Liberalism, Human Rights and a Culture of Domination: A Feminist Analysis

On Domination

Human rights

Claims to human rights are necessary because of the harms caused by the more obviously oppressive ways in which domination operates, that is, through overt violence and callous indifference. These two forms of domination are illustrated by the two kinds of human rights' violations. There are those atrocities perpetrated by identifiable agents—authoritarian regimes, police, security forces, official armies, unofficial militias and paramilitaries, bureaucratic functionaries, individuals acting under orders, etc.—and which are so clearly dehumanising—genocide, torture, beatings, rape, killings, forced resettlements, arbitrary arrests and imprisonment—that not even the perpetrators try to justify them, but rather deny they occurred and try to hide them. The paradigm examples of violations of this sort occurred under the Nazi and Stalinist regimes, although they are by no means the only examples. These are the kinds of social conditions that give rise to the need for the so-called 'first generation' of civil and political rights. The difficulties in bringing the guilty to account are enormous, largely because of the refusal of the powerful nation states that dominate the UN Security Council, China and the United States in particular, to allow the establishment of any international enforcement mechanisms to which they themselves might be subjected (Robertson, 1999). Nonetheless, it is possible to identify both the crimes and their perpetrators, notwithstanding the political impotence or lack of political will.

The second kind of human rights' violation has no immediately identifiable perpetrators. The most extreme example here is the widespread hunger throughout the world (Alston and Tomasevski, 1984; O'Neill, 1986; Drèze and Sen, 1989). An estimated 830 million people are starving (UNWire, 1999), including people in the rich industrialised nations (Riches, ed., 1997). These are the social conditions that give rise to the need for the so-called 'second-generation' social and economic rights. Here, there are no readily identifiable agents or agencies responsible for the situation. The injustices are obvious; what is less obvious is the nature of the social conditions that both cause the injustice and give permission, however tacitly, for the social destructiveness.[1]

These two different forms of rights violations—the overt and direct on the one hand, and the diffuse and dispersed on the other—indicate the kinds of social conditions which make explicit appeals to human rights necessary because they are conditions which permit, condone, justify or cause the atrocities. It is not sufficient simply to describe to these background conditions as 'a demonstrably nasty world' or as 'evil', as Susan Mendus does: 'the political impetus for human rights comes from the recognition

[1] The literature enumerates three 'generations' of human rights – civil and political, social and economic, and cultural (James 1994; Charlesworth 1995). However, from a feminist standpoint the third, 'cultural' generation of rights has an uncertain status. It is true that minority peoples have been subordinated (and worse) by the dominance of the West. But 'culture' is not an unambiguous basis for making rights claims, first, because it lacks the universal form of claims to access food, clothing and shelter (etc.), and second, because 'culture' is too often an alibi for the oppression of women.

of evil as a permanent threat in the world' (Mendus 1995: 23-4).[2] She does make the important point that human rights are not some kind of positive good unattached to the social conditions that give rise to them. Such an interpretation, she argues, allows the enumeration of rights to 'grow uncontrollably' and to deteriorate into a set of trivial demands by anyone about anything (p.13-14). Instead, she suggests that rights be seen as 'bulwarks against evil' (p.23), not something to be struggled *for*, but rather a positive affirmation of human worth and dignity against those 'forces of destruction which are always at large' (p.20).

But although terms like 'evil' and 'forces of destruction' do serve as reminders that human rights claims do not arise out of nowhere, they are insufficiently precise. In contrast, the term 'domination', in the sense of social arrangements intended to ensure that powerful vested interests will prevail at the expense of even the most basic interests of those who are not powerful, captures more accurately the nature of those social arrangements that either actively transgress norms of human dignity or fail to provide the necessary conditions for its existence.

Terminology

I use the term 'domination' in preference to other related terms like 'tyranny', 'despotism', 'oppression', 'power', 'authority' or 'inequality', because 'domination' identifies more precisely what is at stake. 'Tyranny' and 'despotism', for example, are archaic terms that have the individualistic connotation that something does not count as tyranny (or despotism) unless there exists an actual tyrant (or despot). In my usage of 'domination', in contrast, the tyranny may not even be imposed on people from without (given the crucial role played by legitimacy and consent), much less by any actual person.

The term 'oppression' tends to confine the focus of attention to the victims without first recognising what it is that victimises them. While it is certainly the case that domination creates categories of the oppressed, and exposing the damage and human misery is important and necessary, focusing only on the oppression can divert attention away from the grand structures of power which cause it, and away, too, from those who benefit. Domination, on the other hand, names the nature of the problem, and its source rather than its effects.

The term 'power' is politically ambiguous. It can refer to power-as-domination, that is, power over the lives of others, and coercion, violence and exploitation. But it can also refer to power as the ability and capacity to get things done and to control the conditions of one's own existence. Power does not always refer to those corrupted and corrupting mechanisms of social control of subordinated populations; it can also refer to the means for gaining access to the resources required by everyone. This second kind of power is positive. It is what a politics of liberation is struggling towards. In contrast, the first kind, power-as-domination, is what we need to be emancipated from. Using the term 'power' confuses two issues which are not only different, but diametric opposites—one the enemy is to be fought against, the other the goal to be struggled

[2] Moreover, I doubt that there is any political purpose to be served in seeing evil as permanent, or even if such a statement makes any sense given that no one could ever be in a position to know whether it were true or not.

towards. Whatever the problems with distinguishing them in practice,[3] it is important to be clear that there are two ways in which power is exercised, and that while one is exploitative, the other is in everyone's interests. The crucial question about power is: whose interests does it serve and whose interests does it over-ride, negate, destroy or marginalise?

