Book review

Individualism and Inequality: The Future of Work and Politics
By Ralph Fevre
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In *Individualism and Inequality: The Future of Work and Politics*, Ralph Fevre joins a growing body of work analyzing the causes and consequences of the transformation of western liberal individualism into neoliberalism. Fevre is not alone in his argument that beliefs about individualism have shifted toward support for competition, markets, and corporate power over individual well-being and participation in civil society and democratic governance. Fevre bring to this important set of issues a comparison between Britain and the USA as they develop their own brands of individualisms from the late eighteenth century into the twentieth, as well as a theoretical division of individualism between sentimental individualism and cognitive individualism. Introduced in earlier works, these concepts allow Fevre, in this book, to develop an argument about how neoliberalism arose in the UK and USA along distinctive paths in public education, work, management, and politics.

Individualism and Inequality is an interdisciplinary work that will be of interest to scholars from several fields, including political theory, education, history, psychology, and management. It brings together these areas to create an interesting narrative of the development of neoliberalism in the USA and UK. Its most significant weakness arises in its use of the concept of cognitive individualism. Over the course of the book, cognitive individualism comes to stand in for neoliberalism, and therefore the concept loses some of its explanatory power to show how neoliberalism developed. Fevre's detailed historical and theoretical analyses are interesting and insightful nevertheless.

Building on the work of British Sociologist Stephen Lukes, Fevre argues that sentimental individualism is the set of beliefs about human nature that supported eighteenth century movements against slavery in Britain and for public education in the USA. Sentimental individualism encompasses those beliefs that hold that each human is inherently important because of their natural abilities to reason and sympathize with each other, and, as a result, they must be treated with dignity, and understood to have natural rights.

On the other hand, cognitive individualism is based in classical liberal ideas that Fevre argues people use in what they see as common sense arguments rather than beliefs. Cognitive individualism uses evidence about what policies are necessary to regulate or promote individual liberty, such as what kinds of governments and economies are most nurturing of individualism. Cognitive individualism does not emphasize the inherent importance of humanity and individuals as being equal as humans, as does sentimental individualism. Instead, cognitive individualism is instrumental for arguments for the free market, divided labor, and most recently, globalization. Cognitive individualism ranges from arguments about why these economic arrangements are the best for individual freedom, fulfillment, and wealth. Individualism, as a distinct concept, is dealt with somewhat vaguely but tends to mean equality in this work.

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Fevre's overall purpose is to argue, despite the early reliance on sentimental individualism by liberal thinkers such as Thomas Paine and even Adam Smith, that by the twentieth century cognitive individualism largely comes to dominate many of the discourses of individualism in the UK and USA, including public education, work and management. Because cognitive individualism does not support arguments for equality, as does sentimental individualism, policies that support equality, such as those protecting unionization, are quickly undermined.

A central strength of the book lies in Fevre's in-depth analyses of the tension and shifts between sentimental and cognitive individualisms within the specific topics of the chapters. In the first substantive chapter on anti-slavery movements, Fevre argues that, although it is based on moral arguments, sentimental individualism developed a distinctive and secular set of meanings from religious ones. Thomas Paine was central in articulating these ideas in his *Rights of Man*. Sentimental individualism is the "secret human rights" (p. 33). Fevre argues that human rights is based in the sentimental belief that all people feel and because of our natural sympathy and compassion, all have a "duty to uphold the dignity of others" (p. 33). According to Fevre, sentimental individualism took hold in Britain in relation to the arguments against slavery; and as a consequence, anti-slavery efforts were successful a century earlier there than in the USA.

