

Understanding homo individualis (UHI)

The major importance of the individuals is supported by many of our time's most fundamental ideals and organizations. Ideals like individual liberty, freedom of speech, the right to self-determination, etc., demonstrate that (human) individuals are not only valued as autonomous creatures but also as a source of creativity and innovation. This is related to the belief that no individual can be fully explained in terms of what she has in common with other individuals. Although individualistic theories have somewhat been discredited during the past few decades, the reconciliation of demands concerning individual freedom with societal welfare's issues is still an open challenge to modern democratic societies.

Following some suggestions by Louis Dumont, and taking the expression from Fontenay, we take "homo individualis" to stand for a conceptual structure accounting for human beings' intrinsic singularity, both value-laden and non-reducible to any physical, biological, mental or even social determination. Although all human beings are conscious of themselves in a non-reflexive way, and all adult human beings develop some form of reflective self-consciousness, i.e. a form of self-representation, distinctive to the kind

of consciousness characterizing (modern) individuals is a kind of self-representation that seems rather empty, when not simply negative.

The research hypothesis of this project is that the capacity to refer to oneself non-criterially and non-qualitatively goes together with the capacity to be aware of oneself as also an "empty" and "indeterminate" "pure ego", and that this capacity is essential to the emergence, and the development, of homo individualis, which thus corresponds with a specific culturally determined declination of homo sapiens. To think of oneself as homo individualis – that is, to think of oneself as non reducible to any of the social and even natural determinations listed above, and to invest this irreducibility with a positive and possibly essential value - accounts for the ability to feel responsible for one's actions, and, to a certain extent, even for one's thoughts, ideas, and judgements.

Under such hypothesis, the project will investigate the conditions of possibility, the overall structure, and the consequences in terms of drives, social capacities and social behavior, of homo individualis. Clarifying the nature of homo individualis will, thus, enable a better understanding of what her "nature" (in a sense to be defined) demands, and, thus, what her well-being and her flourishing could amount to.

Understanding homo individualis (hereafter UHI) will offer a basis to further investigate the ways in which this can be done, by elucidating also the structures that allow having citizens that are able to realize their own individuality in harmony with the common good.