Much the same objection can be applied to the term 'authority'. Not all authority is bad in the sense of forcible imposition; on the contrary, some forms of authority are necessary, for example, to organise adequate and fair distribution of resources, or to protect the helpless and innocent, or to ensure that the truth is heard and the lies challenged. There are some areas that require more authority not less, the field of human rights itself, for example, or the voices of women speaking in their own interests. Like power, authority too can be judged according to the interests it serves, whether it operates in the service of forms of power detrimental to segments of the population, or whether it operates in the service of genuinely human values and at the expense of no one's basic human needs. Using the term 'domination' signals that it is the presence or absence of domination that makes the difference between one kind of power and authority and the other, between what must be resisted, and what needs to be embraced or struggled for.

As for the term 'inequality', although it is the case that domination creates inequalities, the term is too imprecise to be useful. This imprecision is no accident, but rather serves the political purpose of keeping any debate around resource distribution muddled and confused. The discourse of 'inequality' keeps any political challenges to the powers-that-be tightly reined in by setting strict limits on what can be investigated. In the first place, although 'inequality' logically implies too much as well as too little, in fact it is only ever applied to those who have too little. In the case of inequality of resources, for example, poverty is well recognised as a problem while wealth is not, even though the accumulation of wealth in the hands of the few is arguably the cause of the poverty of others, and hence is the prior problem. Talk of 'inequality' keeps attention to be focused on the victims of domination, on those who have too little—money, food, freedom, personal safety and security—while deflecting attention away from those who have too much.

Second, it tends to carry with it the assumption that, because inequality is the problem, equality is the solution. This paralyses any political opposition by demanding an impossibility—not everyone can be a multi-billionaire, CEO of a transnational corporation, skilled in the latest information technology, a player on the stock exchange, owner of the mass media, or even in paid employment. 'Equality' is not even conceivable (as centuries of liberal philosophising have demonstrated), much less a feasible political option.

And third, the term 'inequality' is inextricably entangled with the idea of 'difference', while its opposite, 'equality', denotes 'sameness'. As a consequence, couching the problem only in terms of 'inequality' all too often implies that the problem lies in being different, and that the solution is to become the same. By setting a homogeneous standard for all, it allows any failure to achieve to be attributed to the personal

[3] For example, the care a mother has for her infant involves a 'power over' that infant. She literally has a life and death control over such a helpless dependent. But her exercising of that control is crucial for the infant's survival and gradual development into an independent existence.

deficiencies of those unable to attain it. But who is different, and whose is the standard to be emulated, is not a matter of indifference. The differences and the standards of sameness are not randomly scattered throughout the population. On the contrary, they are systematically organised in accordance with the interests of those who have the power to make their will prevail despite the interests, wishes or needs of others. It is the term 'domination' which most accurately reflects that systematic organisation.

The reference to 'the interests of all' is not intended to imply the likelihood, or even the desirability, of a social order where everyone is satisfied. On the contrary, in a world without domination there would be some who would be thoroughly dissatisfied, namely those who wanted to accumulate wealth in their own hands, orthose who craved power over others, or those who felt the need to use others for their own gratifications. Perhaps in a genuinely egalitarian social order, such desires would not exist. Be that as it may, the point of using the phrase 'in the interests of all' is not to identify those social conditions that would satisfy everybody – that is to demand an impossibility. Rather, the phrase is used in the context of social conditions which are clearly not in the interests of all and that is denied, disguised, justified or lied about in some way. It is a way of calling attention to those denials, disguises, justifications and lies.

The term 'interest' also needs clarification. My usage is not individualistic. Interests are not things people just happen to have, which 'society' (or particular institutions thereof) either satisfies or not, and which would remain the same however the social order was changed. In the sense in which I use the term, interests are socially constituted, and the relevant question here is whether the satisfaction of interests reinforces domination, or whether that satisfaction is a necessary part of a dignified human existence. In that sense, interests (like power and authority) are of two kinds. There are those constituted in accordance with relations of domination, the satisfaction of which can only be gained at someone else's expense—the male interest in prostitution, for example, or in maintaining control over women's reproductive capacities, or the interests of the rich in avoiding taxation, or the interests of capital in increasing rates of profit. And there are those interests to the satisfaction of which everyone ought to be entitled—access to sufficient resources to guarantee a life of comfort and security, for example, or protection from abuse and degradation. Distinguishing between two kinds of 'interest', however, only makes sense in the context of theorising domination. The distinction enables interrogation of interested claims for the extent to which they reinforce domination or challenge it.

Thus the phrase 'at the expense of' refers only to the latter kind of interests, those that contribute to genuine human dignity and well-being. The phrase does not apply to any of the interests of domination. 'At the expense of' means at the expense of someone's dignity, human rights and the satisfaction of their basic needs. Once again, even if we cannot enumerate human needs exhaustively, we can recognise when they are not being met. And if they are not being met because of social arrangements that favour the already rich and powerful, then those social arrangements are operating at the expense of those who are being deprived.

Identifying domination

It is systematic

The first thing to be said about domination is that it is systematic, that is, that its effects—war, poverty, violence, that 'evil' mentioned by Susan Mendus—are not

accidental occurrences but the kinds of events domination causes because of its inherent dehumanisation. Some people must be dehumanised in order that the privileged might appear at many times their natural size. But when I said above that the social arrangements of domination were intended to ensure that vested interests would prevail, I did not mean the deliberate and conscious devising of some plan or plans on the part of particular individuals or groups. I meant that domination was systematic in that it has a logic that is decipherable (as long as we occupy a moral and political standpoint that will allow the deciphering to happen). The social evils caused by domination are not random; rather, they are the logical requirement of a social order whose reason for existence is to enable some to have power over others. The chief motivating force of this system is to establish and maintain male power, but itis flexible enough to allow some (few) women to occupy positions of power, as long as they are enthusiastic supporters of the male-identified system.[4] This social order permits people to be harmed by providing categories of unworthiness to justify the harm, by requiring that some people flourish at other people's expense, and by purveying the interests of the powerful as the interests of everybody and as social reality per se.

