmation of her commitment to individual existential freedom. However, freedom can weigh heavily on the human individual, as much of existentialist philosophy and literature reminds us. In sexual matters this is no different. The sexual freedom that Goldman advocates demands corresponding responsibility — responsibility for one's actions and responsibility to develop a workable ethics to accompany sexual liberation. As Marsha Hewitt writes:

> It is vital that a new analysis be constructed of sexual ethics and values, because today the "New Right" has stepped into the breach and is dominating the discourse on "traditional" values with a popular positive response. Certainly, Emma Goldman understood very well the contradictions of interpersonal relationships, the contradiction and tension between the principle of "varietism" and the agonizing experience of sexual jealousy and the deep desire to form exclusive sexual relationships, as her correspondence with Ben Reitman clearly shows. However, we cannot afford to dismiss these contradictions. We must begin to analyze them with dignity and humanity.[101]

Goldman's anarchist-feminist critique of marriage is only the beginning of the difficult task to free individuals from repressive sexual practices.

---

[97] Goldman, *Anarchism and Other Essays,* p. 223.

[98] Goldman, *Anarchism and Other Essays,* p. 237.

[99] Goldman, *Anarchism and Other Essays,* p. 237.

[100] Goldman, *Red Emma Speaks,* p. 174.

[101] Marsha Hewitt, "Emma Goldman: The Case for Anarcho-Feminism," *Our Generation,* Vol. 17, No. 1, September, 1985, pp. 172–173.

Goldman understands children not as property of their parents, as Mill and Richards sees them, but as individuals requiring the love, sympathy and respect due to all individuals. She asks, "is the child to be considered as an individuality, or as an object to be moulded according to the whims and fancies of those around it?"[102] For her, of course, the answer to such a question is clear: "Every sensitive being abhors the idea of being treated as a mere machine or as a mere parrot of conventionality and respectability; the human being craves recognition of his kind."[103] Children must be raised and nurtured in freedom, and must be accorded the full respect and love deserving of all individuals. The child is not an object to be manipulated, or a thing to be possessed, but is its own self, and must be allowed to develop in freedom and with dignity. Goldman criticizes parents who see children as an extension of themselves. She argues:

> The Scriptures tell us that God created Man in His own image, which has by no means proven a success. Parents follow the bad example of their heavenly master; they use every effort to shape and mould the child according to their image. They tenaciously cling to the idea that the child is merely part of themselves — an idea as false as it is injurious, and which only increases the misunderstanding of the soul of the child, of the necessary consequences of enslavement and subordination thereof.[104]

Not only does Goldman criticize "conventional" parents, she also lashes out against "radical" parents who do not extend their own political views to include children. "Radical parents, though emancipated from the belief of ownership of the human soul, still cling tenaciously to the notion that they own the child, and that they have the right to exercise their authority over it."[105] Children must be reared in freedom, and must be allowed to experiment with and control their own lives. Adults must learn to listen to children, to respect and co-operate with them. Only in this way will children grow into free adults. As Goldman asserts:

> I fail to understand how parents hope that their children will ever grow up into independent, self-reliant spirits, when they strain every effort to abridge and curtail the various activities of their children, the plus in quality and character, which differentiates their offspring from themselves, and by the virtue of which they are eminently equipped carriers of new, invigorating ideas. A young delicate tree that is being clipped and cut by the gardener in order to give it an artificial form will never reach the majestic height and the beauty it would if allowed to grow in nature and freedom.[106]

Children ought not to be brought up under the "authority" of parents, but rather should be reared in an atmosphere that respects their spontaneity and will. Self-awareness, self-determination and critical thought will be the result of such a strategy, and "in this way alone can we hope for the free individual and eventually also for a free community, which shall make interference and coercion of human growth impossible."[107]

[102] Goldman, *Red Emma Speaks,* p. 131.
[103] Goldman, *Red Emma Speaks,* p. 131.
[104] Goldman, *Red Emma Speaks,* p. 135.
[105] Goldman, *Red Emma Speaks,* p. 137.
[106] Goldman, *Red Emma Speaks,* p. 136.
[107] Goldman, *Red Emma Speaks,* p. 139.

Goldman's existential individualism pits her against many of the feminists of her day who argue in favour of women's suffrage. She argues against the women's suffrage movement, and points out that in fact, "now, woman is confronted with the necessity of emancipating herself from emancipation, if she really desires to be free."[108] She insists that giving women the vote will do nothing for women's emancipation; on the contrary, it will simply reinforce existing relations of domination and subordination.

> Woman's demand for equal suffrage is based largely on the contention that woman must have the equal right in all affairs of society. No one could, possibly, refute that, if suffrage were a right. Alas, for the ignorance of the human mind, which can see a right in an imposition. Or is it not the most brutal imposition for one set of people to make laws that another set is coerced by force to obey? Yet woman clamors for that "golden opportunity" that has wrought so much misery in the world, and robbed man of his integrity and self-reliance; an imposition which has thoroughly corrupted the people, and made them absolute prey in the hands of unscrupulous politicians.[109]

Women will not (and, as history shows, did not) "purify" politics, as some suffragists claim; indeed, they will find that politics and power are as corrupting to them as they are to men. "To assume … that she would succeed in purifying something which is not susceptible of purification, is to credit her with supernatural powers."[110] For this reason Goldman argues against women's participation in governmental or State politics as to do so would be to compromise the will of the individual through an inherently hierarchical form of political organization. She points out that, for men, "every inch of ground he has gained has been through a constant fight, a ceaseless struggle for self-assertion, and not through suffrage. There is no reason whatever to assume that woman, in her climb to emancipation, has been, or will be, helped by the ballot."[111] She argues that women will become liberated not through gaining the vote or holding elected office, but rather by their "will to be and to do."[112] It is in the individual act of self-assertion and self-determination that women gain their freedom, not by joining an inherently corrupt and hopelessly hierarchical system of government. "The right to vote, or equal civil rights, may be good demands, but true emancipation begins neither at the polls nor in the courts. It begins in woman's soul."[113] Goldman's insight is existentially individualistic — she places the responsibility for women's emancipation in the hands of individual women themselves, and her whole philosophical outlook emphasizes the primary importance of human freedom for both men and women. This stress on freedom permeates all her writing, whether it be on education or prostitution, economics or love. The freedom to love, without reservation or guilt, encapsulates her arguments on women's emancipation, and can be seen as providing a philosophical basis for all her political writing. For anarchism cannot work without the capacity of human individuals to relate to one another in love and sympathy, while simultaneously maintaining a sense of self-determination. As Goldman states:

[108] Goldman, *Anarchism and Other Essays,* p. 215.
[109] Goldman, *Anarchism and Other Essays,* pp. 197–198.
[110] Goldman, *Anarchism and Other Essays,* p. 198.
[111] Goldman, *Anarchism and Other Essays,* p. 209.
[112] Goldman, *Anarchism and Other Essays,* p. 209.
[113] Goldman, *Anarchism and Other Essays,* p. 224.

> The demand for equal rights in every vocation of life is just and fair; but, after all, the most vital right is the right to love and be loved. Indeed, if partial emancipation is to become a complete and true emancipation of woman, it will have to do away with the ridiculous notion that to be loved, to be sweetheart and mother, is synonymous with being slave or subordinate. It will have to do away with the absurd notion of the dualism of the sexes, or that man and woman represent two antagonistic worlds.
>
> Pettiness separates; breadth unties. Let us be broad and big. Let us not overlook vital things because of the bulk of trifles confronting us. A true conception of the relation of the sexes will not admit of conqueror and conquered; it knows of but one great thing: to give of one's self boundlessly, in order to find one's self richer, deeper, better. That alone can fill the emptiness, and transform the tragedy of woman's emancipation into joy, limitless joy.[114]

Goldman's consideration of women and governmental politics is based on the classical anarchist critique of the State. As Peter Marshall points out about anarchist thought, its critique of the State "not only questions many of the fundamental assumptions of political philosophy but challenges the authoritarian premisses of Western civilization."[115] He argues further:

> Although anarchists feel that representative democracy is preferable to monarchy, aristocracy or despotism, they still consider it to be essentially oppressive. They rebut the twin pillars of the democratic theory of the State — representation and majority rule. In the first place, no one can truly represent anyone else and it is impossible to delegate one's authority. Secondly, the majority has no more right to dictate to the minority, even a minority of one, than the minority to the majority. To decide upon truth by the casting up of votes, Godwin wrote, is a "flagrant insult to all reason and justice." The idea that the government can control the individual and his property simply because it reflects the will of the majority is therefore plainly unjust.[116]

It is in this anarchist tradition of opposing the State and governmental politics that Goldman frames her views on women. Along with other anarchists, she sees the State as inherently oppressive, as violating the sanctity of individual sovereignty.

> Just as religion has fettered the human mind, and as property, or the monopoly of things, has subdued and stifled man's needs, so has the State enslaved his spirit, dictating every phase of conduct. "All government in essence," says Emerson, "is tyranny." It matters not whether it is government by divine right or majority rule. In every instance its aim is the absolute subordination of the individual.[117]

The problem, then, for both women and men, is "how to be one's self and yet in oneness with others, to feel deeply with all human beings and still retain one's own characteristic qualities."[118] Goldman's anarchist solution to such a problem is to allow the human individual the freedom

[114] Goldman, *Anarchism and Other Essays,* pp. 224–225.
[115] Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible,* p. 35.
[116] Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible,* p. 22.
[117] Goldman, *Anarchism and Other Essays,* p. 56.
[118] Goldman, *Anarchism and Other Essays,* p. 214.

to be self-determined while eliminating any and all structural forms of domination. She believes that if individuals both refuse to dominate and to be dominated, then the human capacity to love and co-operate, to "be one's self and yet in oneness with others" would emerge spontaneously. Thus, Goldman's existential individualist position embraces social relationships of co-operation and sympathy without compromising its respect for individual freedom.

