



INDIVIDUALISM V COLLECTIVISM

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WHY DO YOU EXIST?

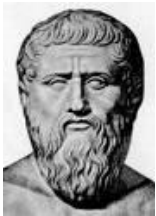
DO SOME PEOPLE IN SOCIETY HAVE GREATER VALUE THAN OTHERS?

IS YOUR FIRST PURPOSE IN LIFE TO SERVE YOUR OWN INTERESTS, OR THE INTERESTS OF SOCIETY?

SHOULD YOU LIVE FOR YOURSELF. OR FOR THE GROUP?

COLLECTIVISM: "The needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few."

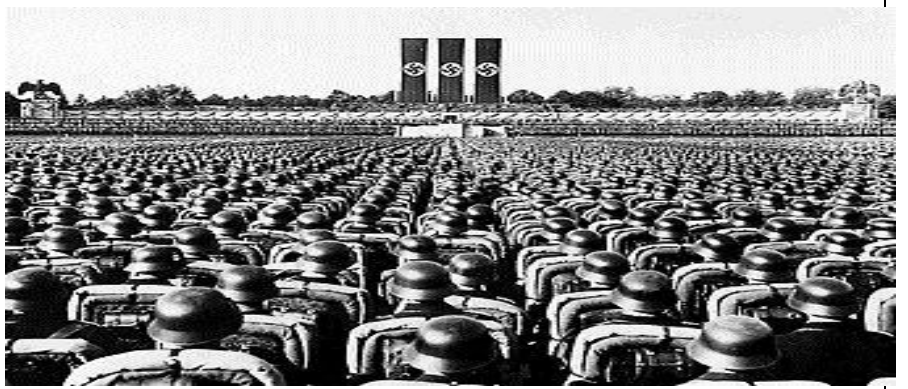
COLLECTIVISM is a philosophy which holds that human beings exist as parts of a greater whole. Without society, the individual has no value, worth, importance, or purpose for being. The purpose of one's existence is to benefit and preserve society. The value of an individual depends upon how much that person contributes to society. The good of the society comes before any consideration of individual rights or interests. Selfishness is a condition that should be eliminated completely, until everyone is SELFLESS. Collectivism is "**THE WE PHILOSOPHY.**"



The first and highest form of the state and of the government and of the law is a condition in which the private and individual is altogether banished from life. -PLATO

A single person, I need hardly say, is something subordinate, and as such he must dedicate himself to the ethical whole. Hence if the state claims life, the individual must surrender it.

The state is an absolute unmoved end in itself, and it has supreme right against the individual, whose supreme duty is to be a member of the state. -GWF HEGEL

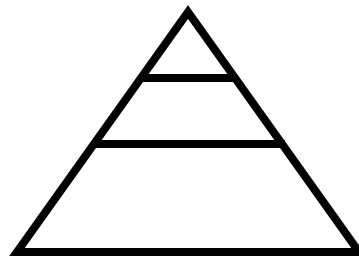
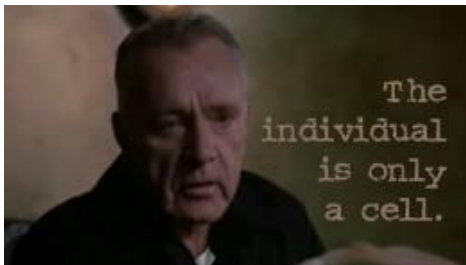


The surrender of the self to the "Greater Good" can look very different, depending on how far you take it...

COLLECTIVIST METAPHYSICS

Plato laid the foundation for collectivist metaphysics with his view of "**The Forms.**" As we know, Plato did not believe that true reality existed here on Earth. All that we see, including other people, are merely reflections of one true "form." Therefore individuals do not really exist! You and I are reflections of a true ultimate human form. Sort of like the reflections you see in a fun house mirror. SOCIETY, or any group of people, is closer to reality and is more of a "person" than the individual.

ORGANIC VIEW OF SOCIETY: Individuals are seen as cells in the "**body politic.**" Each person, as a cell, exists to serve a function in the "body" of society. Each person is expendable and obsolete as a separate unit. Plato's ideal society is composed of "silver, gold, and bronze" people who each have a specific role to play in society. This can be compared to organs, bones, muscles, etc. in the body- each is important as a part of the body, but is obsolete without the body. Of course, society is to be ruled by a philosopher-king (the brain?) who knows best.



RELATIVIST OR NATURAL LAW?

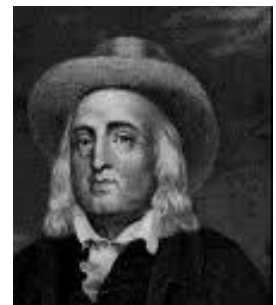
Collectivists may be relativists or they may believe in the existence of universal, if not hidden, truth. From the relativist view, reality is seen to be the creation of the group; views in conflict with those of the group are seen to be *untrue*. This may be applied democratically: the will of the majority is *truth*. Beliefs held by the majority are *reality*.