Only certain sorts of people thrive under the system, and certain sorts do not, but the kinds of people they are, and whether they are successful or not, is enabled by the system, and not by something inherent in people themselves. We are all unique and different in our susceptibilities and resistances (as well as sharing a common humanity), and hence the system will affect each of us in unique and different ways; what is a life-long struggle for one person might be irrelevant for another. But the system also has a logic that selects some characteristics and ignores others, that allows some to thrive and some to atrophy. Domination favours brutality, ruthlessness and greed, so those characteristics will tend to flourish under conditions of domination. Given that these preferences must be hidden if the system is to present itself as in the interests of all, they will be presented as something else ('market forces' or 'freedom'), or their value will be reversed or neutralised ('greed is good', 'pornography is free speech', 'prostitution is sex work'). But those who are successful under the system of domination will not be the best people (judged from a genuinely human standpoint); nor will those who fail be deficient (judged from the same standpoint).

It claims 'legitimacy'

The term 'domination' suggests the existence of a ruling class, of those who dominate, and there are certainly beneficiaries of the hierarchies of worth and worthlessness established under conditions of domination in the sense that there are those who can accumulate more resources, power and privilege than most people can. The outright violence and the ruthless indifference to suffering and destitution are both consequences of the dehumanisation necessary for that accumulation. But for most purposes most of the time, domination does not appear in the form of an identifiable set of persons separate from the masses (i.e. the rest of us), persons who know their own interests and impose them directly on others. Instead, there is a system that presents itself as the interests of all. Although the system's logic is brutality, to the extent that its self-presentation is accepted as reality, it is maintained largely by the consent of its subjects, even those most oppressed by it. Or (to put the same point in

[4] Money is the chief form this power takes. The super-rich are all men, while most wealthy womenhave inherited their wealth from male relatives.

another way) the social arrangements of domination, whose nature as domination is disguised or ignored, are accorded legitimacy, not only by those who benefit from them, but also by those subjected to them.

My use of the term 'domination' goes beyond the usual connotations of the term—to quote the OED: 'lordly rule, sway, or control; ascendancy', 'exercising chief authority or rule; ruling, governing; most influential. Occupying a commanding position', 'to master'. It includes some of the implications of Max Weber's concept of '*Herrschaft'* (literally, 'Lordship'), in that what I mean by 'domination' includes both the notion of coercive impositions and the notion of a legitimacy perceived as such by dominators and dominated alike. This double meaning of 'coercion' and 'legitimacy' has caused problems for Weber's English translators. Translations tend to waver between 'authority' and 'domination' even though there are important political issues at stake depending on whether the authority in question is consensual or enforced.

Talcott Parsons, for example, said that the term 'authority' was an accurate translation of '*Herrschaft'* for those instances where Weber was concerned with '*legitime Herrschaft*' (legitimate authority). He himself used the terms 'imperative control' or 'imperative co-ordination' as translations of '*Herrschaft'* although, as even Parsons acknowledged, the term was 'awkward' (Parsons, ed., 1964: 152). In contrast, Reinhard Bendix considered using 'authority' as a translation for '*Herrschaft'*, but rejected it in favour of 'domination' on the grounds that the term 'authority' did not give sufficient emphasis to the coercive aspects of 'Herrschaft'. 'As a realist in the analysis of power', said Bendix, Weber 'would have been critical of any translation that tended to obscure the "threat of force" in all relations between superiors and subordinates' (Bendix, 1966: 481-2n13). However, whichever term is used—'authority' or 'domination'—there will be occasions when it is inappropriate. As I argued above, whether authority operates in the interests of everyone (and hence is, or ought to be, consensual), or whether it operates only in the interests of the powerful (and hence is imposed, whether or not it appears to be consensual), is precisely the question at issue. Using terminology that confuses the two meanings hides the political problem because it fails to acknowledge it.

My usage of the term, 'domination', differs from Weber's '*Herrschaft'* in that it allows for the possibility that there are forms of authority that are illegitimate from a genuinely human standpoint, no matter how legitimate they are formally and no matter how many consent. '*Herrschaft'* does maintain itself through claims to legitimacy. But it must also be asked: in whose interests, and at whose expense, is authority legitimated? To the extent that social arrangements do not in fact operate in the interests of all, but on the contrary establish hierarchies of entitlement whereby some people's interests, even the most trivial and ephemeral, prevail at the expense of even the most important and necessary interests of others, any claim that those arrangements are 'legitimate' is ideological and spurious.

The perceived legitimacy allows the violence to remain for the most part and most of the time covert, disguised and 'private', at least in the self-styled 'free world' of the Western liberal democracies. But it is an ever-present threat because domination gives tacit permission for those who fail to thrive under the system to be treated with contempt. While manifestations of that contempt are officially deplored, they are also effectively condoned by being interpreted as isolated instances, by being called something else, or by being accepted a legitimate nevertheless.