Goldman's commitment to existential individualism clearly echoes certain liberal sentiments, as can be seen in her consideration of the problem of women's subordination. However, Goldman's anarchism diverges from liberal political theory in combining existential individualism with free communism and denouncing instrumental individualism as inherently laden with power relationships. Other anarchist-feminists, both those who wrote during the early part of this century and more modern thinkers, share with Goldman a commitment to existential individualism. As Margaret Marsh notes:

> Anarchist-feminists of the late nineteenth century articulated and practiced an ideology that set them at odds with contemporaries on the questions of the sanctity of marriage, the inviolability of the maternal instinct, and the idea of the family as a refuge from a hostile and chaotic outside world. Their attacks on marriage and the family, set in the context of a liberated female sexuality, alienated them not only from most feminists but also from many of their male comrades… [They] faced their most intense external opposition — from nonanarchists and from certain segments of the anarchist community — when they argued for absolute economic independence from men; for sexual varietism with its implicit denial of emotional possession; and for the proposition that men and women were essentially the same psychologically and intellectually, a premise that negated the belief in a female nurturing instinct.[119]

The goal of these early anarchist-feminists is the sexual, social, political and economic freedom of every individual, whether male or female. This involves rejecting social, political, economic and sexual institutions that bind the individual and deny existential freedom of choice. Intimate relationships as well as political and economic associations must be free and voluntary, with no power or privilege admitted. Extending the traditional anarchist argument against authority and power beyond the political realm to include sexual and family relationships, the early anarchist-feminists from Goldman to Cleyre affirmed women's place in the anarchist vision of freedom. As Marsh concludes:

> Anarchist-feminists made their most radical contribution by declaring that if gender ought not inhibit women from participating in the economic and political life of the society, neither were they valid in determining roles within our most intimate institutions. They maintained that if we are ever to build an egalitarian society, differences in roles — whether in sexual relationships, childrearing, political life, or work — must be based on capacity and preference, not on gender.[120]

Modern anarchist-feminists continue in this tradition by combining an existential individualist commitment with an anti-instrumental critique of property relations. While no one writer

[119] Marsh, *Anarchist Women,* p. 172.
[120] Marsh, *Anarchist Women,* pp. 173–174.

has contributed to the literature in a manner equal to Goldman's, taken as a whole the underlying tone of modern anarchist-feminism maintains the meshing of existential individualism with free and voluntary communism. Peggy Kornegger, for example, identifies one aspect of anarchism as being the "belief in both individuality and collectivity. Individuality is not incompatible with communist thought… Successful revolution involves unmanipulated, autonomous individuals and groups working together to take 'direct, unmediated control of society and of their own lives.'"[121] For women, this means:

> [being] committed to "living on the boundaries," to anti-capitalist, non-consumption values. What we want is neither integration nor a *coup d'état* which would "transfer power from one set of boys to another set of boys." What we ask is nothing less than a total revolution, revolution whose forms invent a future untainted by inequity, domination, or disrespect for individual variation.[122]

Kornegger's analysis contains an affirmation of individual freedom along with a critique of the instrumental values associated with capitalism.

Nicole Laurin-Frenette's anarchist-feminist critique of feminism and its traditional reliance on the State also hinges on a commitment to existential individualism. She argues that in the twentieth century, a "restructuring of social control is brought about through the State and State-related institutions. In some respects, it takes place in the name of feminist principles and, partly, with women's consent and participation."[123] She argues against the use of the State to achieve feminist goals, as such a strategy only increases the State's "ability to control women and their movement."[124] She also condemns femininity as being produced by power and, ultimately, constraining women's freedom.[125] Her concern for women's individual freedom, defined not by the State or by any notion of femininity, is part of the anarchist belief in existential individualism.

Anarchist-feminism, as an expression of the anarchist sensibility applied to feminist concerns, takes the individual as its starting point and, in its opposition to relations of domination and subordination, argues for non-instrumental economic forms that preserve individual existential freedom, for both women and men. In anarchism, the existential individualism of liberal political theory is combined with a free communism which challenges instrumental individualism. Liberal possessive individualism, with its dual conception of the human individual as existentially free and competitively instrumental, contains the roots of a truly liberatory movement; however, as long as liberalism maintains its commitment to instrumental market relations, it will undermine its own liberatory potential. Anarchism, with its uncompromising existential individualism, takes the freedom of the human individual to its logical conclusion.

The liberal feminist writings of John Stuart Mill, Betty Friedan and Janet Radcliffe Richards contain inconsistencies which can be traced to the dual and contradictory nature of liberal individualism. When these liberal feminists are examined beside the anarchist-feminist writings of Emma Goldman, it is evident that anarchism is related to liberalism in its commitment to existential freedom, but diverges from liberalism in its communist condemnation of competitive,

[121] Peggy Kornegger, "Anarchism: The Feminist Connection," *The Second Wave,* Spring, 1975, p. 27.

[122] Kornegger, "Anarchism: The Feminist Connection," p. 33.

[123] Nicole Laurin-Frenette, "On the Women's Movement, Anarchism and the State," *Our Generation,* Vol. 15, No. 2, Summer, 1982, pp. 33.

[124] Laurin-Frenette, "On the Women's Movement," p. 37.

[125] Laurin-Frenette, "On the Women's Movement," p. 37.

proprietarian instrumentalism. Peter Marshall supports this conclusion when he states that "political theorists usually classify anarchism as an ideology of the extreme Left. In fact, it combines ideas and values from both liberalism and socialism and may be considered a creative synthesis of the two great currents of thought."[126] Marshall's characterization of anarchism, however, ought not to be taken as indicating that anarchism is *derivative* of socialism and liberalism; anarchism is a movement in its own right, which holds ideas that are *shared* by other traditions.

In contrast to collectivist movements for social change which de-emphasize the individual, anarchism and liberalism both humanistically assert the centrality of the individual in any liberatory endeavour. As J. Frank Harrison warns us, "we ignore individualism at our own cost… In this bureaucratic era of mass communications, individualistic concerns are by no means simply bourgeois concerns but, rather, they are a necessary part of any radical critique of the human condition."[127] Anarchism and liberalism are political philosophies that do not ignore but rather affirm individualism. They both share a strong commitment to individual freedom, a tendency I call existential individualism. Marshall points out that "anarchists certainly see freedom as a permanent and necessary factor in the life and progress of humanity, as an intrinsic good without which it is impossible for human beings to reach their full stature."[128] This sentiment could have just as easily been expressed by a liberal; as C. B. Macpherson states, liberal "can mean equal effective freedom of all to use and develop their capacities."[129] The very term "liberal" is based on the Latin term *liberalis* meaning free. In their feminist considerations, Mill, Friedan, Richards and Goldman all affirm an individualism that is committed to freedom and self-determination as ends in and of themselves. In employment matters, all four writers assert that women should be able to determine for themselves what jobs to assume, and should suffer no discrimination by virtue of their sex. Education, free expression and the gaining of knowledge is supported by anarchist and liberal alike, and is seen by both as being an essential ingredient in women's emancipation. In terms of marriage and the family, anarchists and liberals both urge voluntary association between partners, reproductive and sexual freedom for women, and the acknowledgement and respect for children as individuals. Even governmental politics are treated in a similar fashion by liberals and anarchists, as State intervention is viewed as a negative thing and self-government the ideal. Finally, both traditions seek to admit women into the category of "individual" by recognizing women's capacity to be free and self-determined.

However, liberals are not anarchists, nor are anarchists liberals. While each shares with the other a commitment to existential individualism, they part company over the liberal assumption that individuals are also competitive owners of both real property and property in the person. Thus, while Mill, Friedan and Richards see the liberation of women as facilitated by their entry into the competitive marketplace as wage earners, Goldman condemns such a move as leading to relations of domination and subordination, or "wage slavery." The liberal belief in the justice of an economic system based on merit is denounced by Goldman as inherently hierarchical. Instead, as Marshall points out, the anarchist replaces liberal justice with egalitarian freedom:

> Anarchists wish to expand human freedom in the negative sense of being free from restraint. Most anarchists also see freedom in the positive sense of being free to do

[126] Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible,* p. 639.
[127] Harrison, *The Modern State,* p. 68.
[128] Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible,* p. 36.
[129] C. B. Macpherson, *The Life and Times of Liberal Democracy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 1.

> what one likes and to realize one's full potential. But freedom is always a triadic relation and involves not only *from* something in order *to* do something, but also the freedom *of* certain agents. In the anarchists' case, they are not concerned with the freedom of a particular class or elite, but the freedom of all human beings[130] (original emphasis).

All must be free for the anarchist; thus an economic system based on property and wages must be opposed on the grounds that such a system promotes relations of domination and subordination. Anarchists assert that women's emancipation cannot be achieved through extending the power relationships of the capitalist workplace to include women. Instead, the wage and property system must be abandoned in favour of free and voluntary association among individuals, with the employment contract giving way to a form of obligation modeled on promising. This is the only form of economic organization that is consistent with a commitment to free and self-determined individuals.

Education is another area over which anarchists and liberals find themselves at odds. Liberals will often see education as a process of preparing the individual for competing against others in the marketplace. Anarchists, on the other hand, see education as the development of critical self-awareness and knowledge about the world. Only through free self-expression and discussion can individuals gain true knowledge. Anarchists believe that the bending of education to suit the needs of the marketplace destroys its critical impetus, and leaves only memorization and the mechanical acquisition of skills.

Liberals and anarchists also disagree over some aspects of marriage and family relations. Liberal writers often conceptualize marriage as an equal partnership, and will even recommend that such partnerships be formalized through contract. Anarchists argue against marriage altogether, as such institutionalized relationships are confining and repressive. Instead, intimate relationships between individuals should be self-regulated and based not on contract but on love and sympathy, voluntarily assumed and voluntarily dissolved. In terms of children, liberals will often treat children as the property of their parents; anarchists, on the other hand, see children as free individuals whose wills should be respected.

It is in the area of governmental politics that the differences between liberalism and anarchism is perhaps most striking. Anarchists like Goldman oppose any involvement in State politics by both men and women because such structures of organization are inherently hierarchical and take away from individuals the ability to run their own lives as they see fit. Liberal thinkers like Mill, Friedan and Richards, in contrast, see the State as a possible avenue for improving the status of women. Thus, suffrage and the inclusion of women as legislators are embraced as appropriate means by which to achieve women's liberation.

This difference of opinion with respect to the State is based on vastly different conceptualizations of the human individual. The liberal who affirms instrumental competitive values must also embrace the State as necessary, as "dog-eat-dog" egofocal ethics must be countered by a system of authority which regulates competitive behaviour. The anarchist, in contrast, opposes instrumental individualism, and is not therefore compelled to adopt the State as a way of controlling competitive property owners from harming one another.

Unlike liberals who undercut their commitment to existential individualism with the hierarchy and domination inherent to instrumentalism, anarchists remain true to existential individu-

[130] Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible,* p. 36.

alism by opposing domination and power in all its forms. A liberatory political philosophy must, if it is to be successful, begin and end with the individual. Liberalism and anarchism are both movements based on individualism; however, liberalism compromises its commitment to individual freedom by advocating economic and political forms of organization that are ultimately oppressive.

Chapter Six: Anarchism, Existentialism and Human Nature

Anarchism is a political philosophy based on an existential individualism that emphasizes the freedom of the individual. However, many anarchist theorists, both past and present, buttress their anarchist politics by asserting that human individuals are naturally co-operative. The positing of a fixed, co-operative human nature presents certain problems for anarchism as it contradicts anarchism's commitment to free will and the existentially free individual. Anarchism does not have to posit a fixed human nature to shore up its political and philosophical arguments. The political philosophy of existentialism, with its rejection of a fixed human nature and its affirmation of humanity as freedom itself, offers anarchism a fluid conceptualization of human nature more in keeping with its individualist imperative.