The next three chapters on Adam Smith, Robert Owen, and public education begin by addressing the famous tension between Smith's two major works: *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* and *An Enquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* and its implications for class inequality. Like Paine, Smith relied on both sentimental and cognitive individual arguments. Fevre argues that Smith's thinking on public education is representative of the way that American sentimental individualism operated in relation to the policies of public education. Smith did not believe that the division of labor produced inequality, but he did see that it resulted in mind-numbingly repetitive and narrow tasks. Because the division of labor is dehumanizing, governments should provide some public education to ameliorate these negative effects. His arguments for public education, based in sentimental individualism's beliefs about the worth of human dignity, did not suggest that public education would or needed to remedy class inequalities, and so in Smith's formulation, public education did not challenge the division of labor and capitalism as causes of class-based inequality. In general, arguments for public education in the USA were about the cultivation of character and civic virtue (Fevre leaves out the fundamental role played by Thomas Jefferson in framing these American views). Because elites in the USA felt little threat from these sentimental arguments for public education, elementary school public education was implemented there decades before Britain where the reform movements led by those like Robert Owen were much more radical, challenging the class divisions of capitalism.

In Chapter 7, Fevre traces shifts away from sentimental to cognitive individualism into the late nineteenth century by focusing on the influence of the British thinker Herbert Spencer. Spencer, influenced by the thinking of Charles Darwin, developed an evolutionary theory of human nature and success. Spencer argued for strict laissez-faire government policy that would allow people to adapt to the new environment of free market division of labor. Laissez-faire policies would also allow those who succeed in the market to survive and pass on the requisite qualities of cooperation and intelligence. Fevre argues that Spencer's negative liberty, which stops government from providing aid to those who are injured by the market and division of labor, ignores sentimental individualism and "sowed the seeds of neoliberalism" (p. 124).

In Chapter 8, Fevre returns to education policy and politics in Europe and the USA in the early 1900s to show how the differences in public education systems affected the politics of class. In the USA, because there was equal public education regardless of class, strong

class-based political parties did not form. In Britain, on the other hand, working class families only had access to vocational secondary schools that did not promote social mobility. As a result, class-based political parties formed in Britain and Europe, and these protected the interests of the working class, as well as the elite class. The paradoxical result of these situations is that in the USA, the classless society fulfilled the "necessary condition for the arrival of neoliberalism and its version of individualism"(p. 132). This version of individualism meant that workers came to believe that they had an important specialized role within the interdependent and complex system of divided labor. Fevre refers to this as technical unity, which replaces the morality of sentimental individualism (p. 133). Fevre shows how John Dewey argued against these transformations, calling them an economic individualism that "conform to the practices of pecuniary culture" rather than the "spiritual factor of our tradition, equal opportunity and free association […]"(p. 135). In the UK, it was not until later that the Labour Government of the 1970s succumbed to pressures to focus education on preparing students for the economic realities of life.

Fevre next argues that corporations and business leaders used the ideas from Dewey and other supporters of sentimental individualism to reframe how work in the economies of the 1970s and 1980s would meet the emotional and spiritual needs of individuals and their aspirations. These ideas were developed in business theories of "people management." People management claimed to respect people as unique individuals and to create business environments where people are fulfilled by meeting the needs of their organizations. Fevre argues that these are cognitive individual arguments that serve the corporate interests of profit by using the language of sentimental individualism. As neoliberalism becomes entrenched, Fevre argues that class divisions are no longer widely seen as causing inequality, in other words, classes are accepted. And second, there is widespread trust in employer's "devotion to individualism […]" (p. 192).

In the last chapters, Fevre explains some of the negative consequences of cognitive individualism. These include an array of problems, such as anxiety and eating disorders, as well as bullying and harassment in the workplace. Although he acknowledges that the evidence is not conclusive, Fevre looks to studies that attribute the rise in such disorders to the lack of personal autonomy that has occurred in the workplace. Part of the problem is that neoliberalism leads employers to promise a great deal of dignity and meaning to the individual, but cognitive individualism and the employment of the twentieth century is largely incapable of cultivating and protecting human dignity. The same is true for job security. Cognitive individualism promises efficiency and greater profits for all, but workers are in weaker positions as individuals and as a result tend to live with a great deal of insecurity. Fevre ends the book with suggestions for addressing these negative trends and highlights the successes of the disability rights movements as a model for reform.

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