For example, although poverty and homelessness are widely lamented, their causes in an economic system based on profit maximisation are rarely, if ever, mentioned. The dominant view is that 'the poor' are responsible for their predicament. Either they are deliberately choosing to do something that makes them poor (e.g. take illicit drugs, refuse employment opportunities, commit crimes, have babies at too young an age), or they are unfortunate enough to have some condition that makes them poor (e.g. mental illness, disability). While the latter are 'deserving' poor and entitled to (meagre) support from 'the community', the former deserve nothing but opprobrium and various measures to coerce them into work.

Government policies intended to deal with unemployment, called 'assistance' or 'mutual obligation', are directed solely at the unemployed. The firms and organisations, including government bureaucracies, who have 'downsized' their staff and 'outsourced' and 'privatised' their responsibilities in the process of divesting themselves of 'surplus' workers and lengthening and intensifying the working day for those who are left, are rarely mentioned in the context of unemployment. But the victims of these standard operating procedures of the capitalist mode of production are demonised in the mass media (Windschuttle, 1980), and if they register as 'unemployed' for the purposes of claiming benefits, they are harassed, loaded with petty obligations, required to engage in futile 'job search', useless 'training' and coerced 'volunteering', and deprived of income ('breached') for the most trivial of reasons (Mullins and Raper, 1996; Raper, 1997).[5] These are all 'legitimate', both in the strictly legal sense and in the sense of acceptance by public opinion.[6] And yet they treat the poor with contempt while showing little regard for the real causes of poverty.

Judged from the human rights standpoint of what people should be entitled to, that is, (in this instance) sufficient resources to live in comfort and dignity, these government policies are illegitimate. They are based on the false belief that unemployment is voluntary; they give no consideration to the human cost in the misery, despair and desperation of those for whom the system has no place; they hold the victims to blame while doing nothing to amend the system that has caused he destitution; and they define the resulting violence (which those demoralised by poverty and destitution visit on themselves and each other rather than on their real tormentors who are, anyway, out of reach) as a separate issue to be dealt with by the criminal justice system, and the resulting demoralisation as another separate issue to be dealt with by the health system.

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[5] An interesting example of where the Australian government's interests lie was the reaction of Senator Jocelyn Newman, the then Minister for Family and Community Services, at the Australian Council for Social Services congress in Canberra, 16 November 2000. When the minister was asked if business would be penalised if it failed to meet its obligations under the 'mutual obligation' policy, she replied: 'People have got to be sensitised and I don't think you can do that by hitting them over the head'. There was laughter from the audience, composed largely of people who worked for and with the disadvantaged, and who were only too aware of governmental head-kicking applied to the poor and deprived. The minister, however, was mystified. 'What's the matter?' she was reported to have said (Grattan 2000). Clearly, only employers counted as 'people' to be treated sensitively, not the unemployed.

[6] Judging by the three consecutive election victories of the Australian government responsible for these policies, especially their landslide win in the November 2004 election. On the other hand, the plight of the unemployed has never been an issue in any election campaign, and the Opposition Labor Party has exactly the same approach to unemployment as the current government. Still, the point remains that the government's treatment of the unemployed is given 'legitimacy' by a public opinion that at the very least raises no protest against that treatment.

Judged from a genuinely human standpoint of telling the truth, and of care and concern for those who cannot look after themselves, the Australian government's[7] policies in relation to the unemployed[8] are illegitimate, no matter how legal they are in formal terms.

My usage of the term 'domination' also differs from Weber's '*Herrschaft*' in that I include, not only those public institutions of state, government, economy, bureaucracy, religion and law, but also other forms of social life, including the ways in which the personal relationships of everyday life are organised. According to Roger Boesche, Weber was reluctant to broaden the scope of '*Herrschaft*' to include 'domination in lecture halls and drawing rooms and erotic relationships', i.e. into areas of private life, because that would be to stretch the meaning too far, although Weber did acknowledge that domination existed there too (Boesche, 1996: 356). But, as feminism has long pointed out, to exclude a domain of 'the private' from politics is to exclude from contestation and rectification that crucial domain where the oppression of women happens. And as Boesche himself pointed out in his impressive history of theories of tyranny, the idea that tyranny is not just a public affair, but operates in the most intimate areas of private life as well, dates at least from the writings of Montesquieu, who 'recognized that a despotic family structure and a widespread oppression of women are essential to establishing and reinforcing a general societal tyranny' (p.185).

The notion of domination bypasses any public/private distinction anyway. To the extent that domination is maintained by appeals to legitimacy, it belongs to the sphere of what might be called meaning and value. Meanings and values are as public as any bureaucracy or governmental apparatus in that they are shared, communicable and participatory, while at the same time they are as private as the contents of individual minds since they involve understandings, feelings, emotions and moral judgements. As meaning and value, 'the social' is both public and private, both institutional and intimate, both political and personal. It permeates hearts and minds as well as structuring institutions, practices and the grand organisations of public life. Social domination is not only 'out there', it is also 'in here'. Because it structures the psyche as well as public institutions, it can manifest itself at the level of feeling and desire, belief and attitude, knowledge and opinion.

As a consequence, the question of legitimacy arises in relation to 'private' behaviours as well as to public institutions. The very notion of 'the private' within the context of present-day liberal democracies is part of the legitimation process. This is so despite the fact that what is 'private', whether it be 'civil society', 'the market' or personal relationships, is that which is not subject to regulation by the state. 'The private' is what can be left free of interference from the law (indeed it must be left free within in the terms of liberalism). That freedom is seen to be justified by the (public) harmlessness of the 'private' sphere, or by its positive beneficence in the case of 'the market'. What is not forbidden by the state is permitted, that is, it is legitimate.

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[7] When I say 'the Australian government' I am not referring any particular government, since the kinds of policies currently in force were introduced by the Labor government (left-wing by repute but not in reality) which preceded the present (February 2005) right-wing Coalition government. Moreover, it is doubtful that any government could evade its obligations to treat the unemployed harshly and still remain in power

[8] Not to mention their policies in relation to refugees.