George Woodcock states:

> Essentially, the anarchists believe that if man obeys the natural laws of his kind, he will be able to live at peace with his fellows; in other words, man may not be naturally good, but he is — according to the anarchists — naturally social. It is authoritarian institutions that warp and atrophy his cooperative inclinations.[1]

As Woodcock suggests, many anarchists subscribe to a view of a fixed, static human nature. For instance, in *What is Property?* Pierre-Joseph Proudhon set out to prove that property *"is robbery"*[2] He writes that property contradicts the other "natural rights" of man: liberty, equality and security.[3] He argues that individuals are inherently social because production is a social act.[4] For him, individuals have a social *instinct:*

> Man is moved by an internal attraction towards his fellow, by a secret sympathy which causes him to love, congratulate, and condole; so that, to resist this attraction, his will must struggle against his nature.[5]

Proudhon argues that property in its antisocialness is a contradiction of humanity's basic social nature.

Proudhon adopts a static approach that cannot adequately explain, for instance, *how* property came about if it is in fact a contradiction of humanity's basic instincts. Proudhon, rather lamely, blames the existence of social ills such as property on inexperienced faculties of reason:

---

[1] George Woodcock, *The Anarchist Reader* (Glasgow: Fontana, 1977), pp. 18.

[2] Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, *What Is Property?* (New York: Dover, 1970) p. 11.

[3] Proudhon, *What Is Property?,* pp. 44–45.

[4] Proudhon, *What Is Property?, pp.* 148–150.

[5] Proudhon, *What Is Property?,* p. 227.

> But man acquires skill only by observation and experiment. He reflects, then, since to observe and experiment is to reflect; he reasons, since he cannot help reasoning. In reflecting, he becomes deluded; in reasoning, he makes mistakes, and, thinking himself right, persists in them… Thus, the greatest evils which man suffers arise from the misuse of his social nature, of this same justice of which he is so proud, and which he applies with such deplorable ignorance. The practice of justice is a science which, when once discovered and diffused, will sooner or later put an end to social disorder, by teaching us our rights and duties.[6]

This explanation is problematic; Proudhon posits a social human nature, then argues that individuals, in their ignorance, act against their own nature. Proudhon attempts to reconcile this problem by asserting that clearly "property is impossible."[7] In fact, historically, property *is* possible, and as such contradicts Proudhon's *conceptualization* of human nature, not, as Proudhon would have us believe, human nature itself.

Proudhon looks to science to guide humanity away from ignorance and onto the path of justice. For him, science is the recognition of our true social nature, and he sees his own analysis as contributing to a scientific understanding of the world. This belief in the "scientific" solution to problems is typical of the nineteenth-century of which Proudhon was a part. It has only been in the twentieth-century, in the face of Hiroshima, that science's sovereign claim to truth has been generally questioned. (Of course, Nietzsche challenged the validity of science in the 1880s; however, his criticisms were not generally accepted by the scholars of his time.)

Proudhon's analysis, like Marx after him, concentrates only on economic activity undertaken in the public realm. The fact that Proudhon focuses his social criticism solely on this public economic realm results in a complete absence of analysis about the status of women. Proudhon is concerned only with the analysis of freedom, equality and security in the public economic realm, which in his day was almost exclusively the sphere of men. Proudhon is blind to the types of activities women have historically performed. This is the problem with an analysis that ignores all factors outside the public domain of male economic activity; a strictly economic solution (in this case, the abolition of property) is insufficient for the liberation of all people.

For Proudhon, property is the antithesis to the original, naive state of communism.

> Communism — the first expression of the social nature — is the first term of social development, — the *thesis;* property, the reverse of communism, is the second term, — the *antítesis.* When we have discovered the third term, the *synthesis,* we shall have the required solution[8] (original emphasis).

The solution, according to Proudhon, is anarchy.[9] It is through the elimination of both private property and the State that man will finally express his *natural* socialness. It must be remembered that this "synthesis" of Proudhon's is based on an analysis that excludes women — it is in fact men and not humanity to which he refers when he speaks of "man's nature." It is unclear how a strategy which ignores half the human population could be seen as a solution at all, much less an anarchistic one.

[6] Proudhon, *What Is Property?,* pp. 252, 254.
[7] Proudhon, *What Is Property?,* pp. 151–223.
[8] Proudhon, *What Is Property!,* pp. 258–259.
[9] Proudhon, *What Is Property!,* p. *277.*

If Proudhon simply asserts a "social instinct," Peter Kropotkin employs a more sophisticated argument: mutual support is favoured by evolution. Kropotkin argues that it is not in competition that species survive over time, but rather it is through co-operation that some species gain the edge over others. Kropotkin is unable to explain the origin for such a "mutual aid" instinct:

> That mutual aid is the real foundation of our ethical conceptions seems evident enough. But whatever the opinions as to the first origin of the mutual-aid feeling or instinct may be — whether a biological or a supernatural cause is ascribed to it — we must trace its existence as far back as to the lowest stages of the animal world; and from these stages we can follow its uninterrupted evolution, in opposition to a number of contrary agencies, through all degrees of human development, up to the present times.[10]

To avoid merely positing a social instinct, Kropotkin turns to empirical arguments to demonstrate that human beings are in fact conditioned towards mutual aid by a process of evolution.

Kropotkin supports his evolutionary stance by arguing that this tendency towards mutual aid has been present throughout natural and social history. In fact, in his fervour to prop up his argument, Kropotkin contrives to find the co-operative spirit in nearly all phenomena. For instance, in his pamphlet, *The State: Its Historic Role,* Kropotkin argues that even in medieval Europe mutual aid was practised by the guilds until the establishment of the city allowed the State to emerge. In the interest of supporting his argument, Kropotkin tends to romanticize the conditions of life and the amount of "freedom" allowed within the guilds, not to mention the total exclusion of women from his analysis.

Along with his evolutionary approach, Kropotkin affirms "necessary stages" to history, which express humanity's "natural" inclination to mutual aid. He describes the "communalist movements that existed in the Xlth and XHth centuries" as "a natural development, belonging, just as did the tribe and village community, to a certain phase in human evolution, and not to any particular nation or region."[11] For Kropotkin, these "natural developments" are countered by the rise of the State, and hence, the State must be abolished.

> We see in [the State] the Institution, developed in the history of human societies to prevent the direct association among men, to shackle the development of local and individual initiative, to crush existing liberties, to prevent their new blossoming — all this in order to subject the masses to the will of the minorities.[12]

The State, is then, for Kropotkin, a rather unnatural development that hinders natural evolution. Kropotkin conceptualizes the natural state of individuals as being inherently anarchistic, as for him, anarchy is simply the absence of the State. However, Kropotkin ignores the fact that the State is a willful creation of individuals in the first place; how then can the State be unnatural? Would Kropotkin have individuals renounce their own will (in the form of the State) in order to accept their own nature?

Like Proudhon before him, Kropotkin ignores women, and in so doing naively points to the State as the root of all evil. Even Kropotkin knows that the power of the patriarch precedes the

[10] Peter Kropotkin, *Mutual Aid* (London: Penguin, 1972), p. 250.

[11] Peter Kropotkin, *The State: Its Historic Role* (London: Freedom, 1969), p.23.

[12] Kropotkin, *The State: Its Historic Role,* p. 52.

power of the State;[13] he however does not make the logical conclusion that while the abolition of the State will free men, it may not necessarily free women.

Kropotkin's arguments may appear to resemble the position of contemporary sociobiologists. However, the motivation of Kropotkin and today's sociobiologists are radically different. Kropotkin is countering the assertions of other writers of his time that human beings are "naturally competitive," that evolution has selected the fittest, most competitive species to survive. This position was often taken up by apologists of capitalism; since human beings are naturally competitive, the capitalist system is simply the best arrangement to allow the free expression of an instrumental human nature. Kropotkin's biologistic arguments were intended to increase the possibility of human freedom. Sociobiologists, on the other hand, although similarly focusing on biology, are generally unconcerned with existential freedom.

Mikhail Bakunin widens anarchist criticism to include not just private property and the State, but also religion. In his essay, *God and the State,* published in 1882, Bakunin launches a sustained attack against religion. The denunciation of the existence of God is, for Bakunin, clearly an affirmation of human freedom:

> *The idea of God implies the abdication of human reason and justice; it is the most decisive negation of human liberty, and necessarily ends in the enslavement of mankind, both in theory and practice*[14] (original emphasis).

The unrelenting humanism of Bakunin's argument is as moving and relevant today as it was over a hundred years ago. He challenges humanity to live in the world without God, that is, without a divine explanation or excuse. Parodying Voltaire, Bakunin claims that *"if God really existed, it would be necessary to abolish him"*[15] (original emphasis) in order for there to be human liberty. This humanism is much closer to twentieth-century thought than it is to the nineteenth; like Nietzsche, Bakunin's radical humanism was not in favour during his time.

Bakunin also criticizes institutional science. He argues that "the only mission of science is to enlighten life, not to govern it,"[16] and advocates that it must "represent society's collective consciousness, [and] must really become the property of everybody."[17] Bakunin challenges authority *as such,* which is a more inclusive approach than that taken by either Proudhon or Kropotkin.

However, like his intellectual forebears, Bakunin argues that human beings are naturally social. For instance, in his discussion of the courage a man must have "to speak and act against the opinion of all," he states:

> Nothing proves more clearly than this fact the natural and inevitable solidarity — this law of sociability — which binds all men together, as each of us can verify daily, both on himself and on all the men whom he knows.[18]

Bakunin argues that this natural "law o£ sociability" cannot prevail so long as our social institutions are based on authority, as is the case with the church and the State. This again is an

[13] Kropotkin, *Mutual Aid,* pp. 261–266.
[14] Mikhail Bakunin, *God and the State* (New York: Dover, 1970), p. 25.
[15] Bakunin, *God and the State,* p. 28.
[16] Bakunin, *God and the State,* p. 55.
[17] Bakunin, *God and the State,* p. 62.
[18] Bakunin, *God and the State,* p. 43 (in).

argument where the social is understood as "natural," and repressive institutions are conceptualized as somehow going against nature. This argument does not address the fact that it is human beings themselves who form the church and the State, and so a contradiction emerges: human beings willfully act against their own nature. This is a point which Bakunin cannot reconcile, try as he may. For instance, he argues:

> The liberty of man consists solely in this: that he obeys natural laws because he has *himself* recognized them as such, and not because they have been externally imposed upon him by any extrinsic will whatever, divine or human, collective or individual.[19]

Bakunin is attempting to reconcile free will with natural law, and his argument is valid only insofar as it applies to physical constraints, or "laws" as he would term them. The fact of gravity is simply that, a fact, which does not limit our freedom because we understand it as one of the conditions of the material world. Bakunin's argument encounters trouble only when he applies it to social situations; then, he is pitting human freedom against "laws" which ultimately are the creation of human individuals themselves. This is clearly a contradiction in terms.