But domination is not simply a matter of individuals actively and consciously asserting their own wills over against the wishes and needs of others, a meaning implied in the use of the terms 'command' and 'obedience' for example. While that is certainly part of its meaning, to confine it only to the sphere of relationships between individuals is to lose a major part of its meaning. To see domination merely as the behaviour of discrete persons whose motivations are not seen to owe anything to any wider context of shared meanings and values, rules out social forms of control which need not be deliberately imposed by anyone, which operate as it were 'almost without hypocrisy' (as Foucault put it), and even with the consent of the subjugated.

Weber defined '*Herrschaft'* in the most general terms as 'the probability that a command with a given specific content will be obeyed by a given group of persons' (Parsons, ed., 1964: 152), although there need not be any overt commands involved, nor any identifiable category of persons issuing commands. The term domination implies something like the idea of a default option, the likelihood that certain interests will gain ascendancy at the expense of others (unless something is done to change it). As Foucault has put it in relation to the tactics of power: 'it is often the case that no one is there to have invented them, and few who can be said to have formulated them', and yet 'the logic is perfectly clear, the aims decipherable' (Foucault, 1984: 95).[9]

The logic and aims of domination are not, however, perfectly clear and decipherable in the normal course of events because of that above-mentioned belief in legitimacy. Everyone is expected to subscribe to the meanings and values of domination, even those most oppressed, since domination operates most efficiently through the complicity of the populations subjected to it. Foucault put it rather well (although he was doing no more than expanding on the Marxist insight that relations of ruling disguise themselves as something else).[10] Despite the problems with his account, he did perceive that domination is not simply a matter of overt prohibition and outright command, but veils itself in secrets and silence.

> power is tolerable only on condition that it mask a substantial part of itself. Its success is proportional to its ability to hide its own mechanisms. Would power be accepted if it were entirely cynical? For it, secrecy is not in the nature of an abuse; it is indispensable to its operation (Foucault, 1984: 86).

He also perceived that domination permeates every level of existence, that it is not confined to the public apparatuses of social control, but penetrates the most intimate and private of spaces.[11]

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[9] This quote turns Foucault's sentence around and hence changes the emphasis. Foucault's account of power is hampered by his failure to distinguish between domination and social relations per se, between a power-over which operates at the expense of those subjected to it and a power-as-capability in the sense of the ability to achieve at no one's expense. In fact, he argued away the very possibility of such a distinction.

[10] One well-known example is Marx's 'Fetishism of commodities' section in volume one of *Capital.*

[11] He is confused on this point, however. By making a distinction between 'sex-desire' on the one hand, and 'bodies and pleasures' on the other—'The rallying point for the counterattack against the deployment of sexuality ought not to be sex-desire, but bodies and pleasures' (Foucault, 1984:157)—he appears to be preserving at least some private spaces from the reach of those regimes of power/knowledge which deploy sexuality throughout the population. But this doesn't make any sense, given that the whole burden of his argument has been that bodies are very much a site, even the primary one, for the deployment of sexuality. And what is 'pleasure' if it is not the satisfaction of

Although domination is maintained (or challenged) by human beings, it is the system that creates the hierarchy of categories to which people are allocated, the people don't create the system. In that sense, people are the creations of the system and not the other way around. In contrast to Durkheim's insistence that 'social phenomena are external to individuals', social phenomena are thoroughly internal to individuals. It is true that society is not made up of the sum total of its individual members, that it is not 'a superstructure built upon the substratum of individual consciousness' (Durkheim, 1966: xlvii). But this is the case, not (as Durkheim argued) because 'social facts' are *sui generis* and hence different from 'psychological factors', but because there can be no 'psychological factors' apart from 'social facts' if 'psychological factors' are to be meaningful, comprehensible and communicable phenomena.

Indeed, it is difficult to know what Durkheim meant by 'psychological factors', since they appeared to bear no relation to 'social facts' whatsoever, neither engendering the social facts nor arising out of them. Durkheim argued against the belief that individuals exist prior to social relations and create those relations out of their own inherent substance (as it were). But by insisting that social phenomena were external to individuals, he showed that he still believed that individuals were something other than social relations in some unspecified way. This is an important point, given that the belief in the autonomous, unencumbered individual fully in control of all the circumstances necessary for his (the pronoun is deliberate) own well-being is the dominant ideology of our time. Under conditions of domination that is a cruel myth.

In contrast, I would argue that, to the extent that the system of domination is operating, we[12] are its puppets. People can (and ought to be) something other than this, but to the extent that they are, the system of domination is no longer operating (they are simply 'being social' in other ways). Since domination has not as yet ceased to exist, it still requires the type of human nature that blindly follows its lead and espouses its meanings and values as one's own.

It can be challenged

Just as the social evils of domination are not chance events, neither are they part of some unspecified 'human condition'. On the contrary, they are the result of human actions and decisions, and hence within the realm of human responsibility (although not of everyone—victimisation and helplessness deprive people of power and hence also of responsibility).

Domination's chief operating mechanism is dehumanisation. In order to be able to make judgements about whether or not something is dehumanising, it is necessary to have a notion of human dignity and of what it is to be genuinely human, that is, of the opposite of dehumanisation. Notions of 'the human' have been criticised for being defined in terms only of the characteristics of the powerful and privileged (or only in terms of men, in the case of the feminist critique). But it does not automatically follow from that critique that notions of 'the human' should bedropped altogether. On the contrary, the continuing existence of gross affronts to humanity signal the continuing

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desire? How, then, is it possible that 'sex-desire' is complicit with the power relations of sexuality, while 'pleasures' are not?

[12] The first person plural in this sentence refers to human beings in general terms because I cannot think of any category of persons to whom the generalisation does not apply.

need for genuine notions of the human. Something is being violated when people are deprived of food, clothing, shelter[13] and other kinds of material needs like clean water, health care and energy sources, when they are deprived of safety and freedom of movement and association, or when they are deprived of respect and recognition as unique and worthwhile ends in themselves. Something is being transgressed when people are held in contempt, diminished and trivialised by labels and practices denying them humanity. That 'something' is what I am referring to as 'the genuinely human'.

Some such notion is necessary if the social order I have called 'domination' is to be challenged. For it is not some inevitable human condition beyond the reach of political action or responsibility. It is not absolute, and for three main reasons. In the first place, domination is not the only form of social arrangement possible. It is true that it permeates every level of the social order. It can be found as much in workplace and playground bullying as in the ravages of global capitalism. It can be found in the violence that is a common everyday occurrence in the lives of those at the bottom—the destitute, the drug-addicted, the alcoholic, the mentally-ill, the prostituted, the trafficked, the homeless—and a constant imminent threat for the rest. It can be found in the seductions of corruption and the banalities of soul-destroying 'employment'. It can be found in stupidities passed off as wisdom, absurdities presented as profundity, degradation offered as pleasure. It can be found in injustice and in the callous indifference to the suffering of those whom the system excludes from its benefits and holds in contempt; and it can be found in the smug self-satisfaction of those whom the system rewards and for whose benefit it exists. Above all, it can be found in the lie that the system operates in the interests of all when the truth is that it benefits only the few (although looked at from another perspective, from a genuinely human point of view, domination does not even benefit the dominators because it demeans everyone, including those who seemingly benefit the most).

At the same time, however, (as I have said elsewhere) if domination were the only form of social arrangement, the human race would have ceased to exist long ago because domination is ultimately lethal. It is possible to live with dignity in decency, certainly for those with material comfort, but also for those living without it. The human spirit (for want of a better term) survives even under the most demeaning conditions. So even though we[14] live under conditions of domination, we also live a genuinely human existence despite that. It is not always the meanings and values of domination which are operating, which are making social arrangements meaningful in the minds of their participants, structuring what counts as real and true, motivating people to act – or not, as the case may be. It is possible to evade its requirements, although not yet (or even ever) once and for all.

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[13] As Adam Smith put it: 'After food, cloathing and lodging are the two great wants of mankind' (Smith, 1937: 161).

[14] Once again, the first person plural refers to human beings in general terms because I cannot think of any category of persons to whom the generalisation does not apply, except, of course, for the exclusion in the second part of the sentence—'a genuinely human existence'—which refers, not to categories of persons, but to categories of occasions.

In the second place, social arrangements proceed by way of rules,[15] in the sense of sanctioned regularities of social life. By 'rules' I do not mean something deliberately devised and consciously applied. The 'rules' I am referring to are normally not open for debate or analysis, any more than the rules of grammar are. They constitute the world-taken-for-granted, the sub-text of social life. They are rules only in the sense that they are regular and decipherable, not in the sense that anyone intended them. In fact, they only appear when there is a problem and explanation is called for, when a rule is broken or applied inappropriately, and even then it is difficult to verbalise them. Human rights are an example of this kind of rule. They are a codification of arrangements that require no codifying as long as they are not being violated.

It might sound odd to suggest that the violations precede the rules they transgress, that the rule was broken before it was formulated. But like all positive law, that is, laws that are formally and officially enacted, human rights instruments are devised to deal with social problems which already exist. It is true that positive law is socially productive in the sense that it creates categories that have their own effect on the social world, and that law and society mutually interact. But law does not constitute the whole of social life. It is a response to problems and other issues that arise elsewhere than the formal instruments of the law itself.

The main point about rules for the purposes of this account of domination is that they can be broken. Whether they are the rules of domination or those of genuine human contact, people do not have to obey them. There are negative sanctions (punishments) for non-compliance with or defiance of the rules, but people still break them.[16] It is possible not to comply with the rules that maintain domination, not once and for all, but whenever the occasion arises, and if not now then next time.

The third reason why domination is not absolute is that (as I argued above) its hegemony is not usually maintained through overt violence or other forms of coercion, but through its 'legitimacy'. For the most part, the sanctions for breaking the 'rules' involve ostracism, ridicule or a sense of meaninglessness, rather than overt punishment. Although violence towards the helpless is endemic under conditions of domination (called 'bullying' in its lesser manifestations), punishment is not its primary motive. Rather, violence is so pervasive because the system permits it by defining the powerless

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[15] All this is standard, 'old-fashioned' sociology. I have not found that postmodernism has added anything of interest to the account.