Many anarchists today still fall back on nature to support their arguments. One of the most preeminent of contemporary English-speaking anarchist theorists, Murray Bookchin, has considerably influenced the modern anarchist movement. His most important contribution is in bringing ecological issues to the forefront of libertarian thought. In his 1982 work, *The Ecology of Freedom,* Bookchin launches a detailed analysis of the development of hierarchy in which he attempts to ground freedom in an ecological relationship with the natural world. His conception of the "natural" human being is of "nature rendered self-conscious."[20] Human beings are part of nature and, according to Bookchin, it is to nature that we must look for an ethics for our actions.

> The matrix from which objective reason may yet derive its ethics for a balanced and harmonized world is the nature conceived by a radical social ecology — a nature that is interpreted nonhierarchically, in terms of unity in diversity and spontaneity.[21]

For Bookchin, nature is a constant movement towards the more complex, towards diversity. Human beings themselves are, according to him, part of this movement, and are part of the continuum of subjectivities that exist in nature. It is through recognizing this natural push for "unity in diversity" that humanity may ground an ethics of freedom. For Bookchin, then, freedom is the recognition of the right for diversity, both in human and non-human terms.

If freedom is inherent to nature's "unity in diversity," then how has it come about that humanity lives now in a state of unfreedom? Bookchin spends a large portion of his book outlining the development of humanity from an initial "organic community" where hierarchy was unknown, to the present authoritarian world. To do this, Bookchin employs anthropological data in an effort to demonstrate that this original nonhierarchical community actually once existed. This task is, however, a difficult one; the anthropological data lends itself to such wide interpretations that almost anything can be said about so-called "primitive" societies. Like Kropotkin, Bookchin goes to great lengths to find empirical evidence to support his theory; his anthropology "documents"

[19] Bakunin, *God and the State,* p. 30.

[20] Murray Bookchin, *The Ecology of Freedom: The Emergence and Dissolution of Hierarchy* (Palo Alto, California: Cheshire, 1982), p. 315.

[21] Bookchin, *The Ecology of Freedom,* p. 274.

humanity's "natural" push towards a "unity in diversity." Unfortunately, this evidence of "organic" societies without any hierarchies at all is open to challenge. For example, Marjorie Cohen contends that while a case may be made for the equality of men and women in certain societies:

> This anthropological evidence may well point to sexual relationships which are different and relatively more egalitarian, to argue that it demonstrates sexual symmetry and full equality is not convincing… While the ethnographic literature is important in that it points to variations in sexual relationships and provides proof to counter the assumption that women always have been passive victims of male dominance, it does not prove that the division of labour by sex (other than for reproduction) is compatible with sexual equality.[22]

Bookchin assumes a "primal division of labour" by sex even in organic communities,[23] but asserts that such a distinction between men and women is initially nonhierarchical, or to use Cohen's terminology, symmetrical. Nowhere does he offer convincing evidence to support this assertion. Neither can he offer an explanation for why this "organic community" developed hierarchies, other than to say that they probably emerged out of a hegemony of old over young, and then spread to the domination of women by men.[24]

Bookchin is arguing on the same grounds as Proudhon and Kropotkin; he only uses different terminology. He assumes not that human individuals are naturally social, but rather that in nature, they are free. This stance presents certain problems. If nature (and, being nature, if humanity) embodies the principle of unity in diversity, then why does humanity *act against nature* by destroying the environment and itself through the exercise of power? Again, there is the same contradiction: a human nature is posited, only to be negated by the acts of real human individuals.

Despite the conceptual problems arising from their assumptions about human nature, each of the writers discussed above have contributed a great deal to radical social theory. Proudhon, for example, in his examination of property, lays the groundwork for later radical analyses, including Marx's critique of capitalism. By arguing against private property and the State that supports it, Proudhon fights for the right of the freely associated individual, a fight that today non-aligned groups in both East and West have taken up in earnest. This right of free association is part of the intellectual legacy left by Proudhon.

Kropotkin's analysis of mutual aid is likewise a valuable contribution to radical theory. By questioning the hegemony of those theorists who justify capitalism through evolutionary arguments, Kropotkin challenges the very concept of history itself. He shifts the ground of debate; instead of glorifying competition, he concentrates on how human individuals co-operate in day-to-day living. He shows that resistance to alienation is possible.

Bakunin generalizes the anarchist stance against State authority to include opposition to all authority. This is a very important theoretical step, as it allows anarchism to address many issues on which "mainstream" leftists are silent. Age, race or sex hierarchies, for example, can be challenged using Bakunin's imperative of questioning authority.

---

[22] Marjorie Cohen, "The Significance of the Sexual Division of Labour to Economic Development," *York Studies in Political Economy,* Third Issue, Spring 1984, pp. 12–13.

[23] Bookchin, *The Ecology of Freedom,* p. *77.*

[24] Bookchin, *The Ecology of Freedom,* p. 5.

Bookchin's analysis of nature points to a conceptualization of anarchism that is more comprehensive yet. He argues that *"If the object of capitalism or socialism is to increase needs, the object of anarchism is to increase choice"*[25] (original emphasis). That Bookchin looks to nature's "unity in diversity" to justify this notion is internally inconsistent; however, his conclusion is still a valuable one. Not only is anarchism a negative moment of destruction, but Bookchin shows that it is a positive creative movement as well.

Thus, while these anarchist thinkers encounter problems that emerge out of their insistence to posit a fixed human nature, they all point to the freedom of the individual as the necessary basis for a good society. This emphasis on freedom is what makes anarchism still a meaningful movement today.

From Proudhon, Kropotkin, Bakunin and Bookchin there comes the insistent cry for freedom; however, this cry is coupled with an idealist conception of the human individual, namely that human beings have a nature and that such a nature is social. By assuming a fixed human nature, these thinkers encounter logical difficulties. However, it is not necessary to try to reconcile a fixed human nature with anarchism as has conventionally been attempted, but rather the notion of human nature must be abandoned entirely. This strategy is necessary because, as human nature and human freedom are irreconcilable, the assertion of a human nature makes the expression of individual free will problematic. Without a capacity for free will, the possibility of anarchism is nonsense. Or, to put it in other terms, anarchy is possible only because of humanity's capacity to freely make meaning of themselves and their world.

As the existentialists assert, humanity creates itself or, to quote Jean-Paul Sartre, "existence precedes essence."[26] Through our own actions, we create our own, always changing, human nature. The argument is not that anarchism can work because human beings are "naturally" cooperative or responsible, but rather that anarchism is possible because we have the freedom to create ourselves. Of course, we may choose not to become anarchists; we may instead choose to be fascists or capitalists. The point is, we choose whether we want to or not, whether we acknowledge our choices or not, and therefore we are responsible for who we are.

The affinity of anarchism and existentialism is not often noted, although a few writers have recognized the complementarity of the two streams of thought. For instance, in her memoirs, Emma Goldman argues with a friend who has accused Nietzsche of being an aristocrat:

> Nietzsche was not a social theorist but a poet, a rebel and innovator. His aristocracy was neither of birth nor of purse; it was of the spirit. In that respect Nietzsche was an anarchist, and all true anarchists were aristocrats…[27]

More recently, in a 1949 pamphlet, Herbert Read explicitly argues for the compatibility of anarchism and existentialism. Read states:

> If finally you ask me whether there is any necessary connection between this philosophy [existentialism] and anarchism, I would reply that in my opinion anarchism is the *only* political theory that combines an essentially revolutionary and contingent attitude with a philosophy of freedom. It is the only militant libertarian doctrine

[25] Bookchin, *The Ecology of Freedom,* p. 70.
[26] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism and Human Emotions* (New York: Wisdom, 1957), pp. 16–17.
[27] Emma Goldman, *Living My Life,* Vol. I (New York: Dover, 1970), p. 194.

> left in the world, and on its diffusion depends the progressive evolution of human consciousness and of humanity itself.[28]

Read argues that existentialism is a humanism that is an "affirmation of the significance of our human destiny."[29] It is a philosophy that allows for the creation of meaning. Existentialism also allows us to shift the grounds of debate away from "human nature" with all its attendant problems, towards a consideration of *how* we can create freedom for ourselves and others. According to Read:

> [existentialism] is eliminating all systems of idealism, all theories of life or being that subordinate man to an idea, to an abstraction of some sort. It is also eliminating all systems of materialism that subordinate man to the operation of physical and economic laws. It is saying that man is the reality — not even man in the abstract, but the human person, you and I; and that everything else — freedom, love, reason, God — is a contingency depending on the will of the individual.[30]

This approach avoids the contradictions and limitations encountered by those theorists who assume a fixed human nature by allowing for an infinite variety of possibilities, including anarchy. In addition, not only does existentialism prove useful in the development of a coherent social theory, but also it may be argued that it is empirically true. As history shows, human individuals act in any number of ways — at times they are cruel, brutal and violent, but they also exhibit love to one another and practise altruism.

With respect to women, both anarchism and existentialism represent inherent critiques of sexism. For instance, as anarchism opposes all forms of hierarchy, it must, to be consistent, condemn the domination of women by men. As existentialism is a philosophy that takes *human* freedom as its point of departure, it ought to be capable of a nonsexist consideration of women in its discussion of the human condition. However, women are not always treated fairly by existentialists; Nietzsche's misogyny is legendary,[31] and Sartre's belief that "the obscenity of the feminine sex is that of everything which 'gapes open'"[32] cannot be seen as anything but woman-hating. While some existentialists to a greater or lesser extent exclude women from the human project, they do so only by conceptualizing the human in exclusively masculine terms. This devaluation of women is not, however, implicit to existentialism itself. The integration of women into the discussion about human existence is demanded by a philosophy that regards human freedom as the only given.

By accepting an ethics based on existentialism, the grounds for debate are now changed; instead of discussing what constitutes human nature and what limitations that nature imposes, the problem shifts to a consideration of what constitutes human freedom and how that freedom can be expanded.

---

[28] Herbert Read, "Existentialism, Marxism and Anarchism," in *The Essential Works of Anarchism,* edited by Marshall S. Shatz (New York: Quadrangle, 1972), p. 538.

[29] Read, "Existentialism, Marxism and Anarchism," p. 533.

[30] Read, "Existentialism, Marxism and Anarchism," p. 525.

[31] Christine Garside Allen, "Nietzsche's Ambivalence About Women," in *The Sexism of Social and Political Theory: Women and Reproduction from Plato to Nietzsche,* edited by Lorenne M. G. Clark and Lynda Lange (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979), pp. 117–133.

[32] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness,* translated with an introduction by Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Washington Square Press, 1966), p. 782.