[16] Under conditions of domination it is often the case that the one who breaks the rule is not the one who pays the price. The discipline of Economics, that pre-eminent academic site for the justification of capitalist domination, even has a word for this—'externalities'. As Immanuel Wallerstein says of 'externalities': 'Externalizing costs (that is, making the collective world society pay in effect for a significant part of a firm's costs of production) has been a … major element in maintaining high profit levels and therefore ensuring the endless accumulation of capital' (Wallerstein, 1999: 131). The managerial elite of the corporations that befoul the environment, for example, do not personally suffer the consequences. 'Astonishingly', an Amnesty International report on the Bhopal disaster is reported to have said, 'no one has been held to account … twenty years on' for the cloud of lethal gas released into the environment by Union Carbide, which killed15,000 people and crippled many more (Basu, 2004). It was later reported that the company that bought Union Carbide, Dow Chemicals, would 'fully compensate the victims' to the tune of $US12billion (Anon, 2004). But it is difficult to see how the dead and the maimed can be 'fully compensated'; and promises by large corporations are notoriously unreliable. Thus does domination encourage the breaking of the primary rule of human society—'Thou shalt not kill or otherwise harm thy neighbour (that is, anyone at all)'—by absolving the perpetrators of responsibility for what they do.

as not fully 'human' and hence as outside the protective bounds of society. And the reason the powerless are not fully 'human' is because they are powerless. They are visibly not those self-sufficient, self-created individuals (enshrined in the dominant power ideology of our time, neo-liberal economics) because they can be brow-beaten, coerced, raped and bashed. Nonetheless, because domination needs 'legitimacy' if it is to operate at all, one of the ways of challenging it is to deny it legitimacy.

This analysis of the social relations of domination brings into question the idea that people actually do consent to such social arrangements in any sense that implies conscious deliberation and choice.[17] If the reproduction of domination requires that it not even be named as such, there can be no informed consent. If people are not provided with any genuine alternatives or not told the truth, their 'consent' is a managed, manipulated and controlled one. The most that can be said is that there is an absence of overt dissent or outright conflict. But if the structures of power are beyond the reach of anything individuals might do or not do, people can hardly be said to 'consent' to them. How can people be said to 'consent' to the way they are governed, for example, if they are offered no genuine alternatives, if they are lied to about the real issues, if the differences between political parties are nothing but cosmetic constructions of advertising agencies? The well-documented apathy and cynicism of the voting public is an understandable reaction to the banal corruption of the political culture of 'democracy'.

More subtly, though, 'consent' can take on a spurious life of its own. Domination makes mindless automata of us all, our 'consent' elicited through the manipulation of hearts and minds, through habituation and the constitution of desire, through control over meanings and values, over what counts as real, important and worthwhile and what counts as absurd, trivial, unimportant or worthless. Because we are social beings, not only do we live within the systems of meaning and value into which we are born, those meanings and values also live in us. To the extent that those systems maintain domination, the ways in which the world makes sense, and we make sense of the world, will also serve to maintain relations of ruling.

To sum up, then: we are the bearers of social relations (to quote the Marxist literature), and to the extent that we acquiesce in those social relations that hold people in subjection and women in contempt, either knowingly or unknowingly, we are the puppets of the regime. However, we are also something other than that. Because there is always a genuine human alternative (conceivable if not always feasible), because social relations take the form of rules and can be broken, and to the extent that domination operates through consent, we can refuse to be complicit.

The interests of the powerful are not in fact in the interests of all, and to the extent that power over others does structure social life, it ought not to do so, and a social life without domination is already possible because it is already conceivable. But the first step in any struggle is to be able to name what it is we are struggling against. That is the function of the term 'domination'. Its usage enables a standpoint from which to interrogate social arrangements, and to expose whether or not, and the extent to which,

[17] In that sense, it is radically opposed to the 'rational choice' model that underlies economic theory and all neoliberal governmental policies and practices, the basic premise of which is that to be human is to be fully in control of all the resources necessary for human existence, and that those who are not in control are not fully human and can be coerced for their own good.

social life is permeated with justificatory ideologies establishing categories of the elite and the subordinated.

The primacy of male domination

The feminist literature has identified three great loci of what it refers to as 'oppression'—'gender', race and class. There are problems with this, among them the focus on 'oppression' rather than domination, the continued inability to link the three theoretically, and the incoherence of the term 'gender' (Thompson 2001). But the main problem is that it denies the genuine originality of the feminist discovery. By exposing the dehumanisation visited on women by a culture of male supremacy, feminism uncovers the source of the dehumanisation running through all forms of domination. By focusing on women as human beings in their own right, feminism exposes the existence of social conditions structured around the principle that only men count as 'human'. To the extent that the status of 'human being' is monopolised by men, those human beings who are female are excluded from the category, or included only as subsidiaries, only insofar as they can be defined in terms of their usefulness to the male (or castigated and penalised for their failure to serve him).And to the extent that women are excluded from human status, either their very existence unacknowledged, or recognised only as men's ancillaries, or allowed (in small numbers) to participate in loyally maintaining the status quo, the social order is already dehumanised. If women are held in contempt, there is no possibility of recognising human dignity among men either.

In this account, capitalism is a form of male supremacy.[18] The ways in which economic affairs are arranged serve to establish and maintain social relations of male domination. To modify an old saying: money is male power. Not all men have access to the means to acquire power in that form. But those who do are men, and any women who might be permitted access (predominantly as the heirs of rich men who have died) must accept the exploitative and tyrannical ethos of the system that generated the wealth.

That male supremacy takes an economic form is clearly exposed by the following information from the United Nations' *Report of the World Conference of the United Nations Decade for Women*:

> while [women] represent 50 per cent of the world adult population and one-third of the official labour force, they perform nearly two-thirds of all working hours, receive only one tenth of the world income and own less than 1 per cent of world property (United Nations 1980: 8, para. 16).

The UN Report referred to this statement as 'the present world profile of women', and it has been widely reported in the feminist literature as a piece of informationabout women. But as a statement about women it is suspect because it defines women as the problem, at least as women having the problem, if not as women being the problem. Women, it says, work too much, earn too little and own hardly anything at all. The implication is that it is something about women that must change. Something must be done to, by or for women, if the problems are to be rectified. The report leaves unexamined the social context within which women are to obtain equal representation. 'Labour force', 'work', 'income' and 'property' are merely the neutral milieux against which women are measured and found wanting. It would seem that there is nothing

[18] For an account of the connections between male supremacy and racism, see: Thompson 2001.

wrong with current social arrangements of these phenomena, except that women's participation rate is not 50 per cent. There is no suggestion that the fact that these aspects of the economy have been organised to exclude or exploit women might mean they are already dehumanised in some essential way, and hence would need to be radically restructured if they are to provide any genuine opportunities for women (and men).