In her consideration of human freedom, Simone de Beauvoir states:

> The negro slave of the eighteenth century, the Mohammedan woman enclosed in a harem have no instrument, be it in thought or by astonishment or anger, which permits them to attack the civilization which oppresses them. Their behavior is defined and can be judged only within this given situation, and it is possible that in this situation, limited like every human situation, they realize a perfect assertion of their freedom. But once there appears a possibility of liberation, it is resignation of freedom not to exploit the possibility, a resignation which implies dishonesty and which is a positive fault.[33]

Beauvoir acknowledges the historical situation in which human individuals are forever immersed. This historical situation is the antithesis of "natural"; it is humanly created and can thus be changed by human individuals. To abandon the divinely given or the naturally ordered world for the social world in which people themselves create meaning results not only in freedom, but also in ambiguity. The ambiguity arises from the fact that if meaning is not fixed, naturally or divinely, then meaning can be changed, and thereby truth acquires ambiguity. There are those who, when faced with the ambiguity of their own existence, assert that if there is no God-given or absolute meaning then there is no meaning at all. This cynicism turns freedom into nihilism, a posture assumed by individuals in an attempt to evade the very responsibility of their own existence.

The recognition that our world is neither divinely nor naturally ordered does not imply that meaning does not exist, as the nihilist would have us believe, but rather that meaning is humanly created. This is not a cynical or nihilistic view of the world. On the contrary, if the ambiguity implied in a world where meaning is created by human individuals is fraught with anguish, it also brings with it the possibility of freedom. Beauvoir speaks of this difference between nihilism and freedom when she contrasts ambiguity with absurdity.

> The notion of ambiguity must not be confused with that of absurdity. To declare that existence is absurd is to deny that it can ever be given a meaning; to say that it is ambiguous is to assert that its meaning is never fixed, that it must be constantly won.[34]

Meaning must always be recreated by human individuals living in history. As there is no divinely given world, there is as well no naturally given world. Human individuals create a world which simultaneously becomes a context for their own existence. This emphasis on the human individual is undeniably humanistic. Humanism does not have to mean that humanity must disregard the natural world; as a political philosophy it can rather point to the social and historical meaning which human individuals give to the natural world. This is not to say that nature would cease to exist without humanity. It would, however, exist *without meaning*. Human individuals are natural but are simultaneously "other nature" by virtue of their self-consciousness. Through this self awareness, human individuals create meaning for themselves and their environment. Of course, the natural world of which people find themselves a part provides a context for the

[33] Simone de Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity* (Don Mills: Citadel, 1948), p. 38.
[34] Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity, p.* 129.

socially created world. However, unlike the human individual, nature alone is incapable of creating meaning or making free choices. It is this self-consciousness that is important to women and other oppressed groups, as it alone opens up the possibility of liberation.

Freedom is at the centre of existentialist thought. For existentialists, human individuals are free — free to project themselves into a meaningful future, free to assert their own value as ends in themselves. The freedom, and the ambiguity, arises out of the fact that the human individual is, as Beauvoir puts it, a "being whose being is not to be, that subjectivity which realizes itself only as a presence in the world, that engaged freedom, that surging of the for-itself which is immediately given for others."[35] Beauvoir is referring to the fact that human individuals are always in a state of becoming — that is, they are never finished, they never achieve being. This lack of being is, in fact, a positive moment as it gives to humanity the possibility of creating themselves, their world and their ethics *freely.* As Beauvoir points out: "One does not offer an ethics to a God. It is impossible to propose any to man if one defines him as nature, as something given."[36] Human individuals are not given, but are always in the process of becoming. If humanity were like a god and could achieve being, there would be no question of an ethics, since meaning would be absolute. Ethics are needed only when meaning is called into question. So, it is in this ambiguity, this flux, that humanity reaches out and freely gives value to their world.

If meaning and value are not then given, but are rather created by human individuals, how are we ethically to decide between the choices before us? For existentialists, it is the very freedom and ambiguity of human existence which forms the basis for ethical behaviour. When Sartre states that "Man is nothing else but what he makes of himself,"[37] he is saying that the human individual *is* freedom, because at first we are nothing. It is only through our existence that we create ourselves. In creating ourselves, we create all of humanity. Our actions imply an ethics not only for ourselves, but for all others.

> Certainly, many people believe that when they do something, they themselves are the only ones involved, and when someone says to them, "What if everyone acted that way?" they shrug their shoulders and answer, "Everyone doesn't act that way." But really, one should always ask himself, "What would happen if everybody looked at things that way?" There is no escaping this disturbing thought except by a kind of double-dealing. A man who lies and makes excuses for himself by saying "not everybody does that," is someone with an uneasy conscience, because the act of lying implies that a universal value is conferred upon the lie.[38]

Thus, one's own choices are essentially choices for all and the ethics demanded by free human existence is one which reaches out towards freedom itself.

> Oppression tries to defend itself by its utility. But we have seen that it is one of the lies of the serious mind to attempt to give the word "useful" an absolute meaning; nothing is useful if it is not useful to man; nothing is useful to man if the latter is not in a position to define his own ends and values, if he is not free.[39]

[35] Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity,* p. 10.
[36] Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity,* p. 10.
[37] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism and Human Emotions* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1957), p. 15.
[38] Sartre, *Existentialism and Human Emotions*, pp. 18–19.
[39] Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity,* p. 95.

Freedom implies responsibility and oppression is unjustifiable.

This emphasis on freedom is where existentialism and anarchism converge. For anarchism to work in practice, each individual must not only be responsible for creating his/her own values, but he/she must also defend the freedom of others in order to protect his/her own. Beauvoir's existentialist position on freedom, then, allows for an anarchist world. These words by Beauvoir could have been written by an anarchist:

> And it is true that each is bound to all; but that is precisely the ambiguity of his condition: in his surpassing toward others, each one exists absolutely as for himself; each is interested in the liberation of all, but as a separate existence engaged in his own projects. So much so that the terms "useful to Man," "useful to this man," do not overlap. Universal, absolute man exists nowhere. From this angle, we again come upon the same antinomy: the only justification of sacrifice is its utility; but the useful is what serves Man. Thus, in order to serve some men we must do disservice to others. By what principle are we to choose between them?[40]

The problem is the same for the existentialist and the anarchist: How can one guarantee individual freedom when one must limit others' freedom to oppress? For Beauvoir this question was of the utmost importance; the fascist slaughter of millions during the Second World War, the Nazi occupation of France, and the realization that revolutionary Russia was turning out to be the antithesis of freedom were all devastating events for her. It was the historical circumstances of Europe in the 1940s that prompted Beauvoir to write: "A freedom which is occupied in denying freedom is itself so outrageous that the outrageousness of the violence which one practices against it is almost cancelled out…"[41]; and "the fact is that one finds himself forced to treat certain men as things in order to win the freedom of all."[42] Oppressors in some way give up their own claim to freedom, as others are put into the position of having to oppose them in order to win freedom for all.

To live ethically, one must reach out towards the future, and in freely doing so, one must open up freedom not only for oneself but for others. One must also ethically oppose those who would seek to limit the freedom of others, even if this opposition regrettably treats some human individuals, those who oppress, as mere objects. For one must weigh the freedom of all against the freedom of some.

The question remains, both for the existentialist and the anarchist: How does one know for certain whether one is acting in a manner that truly opens up freedom for all? Existentialism tells us that we never can know for certain. We choose to act in doubt, and with anguish, but we cannot help but choose.

> We must decide upon the opportuneness of an act and attempt to measure its effectiveness without knowing all the factors that are present… The man of action, in order to make a decision, will not wait for a perfect knowledge to prove to him the necessity of a certain choice; he must first choose and thus help fashion history. A choice of this kind is no more arbitrary than a hypothesis; it excludes neither reflection nor even method; but it is also free, and it implies risks that must be assumed as

[40] Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity,* pp. 112–113.

[41] Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity,* p. 97.

[42] Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity,* p. 97.

> such. The movement of the mind, whether it be called thought or will, always starts up in the darkness.[43]

We can never be sure of ourselves; instead, we act in doubt and anguish, but nevertheless, we act. Even inaction, in its consequences, is an act, and as such is fraught with doubt. This uncertainty taints our freedom with ambiguity. It demands that we act thoughtfully and responsibly, as our uncertain actions change not only our world but ourselves as well. Doubt can be assumed positively; the admission of our own uncertainty can allow us to be more receptive to other points of view. While existentialism requires freedom to be the ethics demanded by human existence, it is a freedom exercised in doubt and hence must not be assumed lightly.

Beauvoir never called herself an anarchist; nonetheless her existentialist beliefs come very close to being anarchistic. Her emphasis on human freedom, and her attempt to ground ethics in that very freedom, is essential for anarchism.

For Beauvoir, freedom and ambiguity are part of the human condition. She understands human life as being intimately connected to death:

> "The continuous work of our life," says Montaigne, "is to build death." … Man knows and thinks this tragic ambivalence which the animal and the plant merely undergo. A new paradox is thereby introduced into his destiny. "Rational animal," "thinking reed," he escapes from his natural condition without, however, freeing himself from it. He is still a part of this world of which he is a consciousness. He asserts himself as a pure internality against which no external power can take hold, and he also experiences himself as a thing crushed by the dark weight of other things. At every moment he can grasp the non-temporal truth of his existence.[44]

These opening words from Beauvoir's *The Ethics of Ambiguity* are interesting because they put death into the very centre of life. To live as a subject conscious of the infinite while bound as an object to the finite is for Beauvoir the tragedy of human existence. The freedom of human existence is contained in the possibility that, despite death, human individuals are able to project themselves into the future. It is a future, however, overshadowed by death. As Mary O'Brien notes in her work, *The Politics of Reproduction-.*

> Dialectical materialism takes as its fundamental postulate the need to eat… The simple sex act has been transformed by the clinical genius of Freud into a theoretical *a, priori* of a system of thought… Death has haunted the male philosophical imagination since Man the Thinker first glimmered into action, and in our own time has become the stark reality which preoccupies existentialism, an untidy and passionately pessimistic body of thought in which lonely and heroic man attempts to defy the absurdity of the void which houses his consciousness and his world. The inevitability and necessity of these biological events has quite clearly not exempted them from historical force and theoretical significance. We have no comparable philosophies of birth.[45]

[43] Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity,* p. 123.
[44] Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity,* p. 7.
[45] Mary O'Brien, *The Politics of Reproduction* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981), pp. 20–21.

O'Brien's thesis is that birth, like eating, sexuality and dying, is not just a brute fact of nature, but is part of the human process of creating meaning and making history. In fact, O'Brien argues that the labour done by women during childbirth and the labour of childrearing itself creates what one might call the ultimate value: human life. This labour, O'Brien argues, mediates between the individual and society; in other words, reproductive labour helps to fill the "absurdity of the void" by establishing a material, meaningful relationship between individuals that continues over time, *despite death.* To speak in existentialist terms, what could be more of a project than the creation of human life itself? Through the creation of new human individuals, reproductive labour projects a future for humanity as a whole.