The report does mention some aspects of the economy that have to be changed. It refers to the 'mass poverty and general backwardness of the majority of the world's population', and acknowledges that they are a consequence of the 'underdevelopment which is a product of imperialism, colonialism, neo-colonialism and also of unjust international economic relations' (p.7, para.12). But it says no more about these, and it makes no connections between 'unjust international economic relations' and the asymmetrical distribution of income and property between women and men. It also acknowledges that women's equality is not possible without peace and what it calls 'development'. But its recommendations on peace amount to no more than calling on the nation states and other relevant instrumentalities (e.g. the mass media) to educate people in favour of peace and to recognise women's contributions to peace initiatives. And its discussion of 'development' has a fine, feel-good sound to it, but it is so all-encompassing as to be meaningless for all practical purposes. It is 'interpreted to mean total development, including development in the political, economic, social, cultural and other dimensions of human life, as also the development of economic and other material resources and also the physical, moral, intellectual and cultural growth of the human person' (p.5, para.4). And once again, no connection is made between 'unjust international economic relations' and the failure of 'development' in the Third World.

The statement quoted above as a 'profile of women' is far more interesting as a statement about men—men work less than women, and yet they are paid nine-tenths of the world's income and own over 99 per cent of the world's property. Read like this, it not only interprets men, and not women, as the problem, it also raises serious and pressing questions about the ways in which the labour force, work, income and property are currently organised. It becomes a statement about the ways in which men prosper in the most literal sense at women's expense, and about those social and economic arrangements that allow it to happen. Moreover, implementing the recommendations in the UN report would mean either doubling the world's property and nearly doubling the world's income, or men giving up half their property and almost half their income to women. The latter is unlikely; and given the finiteness of the world's resources, the already critical level of their depletion, and the ecological disasters already everywhere apparent, the former is not feasible. But the report does not discuss these problems, as indeed it cannot since its focus is on 'women', rather than on the male supremacist nature of the economic institutions that ensure such unjust outcomes for women.

The statement does, however, provide a succinct account of the male supremacist nature of current world economic arrangements, that is, of capitalism in its latest phase. Read as such, this piece of information indicates an intimate connection between capitalism and male supremacy. If 'property' is over 99 per cent in the hands of men, it is clearly a masculine phenomenon. And to the extent that 'property' is the essence of capitalism, that is, the wealth produced by the processes of capital valorisation and accumulation, then so is capitalism a masculine phenomenon. From a feminist

standpoint, then, this information from the United Nations is more significant as a statement about men and the world economy than about women.

We live in a world ruled by men who are grossly out of touch with humanity, their own as well as anyone else's. This is not a statement about men as certain sorts of individuals, but about principles and values, norms and mores, which have an influence on everyone's lives. As I have already argued, domination operates most efficiently to the extent that it has everyone's allegiance. There have been times when positions of domination have been occupied by women, the prime ministership of Margaret Thatcher being an exemplary instance. Those occasions are rare, and the women in power must work assiduously to uphold male supremacy. They, too, must hold women in contempt, along with the virtues of caring conventionally ascribed to women, while subscribing to the callous and brutal ethos of the world dominated by men.

Nonetheless, those instances do indicate that women, too, can collude with, even embrace wholeheartedly, the ethos of male supremacy. As Jane Addams put it in1897: 'I am not one of those who believe – broadly speaking – that women are better than men. We have not wrecked railroads, nor corrupted Legislatures, nor done many unholy things that men have done; but then we must remember that we have not had the chance' (quoted in Eisenstein 1984: 148n7). There are women who have taken up the chance to do unholy things – Myra Hindley and Rosemary West, for example, who were mass murderers (Cameron 1996; Cameron 1996/97); or Magda Goebbels who poisoned her six children before committing suicide in the *Führerbunker*; or the women in Nazi Germany who were no more resistant to Nazi ideology than men were (Koonz 1987). But the projects which provided these women with the opportunities to do evil were devised and set in train by men in what men perceived as their own interests. It is unlikely that either Myra Hindley or Rosemary West would have murdered anyone without their male partners, Ian Brady and Fred West. Magda Goebbels was in thrall to Hitler, as was his mistress, Eva Braun. And Nazi ideology explicitly subordinated women to men and glorified the male and the brutal values of violence and death (Theweleit 1987; Theweleit1989; Hesse 1990; Kaplan and Adams 1990; Milfull 1990). Women's complicity with evil, no matter how eager, does not make it any the less an instance of the logic of male supremacy.

Such women are indeed no better than men when they get the chance. But they only get the chance to the extent that they demonstrate loyal adherence to the meanings and values of male domination. These women were fulfilling their conventional role of men's loyal helpmeets. That does not absolve them of personal responsibility for their actions; nor does it mean that they were innocent or in any way morally superior to the men whose projects they aided and abetted. But neither does the collusion of the women make those projects any less male supremacist. It is not simply a question of men and women, but rather of a system of meanings and values founded on the dehumanising premise that only men count as 'human'. Women can align themselves with that belief (Dworkin 1983; Campbell 1987), and men can be disloyal (Stoltenberg 1990). But wherever categories of people are defined as less than human, the logic of male supremacy is operating.

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