Despite Beauvoir's focus on death, she briefly touches upon the significance of birth in *The Ethics of Ambiguity* when she speaks of the degradation and resignation of oppressed peoples:

> Yet, with all this sordid resignation, there were children who played and laughed; and their smile exposed the lie of their oppressors: it was an appeal and a promise; it projected a future before the child, a man's future. If, in all oppressed countries, a child's face is so moving, it is not that the child is more moving or that he has more of a right to happiness than the others: it is that *he is the living affirmation of human transcendence:* he is on the watch, he is an eager hand held out to the world, he is a hope, *a project*[46] (emphasis added).

This is one of the few places in her writing that Beauvoir acknowledges children as a project: the project of humanity. In her groundbreaking feminist work, *The Second Sex,* published in French in 1949 and in English translation in 1953, Beauvoir points to death as explicitly opposed to birth as the only truth of human existence. Beauvoir argues that transcendence is found in the warrior, for it is in war that:

> [Man] proved dramatically that life is not the supreme value for man, but on the contrary that it should be made to serve ends more important than itself. The worst curse that was laid upon woman was that she should be excluded from these warlike forays. For it is not in giving life but in risking life that man is raised above the animal; that is why superiority has been accorded in humanity not to the sex that brings forth but to that which kills.[47]

To base the freedom of humanity on death instead of on life is problematic indeed. In an age where nuclear annihilation is a very real possibility, a philosophy based solely on death is suicidal. The recognition that giving birth is a way to project oneself and humanity freely into the future would give existentialism the life-affirming quality that must be demanded of any political philosophy today.

If the labour of childbirth and childrearing is not only a project, but one in which human individuals gain a sense of connectedness to others and an ability to transcend death, then the birth and raising of children ought to be central concerns of any society. In fact, most societies relegate such labour to women only, where it is seen to lack value. The birth and raising of children is valuable precisely because the human individual is of ultimate value. The fact that Beauvoir does

[46] Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity,* p. 102.
[47] Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (New York: Vantage, 1974), p. 72.

not recognize this does not mean that existentialism must be rejected altogether. Rather, to existentialism's preoccupation with death must be added a consideration of birth: the understanding of birth and death as forming a dialectic of human existence. Existentialism offers a political philosophy that places the human individual in a position of freedom and responsibility; to it, some contemporary feminists add a life-affirming dimension. Anarchism must take from both.

In a practical sense, what would the adoption of feminist-infused existentialism mean for anarchism? In addition to the traditional challenge of setting up a nonhierarchical social and economic system, anarchists would also have to consider ways in which childbirth and childrearing could be shared by all members of the community. This is not to say that every person would have to reproduce biologically, but rather that communities ought explicitly to create child-supportive environments. While anarchists and existentialists have not generally regarded children as an important issue, feminists have.

Consider, for example, Charlotte Perkins Gilman's exploration of the raising of children in the fictional world of *Herland,* written in 1915.

> Well, here is the Herland child facing life… From the first memory, they knew Peace, Beauty, Order, Safety, Love, Wisdom, Justice, Patience, and Plenty. By "plenty" I mean that the babies grew up in an environment which met their needs, just as young fawns grow up in dewy forest glades and brook-fed meadows. And they enjoyed it as frankly and utterly as the fawns would.
>
> They found themselves in a big bright lovely world, full of the most interesting and enchanting things to learn about and to do. The people everywhere were friendly and polite. No Herland child ever met the overbearing rudeness we so commonly show to children. They were People, too, from the first; the most precious part of the nation.
>
> In each step of the rich experience of living, they found the instance they were studying widen out into the contact with an endless range of common interests. The things they learned were *related,* from the first; related to one another, and to the national prosperity…
>
> Even their shortcomings and misdeeds in childhood never were presented to them as sins; merely as errors and misplays — as in a game. Some of them, who were palpably less agreeable than others or who had a real weakness or fault, were treated with cheerful allowance, as a friendly group at whist would treat a poor player…
>
> That the children might be most nobly born, and reared in an environment calculated to allow the richest, freest growth, they had deliberately remodeled and improved the whole state.[48]

For Gilman, childrearing and education should be a process undertaken in freedom within an atmosphere of mutual respect. Being a child does not mean exclusion from the adult world, or the denial of the rights of the child; childhood is a time when children should be encouraged to experiment and play, learn and grow, *freely.* Gilman does not speak about men and women sharing the raising and educating of children since the only inhabitants of the fictional world

[48] Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *Herland,* introduction by Ann J. Lane (New York: Pantheon, 1979), pp. 100–102.

of Herland are women. It is perhaps precisely this absence of men that allows Gilman in 1915 to concentrate on the issue of children — a private realm "women's issue" that is conspicuously absent in most public-issue oriented male writing. In *Herland,* Gilman is stating that what are seen as private realm activities are really political issues. These are issues that anarchism must address if it is truly to fight oppression and hierarchy in all their forms.

More recently, Marge Piercy unfolds an alternative world in contrast to today's society in *Woman on the Edge of Time.* Childrearing in the fictional community of Mattapoisett is shared by three people, who take primary responsibility for their children. School, as such, has been eliminated; children learn through working with other children and adults. Jackrabbit and Luciente introduce Connie, a woman from our time and place, to their world.

> In one of the spiderweb gardens an old man with a bush of white hair and a gnarled face, arms like driftwood scoured by salt and wind, was picking peas into a basket and weeding into another, with two kids of nine or ten working on either side.
>
> "How come they aren't in school?" she asked. "Is school out already for the summer?"
>
> "This *is* school," Luciente said, drawing Connie nearer to them.
>
> "This one is lamb's-quarters, no?" one kid was asking.
>
> "Can you eat it?"
>
> "Fasure."
>
> "Look at the shape of the pea flowers. Most legumes have irregular flowers with five petals — see, the two lower ones join in a keel, like the keel on the fishing boats. The two at the sides are like spread wings. Then you have the one on top. Most legumes have leaves like these."
>
> "Alternate. Compound. With these twisty things that hold on?"
>
> "Tendrils. Some have thorns instead. After we're done weeding, we'll look for a tree that's evolved in a typical legume way, that has thorns a couple of inches long." His fingers showed the size.
>
> As they strolled on, she said, "But they can't possibly learn as much that way as they would in a classroom with a book!"
>
> "They can read. We all read by four or so," Jackrabbit said. "But who wants to grow up with a head full of facts in boxes? We never leave school and go to work. We're always working, always studying. We think, what person thinks person knows has to be tried out all the time. Placed against what people need. We care a lot *how* things are done"[49] (original emphasis).

Children, then, are fully integrated into the community. That means that all men and women have some connection to children, as they work and play with children in everything they do. Children are treated as people, not objects. The education gained by being full members of the community is a rich one, for the children and adults alike. Everyone benefits from this humane nonauthoritarian approach to childrearing: children grow up with self-respect and a concern for

[49] Marge Piercy, *Woman on the Edge of Time* (New York: Fawcett Crest, 1976), pp. 130–131.

others while adults establish a direct connection with the next generation, the future. As Luciente explains to Connie:

> We all teach. The kids work with us. We try to share what we have learned and what we don't know… I think maybe growing up is less mysterious with us since the adult world isn't separate. What better place to learn anatomy than in a clinic? What better place to learn botany than a field of corn? What better place to study mechanics than a repair shop? … We ask a lot of our kids but … politely? It's not the one-to-one bind you had with your daughter, from what you say. We have more space, more people to love us.[50]

This is a humane approach to children, which ultimately means a humane approach to oneself. How many adults have looked back at their childhood and shuddered at the remembrance of authoritarian parents and teachers? How many people feel emotionally deformed as adults because they were treated as subhuman as children? For education and childrearing to be humane it must be anti-authoritarian; children deserve to be brought up in anarchy, in freedom. Children are the epitome of a human project — *because* they are open-ended or, to put it another way, free. A sane, humane society must learn from the Mattapoisettians the art of being with children.

For some people, however, excellence is equated with authoritarianism; in order for a child to excel, s/he must be forced to practise, whether it be the multiplication tables or the piano scales. These people have lost sight of the child as a concrete end in itself; rather, they see the child as a means to an abstract end: excellence. In an interview with Marge Piercy about *Woman on the Edge of Time,* Barbara Dunning and Jean Lunn ask whether the way people now study, say to be musicians, would be lost in a world like Mattapoisett. Piercy responds that yes, some practices we have today would be considered inappropriate in a more humane culture.

> I think that probably certain kinds of things would be lost. For instance, the violin prodigy who starts at age two and practices seventeen hours a day, yes, I don't think there'd be any. Because I don't think anybody would be willing to have their life warped in that way… If you value the sound that you get out of castrated boys enough to castrate boys to get it — if you don't, you won't. I think that [Mattapoisett's] a society in which no thing is valued enough to destroy a person to get it. I suspect that such a society would produce actually more interesting art. Almost everyone in that society practices some art, and some people do it full time.[51]

Piercy is concerned not with the production of culture, but with the production of healthy people. As human individuals are ends in themselves and ought not to be made into means to serve any ends, Piercy's point is well taken.

Both Piercy and Gilman argue in their work that childrearing and education should become universal concerns, with everyone in the society taking part. Gilman posits an all-female society as a means to generalize what is considered to be traditionally feminine issues; Piercy has both men and women sharing in the role of primary caregiver. Both writers advocate the integration of children and reproductive labour into the public realm, which they argue will have a positive

[50] Piercy, *Woman on the Edge of Time,* pp. 132–133.

[51] Marge Piercy, *Parti-Colored Blocks for a Quilt* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1982), pp. 105–106.

effect on society as a whole. Anarchists can learn from these and other feminists the value of human life, and the importance of integrating the perpetuation of life into the mainstream of society. For if everybody took part in the raising of children, who could order those very children into war?

Existentialism and anarchism are the theory and practice that see individual freedom as necessary; feminism understands that there would be no individuals at all without birth. Existentialism, in insisting that the world is created by human individuals, allows for an infinite number of futures, even the possibility of a world without hierarchy. If human individuals are themselves projects, then children are the project of a project. Individuals must, then, in freedom, reach out beyond themselves to others, whether they live today or are yet to be born.

Chapter Seven: Beyond Feminism: Anarchism and Human Freedom

Anarchism is not only a more coherent liberatory movement than liberal feminism, but it is also a more inclusive and complete liberatory movement than feminism as a whole. This is not to say that feminism has not been useful; anarchism, for a variety of reasons, has yet to emerge as a significant popular movement while feminism has accomplished many extensive gains for women. The feminist movement has identified and documented the very specific domination of women by men in virtually all cultures throughout recorded history. As Seyla Benhabib observes, "the historically known gender-sex systems have contributed to the oppression and exploitation of women. The task of feminist critical theory is to uncover this fact, and to develop a theory that is emancipatory and reflective, and which can aid women in their struggles to overcome oppression and exploitation."[1] Anarchism, with its anti-authoritarian imperative, can learn from feminist analysis how the male/female hierarchy in particular is manifested and perpetuated, and can join feminism in opposing male domination. Additionally, in its concern for abolishing male supremacy, feminist criticism produces considerable insight into the general nature of hierarchy, which can further help the anarchist protest against all power and domination. However, because the feminist movement as an entity lacks an inherent critique of power and domination, it may be insufficient for the achievement of existential freedom for all women.

Anarchist political philosophy is based upon the belief that individuals are capable of self-determination, that self-determination is the foundation for human freedom, and that power relationships undermine self-determination and therefore must be constantly opposed. This uncompromising anti-authoritarianism is what makes anarchism so compelling to its adherents, both as a philosophy and as a political movement. Anarchists understand that freedom is grounded in the refusal of the individual to exercise power over others, coupled with the opposition of the individual to restrictions by any external authority. Thus, anarchists challenge any form of organization or relationship which fosters the exercise of power and domination. Compulsory education, State power, sexual repression, censorship, private property, alienated labour, child abuse — these are all relationships of power that anarchists critically challenge.

Of course, many expressions of power exist in our society other than those listed above; what distinguishes the anarchist from other political activists is that the anarchist opposes them all. This condemnation of power *per se* is fundamental to the anarchist position and gives it a critical impetus which takes it beyond traditional political movements. The feminist movement, with its central concern the liberation of women, does not contain within itself the larger critique of power that is basic to anarchism. Without an implicit condemnation of power *as such,* feminism risks limiting itself to an incomplete struggle for liberation.

[1] Seyla Benhabib, "The Generalized and the Concrete Other: The Kohlberg-Gilligan Controversy and Feminist Theory," in Seyla Benhabib and Drucilla Cornell, editors, *Feminism as Critique* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1987), p. 80.

It is absolutely necessary that an explicit anti-authoritarianism be present in a political philosophy if it is to bring about true human liberation. *No* hierarchy is acceptable, *no* ruler is allowable, *no* domination is justifiable in a free society. Clearly, if this antiauthoritarian principle is not fundamental to a political philosophy, then domination and hierarchy can exit in theory and practice without presenting a crisis. As a movement, feminism does not have as a defining characteristic an anti-authoritarian critique of power and domination; therefore, as a political philosophy, it leaves the door open for the acceptance of hierarchy and domination.

Of course it is possible to point to various groups and individuals within feminism who are critical of power, domination, and hierarchy. The feminist writer Marilyn French, for instance, criticizes power in her book *Beyond Power: On Women, Men and Morals,* and advocates building a new world on what she argues is the opposite of power: pleasure.[2] Another feminist writer, Starhawk, likewise criticizes the exercise of what she calls "power-over," and advocates the use of consensus decision making as one means to counter power.[3] Angela Miles, in her essay "Feminist Radicalism in the 1980's," argues for an "integrative" feminism that opposes all forms of domination.[4] These are only three examples of feminist thinkers who consciously oppose the exercise of power and domination — there are many others.

However, while one can point to various examples of feminist thought which focus on the problem of power, this does not indicate in any sense that a critique of power is necessary or integral to feminist theory. In other words, just as one can be a feminist and oppose power like the three writers cited above, it is also possible and not inconsistent for a feminist to embrace the use of power and advocate domination without relinquishing the right to be a feminist.

For example, in her essay "The Future — If There Is One — Is Female," Sally Miller Gearhart argues for the establishment of a matriarchy; she says we must "begin thinking of flipping the coin, of making the exchange of power, of building the ideology of female primacy and control."[5] A matriarchy, like a patriarchy, is based on power; the fact that in a matriarchy *women* hold the power does not negate the fact that power is still being exercised.

Jo Freeman, in her article "The Tyranny of Structurelessness," argues that feminists must abandon their small leaderless groups in favour of delegated power and a strong, centralized feminist organization.[6] In place of small grassroots groups that use consensus to make decisions, Freeman advocates large-scale democratic decision making without questioning the tyranny of the majority over the minority that is inevitable in any democratic form of organization. For Freeman, if feminism is to be successful, then "some middle ground between domination and ineffectiveness can and must be found."[7] Clearly, Freeman sees nothing wrong with women participating in forms of politics which are based on the exercise of domination and power.

Catharine MacKinnon, in *Toward a Feminist Theory of the State,* suggests that a widening of State power in the form of a feminist State is the only way to counter male sexual domination. As the discussion in Chapter Two indicated, MacKinnon does not question power itself; in fact, she

[2] Marilyn French, *Beyond Power: On Women, Men and Morals* (New York: Summit, 1985), pp. 539–540.

[3] Starhawk, *Dreaming the Dark: Magic, Sex and Politics* (Boston: Beacon, 1982), pp. 110–111.

[4] Angela Miles, *Feminist Radicalism in the 1980's* (Montreal: CultureTexts, 1985), p. 5.

[5] Sally Miller Gearhart, "The Future — If There Is One — Is Female," in Pam McAllister, editor, *Reweaving the Web of Life: Feminism and Nonviolence* (Philadelphia: New Society Publishers, 1982), p. 270.

[6] Jo Freeman, "The Tyranny of Structurelessness," in *Untying the Knot: Feminism, Anarchism and Organisation* (Montreal: BOA, 1986).

[7] Freeman, "The Tyranny of Structurelessness," p. 14.

advocates investing the State with more power over the individual. MacKinnon's main concern is with *who* exercises power; she believes that feminists must wield power through a strong State in order to achieve the liberation of women.[8]

Finally, as discussed at length in Chapter Four, the liberal feminist Betty Friedan maintains that the struggle for and the achievement of women's equality should take place without disturbing the existing hierarchies of the State and the capitalist economic system.[9] Friedan has no quarrel with economic or political power — she simply wants men and women to be able to compete for power on an equal footing. Gearhart, Freeman, MacKinnon and Friedan — all four are undeniably feminist, and all four accept power as part of their world view. This acceptance of power does not in any way disqualify them from being feminists. Feminism may allow for a critique of power, but a critique of power is not necessary to feminism.

In spite of the fact that some feminists clearly embrace the use of power, the argument has been made by certain theorists that feminism is inherently anarchistic. For instance, Lynne Farrow takes this position when she claims that "Feminism practices what Anarchism preaches."[10] Peggy Kornegger also asserts an identity between the two movements when she states "feminists have been unconscious anarchists for years."[11] Both Farrow and Kornegger, in their enthusiasm to link feminism with anarchism, ignore groups and individuals within the women's movement who are decidedly "archie," that is who endorse the use of power in both theory and practice. By collapsing anarchism and feminism into one movement, Kornegger and Farrow disregard the rich diversity of perspectives that make up the feminist movement, at the same time committing a grave injustice to anarchism by focusing on the narrow issue of women's subordination. Anarchism embraces feminism, but anarchism is also a great deal more. In fact, feminism and anarchism are not identical movements as Farrow and Kornegger suggest; feminism as a whole recognizes the iniquity of the oppression of women by men; anarchism opposes oppression of all kinds. Certainly some feminists look beyond sexism to a wider, anarchistic critique of power; however, this wider critique is not at all necessary to feminism.

Since it is possible that one could be a feminist without sharing the anarchist sensibility towards power, then it is logical to ask whether it is possible to be an anarchist without being a feminist. In other words, can anarchism accommodate the oppression of women without contradicting itself? As anarchism is a political philosophy that opposes *all* relationships of power, it is inherently feminist. An anarchist who supports male domination contradicts the implicit critique of power which is the fundamental principle upon which all of anarchism is built. Sexist anarchists do indeed exist, but only by virtue of directly contradicting their own anarchism. This contradiction leaves sexist anarchists open to criticism on their own terms. Anarchism must be feminist if it is to remain self-consistent.

Not only is anarchism inherently feminist, but also it goes beyond feminism in its fundamental opposition to all forms of power, hierarchy and domination. Anarchism transcends and contains feminism in its critique of power. This implicit opposition to the exercise of power gives anarchism a wider mandate than feminism or most other liberatory movements. Anarchist political philosophy and practice is free to critically oppose any situation of oppression. While race, class,

---

[8] Catharine A. MacKinnon, *Toward a Feminist Theory of the State* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), p. 41.

[9] See Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: Dell, 1974), especially pp. 330, 337–339.

[10] Lynne Farrow, *Feminism as Anarchism* (Montreal: BOA, 1988), p. 1.

[11] Peggy Kornegger, "Anarchism: The Feminist Connection," in *The Second Wave,* Spring, 1975, p. 31.

age, gender, sexuality, or ability, for instance, may pose analytic problems for other movements, anarchism is capable of dealing with all these issues as legitimate because of its fundamental commitment to freedom for *all* individuals. No one oppression is given special status in anarchism — *all* oppression is equally undesirable. Anarchism fights for existential freedom against each and every form of power and domination, not just a particular historical manifestation of power. This gives anarchism a flexibility not available to other movements. Not only can anarchism address any form of oppression that exists today, it is versatile enough to be able to respond to any form of oppression that may emerge in the future. If tomorrow, for instance, left-handed people were proclaimed to be criminals for their lack of right-handedness, anarchists would have to oppose such oppression in order to remain true to anarchism's underlying existential individualism. It is this fundamental anti-authoritarianism which leads anarchists to fight for the dignity and freedom of such groups as women, people of colour, gays and lesbians, people with AIDS, the differently abled, the poor, and the homeless, among others. Anarchism goes beyond most other liberatory movements in opposing oppression in whatever form it takes, without assigning priority to one oppression over another.

Unlike most other political movements, anarchism understands that all oppressions are mutually reinforcing; therefore it urges that the liberation struggle take place on many fronts at once. Thus, some anarchists concentrate on challenging State power, others focus on opposing male domination, and still others spend their energy fighting against capitalist exploitation, compulsive heterosexuality, organized religion, and a myriad of other causes. The anarchist movement accommodates a diversity of anti-authoritarian struggles, and while each is recognized as being essential to the establishment of a truly free society, none is placed as prior to the others. Anarchism fights all oppression in all its manifestations.

Anarchism goes beyond feminism, beyond liberalism, indeed beyond most other liberatory movements, in its relentless quest for individual freedom. Certainly there are people working within other movements who share anarchism's aversion to power; however, any political movement that does not have at its core an anti-authoritarian critique of power leaves itself open to anarchist questioning. The gift of anarchism lies in this critique — a thoughtful but relentless questioning of authority and power, one which seeks to create a world where all individuals may live in freedom.

Bibliography

Allen, Christine Garside. "Nietzsche's Ambivalence About Women." In *The Sexism of Social and Political Theory: Women and Reproduction from Plato to Nietzsche,* pp. 117–133. Edited by Lorenne M.G. Clark and Lynda Lange. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979.

Annas, Julia. "Mill and the Subjection of Women." *Philosophy,* Volume 52, 1977, pp. 179–194.

Bakunin, Michael. *Bakunin on Anarchism.* Edited by Sam Dolgoff. Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1980.

Bakunin, Michael. *God and the State.* Introduction by Paul Avrich. New York: Dover, 1970.

Bakunin, Mikhail. *The Political Philosophy of Bakunin.* Edited by G. P. Maximoff. Preface by Bert F. Hoselitz. New York: The Free Press, 1953.

Bausch, Christa. "Review of *The Sceptical Feminist* by Janet Radcliffe Richards." *Sociology and Social Research,* Volume 69, No. 2, January 1985, pp. 274–275.

Beauvoir, Simone de. *The Second Sex.* New York: Vantage, 1974.

Beauvoir, Simone de. *The Ethics of Ambiguity.* Don Mills, Ontario: Citadel, 1948.

Benhabib, Seyla. "The Generalized and the Concrete Other: The Kohlberg-Gilligan Controversy and Feminist Theory." In *Feminism as Critique,* pp. 77–95. Edited by Seyla Benhabib and Drucilla Cornell. Cambridge: PolityPress, 1987.

Berkman, Alexander. *ABC of Anarchism.* London: Freedom Press, 1977.

Biehl, Janet. "Ecofeminism and Deep Ecology." *Our Generation,* Volume 19, No. 2, Spring/Summer 1988, pp. 19–31.

BOA. "Sidewinding Our Way to Sedition." *BOA: Bevy of Anarchist/Feminists,* No. 1, 1987, pp. 7–9.

Bookchin, Murray. *The Ecology of Freedom.* Palo Alto: Cheshire, 1982.

Choice, "Review of *The Sceptical Feminist* by Janet Radcliffe Richards," Volume 18, No. 9, May 1981, pp. 1278–1279.

Chomsky, Noam. *The Chomsky Reader.* Edited by James Peck. New York: Pantheon Books, 1987.

Clark, John. *The Anarchist Moment.* Montreal: Black Rose, 1984.

Cohen, Marjorie. "The Significance of the Sexual Division of Labour to Economic Development." *York Studies in Political Economy,* Third Issue. Spring, 1984, pp. 1–23.

Dijkstra, Sandra. "Simone de Beauvoir and Betty Friedan: The Politics of Omission." *Feminist Studies* 6, No. 2, Summer 1980, pp. 290–303.

Drinnon, Richard. *Rebel in Paradise: A Biography of Emma Goldman.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964.

Eisenstein, Zillah R. *The Radical Future of Liberal Feminism.* New York: Longman, 1981.

Farrow, Lynne. *Feminism as Anarchism.* Montreal: BOA, 1988.

Finlayson, Judith. "Friedan Keeps Up the Battle." *The Globe and Mail,* Saturday, November 9, 1985, p. D20.

Freeman, Jo. "The Tyranny of Structurelessness." In *Untying the Knot: Feminism, Anarchism and Organisation.* Montreal: BOA (Bevy of Anarchist/Feminists), 1986, pp. 5–16.

French, Marilyn. *Beyond Power: On Women, Men and Morals.* New York: Summit, 1985.
Friedan, Betty. *The Feminine Mystique.* New York: Dell, 1974.
Gearhart, Sally Miller. "The Future — If There Is One — Is Female." In *Reweaving the Web of Life: Feminism and Nonviolence,* pp. 266–284. Edited by Pam McAllister. Philadelphia: New Society Publishers, 1982.
Gilman, Charlotte Perkins. *Herland.* Introduction by Ann. J. Lane. New York: Pantheon, 1979.
Goldman, Emma. *Vision on Fire.* Edited with introductions by David Porter. New Paltz, N.Y.: Commonground Press, 1983.
Goldman, Emma. *Anarchism and Other Essays.* Introduction by Richard Drinnon. New York: Dover, 1969.
Goldman, Emma. *Living My Life.* Volumes I and II. New York: Dover, 1970.
Goldman, Emma. "Anarchism." In *The American Mind,* Volume II, pp. 1015–1018. Edited by H.R. Warfel, R.H. Gabriel and S.T. Williams. New York: American Book Company, 1937.
Goodway, David. "Introduction." In *For Anarchism: History, Theory, and Practice,* pp. 1–22. Edited by David Goodway. London: Routledge, 1989.
Graham, Robert. "The Role of Contract in Anarchist Ideology." In *For Anarchism: History, Theory, and Practice,* pp. 150–175. Edited by David Goodway. London: Routledge, 1989.
Guerin, Daniel. *Anarchism.* With an introduction by Noam Chomsky. Translated by Mary Klopper. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1970.
Harrison, J. Frank. *The Modern State.* Montreal: Black Rose, 1983.
Hewitt, Marsha. "Emma Goldman: The Case for AnarchoFeminism." *Our Generation,* Volume 17, No. 1, September, 1985, pp. 167–175.
Holmstrom, Nancy. "Review of *The Sceptical Feminist* by Janet Radcliffe Richards." *Ethics,* Volume 92, No. 2, January 1982, pp. 388–389.
Jaggar, Alison M. *Feminist Politics and Human Nature.* Sussex: Harvester Press, 1983.
Kline, Wm. Gary. *The Individualist Anarchists: A Critique of Liberalism.* Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 1987.
Kornegger, Peggy. "Anarchism: The Feminist Connection." *The Second Wave,* Spring 1975, pp. 26–37.
Kropotkin, Peter. *Act For Yourselves.* Edited by Nicolas Walter and Heiner Becker. London: Freedom Press, 1988.
Kropotkin, Peter. *Mutual Aid: A Factor in Evolution.* London: Freedom Press, 1987.
Kropotkin, Peter. *Anarchism and Anarchist Communism.* London: Freedom Press, 1987.
Kymlicka, Will. "Liberalism and Communitarianism." *Canadian Journal of Philosophy,* Volume 18, No. 2, June 1988, pp. 181–204.
Laurin-Frenette, Nicole. "On the Women's Movement, Anarchism and the State." *Our Generation,* Volume 15, No. 2, Summer, 1982, pp. 27–39.
MacKinnon, Catharine A. *Toward a Feminist Theory of the State.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989.
Macpherson, C. B. *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988.
Macpherson, C. B. *The Life and Times of Liberal Democracy.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977.
Macpherson, C. B. *The Real World of Democracy.* Toronto: CBC Publications, 1970.
Marsh, Margaret S. *Anarchist Women, 1870–1920.* Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1981.

Marshall, Peter. *Demanding the Impossible: A History of Anarchism.* London: Harper Collins, 1992.
Marx, Karl. "Marx to L. Kugelmann in Hanover." In *Marx, Engels, Lenin: Anarchism and Anarcho-Syndicalism,* pp. 43–44. Edited by N. Y. Kolpinsky. Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1972.
Marx, Karl and Friedrich Engels. *The Communist Manifesto.* Middlesex: Penguin, 1968.
McArthur, Judith N. "Utilitarians and the Woman Problem." *The Social Science Journal,* Volume 22, No. 3, July 1985, pp. 57–70.
McKercher, William R. *Freedom and Authority.* Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1989.
Miles, Angela. *Feminist Radicalism in the 1980's.* Montreal: CultureTexts, 1985.
Mill, John Stuart. "The Subjection of Women." In *Essays on Sex Equality: John Stuart Mill and Harriet Taylor Mill,* pp. 125–242. Edited with an introduction by Alice S. Rossi. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970.
Mill, John Stuart. *On Liberty.* Edited with an introduction by Gertrude Himmelfarb. London: Penguin Books, 1974.
Miller, David. *Anarchism.* London: J.M. Dent and Sons, 1984.
Mills, C. Wright. *The Sociological Imagination.* London: Oxford University Press, 1959.
Mitchell, Juliet. *Women's Estate.* New York: Vintage, 1973.
O'Brien, Mary. *The Politics of Reproduction.* Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981.
Pateman, Carole. *The Sexual Contract.* Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988.
Pateman, Carole. "Introduction: The Theoretical Subversiveness of Feminism." In *Feminist Challenges: Social and Political Theory,*
pp. 1–10. Edited by Carole Pateman and Elizabeth Gross. Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1987.
Piercy, Marge. *Parti-Colored Blocks for a Quilt.* Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1982.
Piercy, Marge. *Woman on the Edge of Time.* New York: Fawcett Crest, 1976.
Proudhon, Pierre-Joseph. *What is Property?* New York: Dover, 1970.
Read, Herbert. "Existentialism, Marxism and Anarchism." In *The Essential Works of Anarchism.* Edited by Marshall S. Shatz. New York: Quadrangle, 1972.
Richards, Janet Radcliffe. *The Sceptical Feminist.* Middlesex: Penguin, 1980.
Ring, Jennifer. "Mill's "The Subjection of Women": The Methodological Limits of Liberal Feminism." *The Review of Politics,* Volume 47, No. 1, 1985, pp. 27–44.
Rocker, Rudolph. *Anarcho-Syndicalism.* Introduction by Nicolas Walter. Preface by Noam Chomsky. London: Pluto Press, 1989.
Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Being and Nothingness.* Translated with an introduction by Hazel E. Barnes. New York: Washington Square Press, 1966.
Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Existentialism and Human Emotions.* New York: Wisdom, 1957.
Scheman, Naomi. "Individualism and the Objects of Psychology." In *Discovering Reality,* pp. 225–244. Edited by Sandra Harding and Merrill B. Hintikka. Dordrecht, Holland: D. Reidel Publishing, 1983.
Shulman, Alix Kates, editor. *Red Emma Speaks.* New York: Schocken Books, 1983.
Sixel, Friedrich W. *Crisis and Critique: On the 'Logic of Late Capitalism.* Leiden: E. J.Brill, 1988.
Starhawk. *Dreaming the Dark: Magic, Sex and Politics.* Boston: Beacon, 1982.
Tulloch, Gail. *Mill and Sexual Equality.* Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1989.
Wendell, Susan. "A (Qualified) Defense of Liberal Feminism." *Hypatia,* Volume 2, No. 2, Summer 1987, pp. 65–160.

Wexler, Alice. *Emma Goldman: An Intimate Life.* New York: Pantheon Books, 1984.
Wolff, Robert Paul. "Four Questions on the Draft." In *Philosophy: A Modern Encounter,* pp. 407–414. Edited by Robert Paul Wolff. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1971.
Woodcock, George. *The Anarchist Reader.* Glasgow: Collins, 1977.

The Anarchist Library (Mirror)
Anti-Copyright

L. Susan Brown
The Politics of Individualism
Liberalism, Liberal Feminism, and Anarchism
1993

<https://archive.org/details/politicsofindivi0000brow>
OCLC: 491469138
ISBN 1-895431-79-4 (Hardcover), 1-895431-78-6 (Paperback)

Black Rose Books

usa.anarchistlibraries.net