Or, such views are formed and manipulated by a small group in power. This conforms with a Platonist view of reality: we don't create it, but we're not in it either, and most of us cannot see or comprehend it. The eighteenth century German philosopher **Immanuel Kant** discussed reality as a universe composed of two dimensions: an elusive true reality ("things in themselves") and reality *as it appears to us*. Those few who have the ability to see reality for what it is (its true ultimate **forms**) know what is best for the Group and should have unquestioned power. The Enlightenment philosopher **Jean Jacques Rousseau** discussed this as the **General Will**- what is best for society. *Regardless of the collectivist's view of reality, it is held that the purpose of one's existence is service to the Group.*

UTILITARIANISM: FOUNDATION OF MODERN COLLECTIVISM?

The greatest happiness of the greatest number is the foundation of morals and legislation. -Jeremy Bentham

Utilitarianism is a broad and varied philosophy influencing diverse thinkers, including both collectivists and individualists. It holds that all actions should be judged by their usefulness and outcomes; *acts should maximize pleasure and happiness and / or minimize pain and suffering*. This can be interpreted as a guide for individual choices in life, or as a guide for social policy. The latter interpretation supports the collectivist view that the role of the individual in society should always be considered in light of the "greater good."



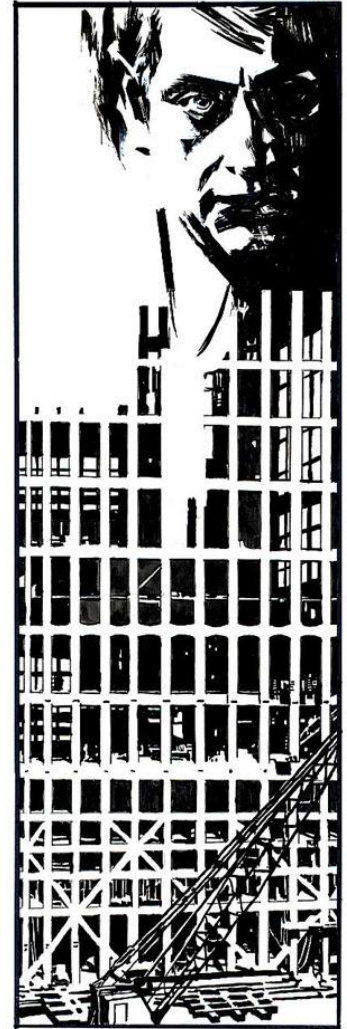
INDIVIDUALISM: "the needs of the one reflect the needs of the many."

INDIVIDUALISM is a philosophy which holds that human beings exist as separate, individual biological units. The purpose of one's existence, simply, is to exist: to serve one's own self interests. Survival, happiness, and self-improvement are the primary goals in life. Selfishness is natural, normal, and needed. Individualism is **THE "I" PHILOSOPHY**.

Let's get metaphysical.

Society is defined as a collection of individuals; it is **not** a living being. I exist as myself- I am the "finished product," not a mere cell or a "reflection." Individuals create society and all other forms of social organization. We do this because it **benefits us as individuals**. Individuals have consciousness; each of us is self-aware. Societies or any group of individuals do not have consciousness, life, feeling, or thoughts; *only individuals* can have these things. Sometimes, the majority of the individuals in a society have similar feelings or thoughts, which leads us to express terms such as "group consciousness," or discuss "society's views." Technically, it is incorrect to make such statements; "group consciousness" really means that a lot of individuals happen to think or feel alike on a given subject. Thus, the "organic view" of society as a living being with greater value than the individual is utterly rejected.

Aristotle argued against Plato's theory of The Forms; he held that things exist as **particulars** (individual units). There are *types* of particulars (for ex. species) but this does not deny their existence as individuals.



'Howard Roark' by J.P. LEON - 06

**THE GOOD OF SOCIETY IS NOT
OF GREATER VALUE THAN THE INDIVIDUAL,
because society IS individuals.**

If the individual can be sacrificed for the "good" of society,
then **no one** in society is safe- because
we all exist as individuals.



**Collectivism always leads to
totalitarian government.**

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- Hayak, The Road to Serfdom

**...because to achieve for
any length of time, it has
always required FORCE**

My philosophy, in essence, is the concept of man as a heroic being, with his own happiness as the moral purpose of his life, with productive achievement as his noblest activity, and reason as his only absolute. —Ayn Rand



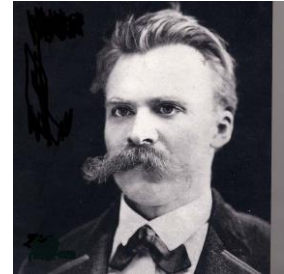
HOW DO YOU LIKE YOUR INDIVIDUALISM?

1. PURE INDIVIDUALISM: "I have needs and YOU CAN GO TO *%&!"

Pure individualism describes an outlook on life in which the primary reason for one's existence is to pursue happiness, self-interest, and self-improvement ANY WAY POSSIBLE AND EXPEDIENT, regardless of the effects on other individuals.

There are no facts, only interpretations. ...All things are subject to interpretation; whichever interpretation prevails at a given time is a function of Power and not truth. -Nietzsche

While collectivism determines the worth and value of a person by how much they contribute to "the greater good," the pure individualist keeps it simple: the only one with true value and worth is ME. Others can have value or worth TO ME, based on what they have done for me lately.



There cannot be a God because if there were one, I could not believe that I was not He -Nietzsche

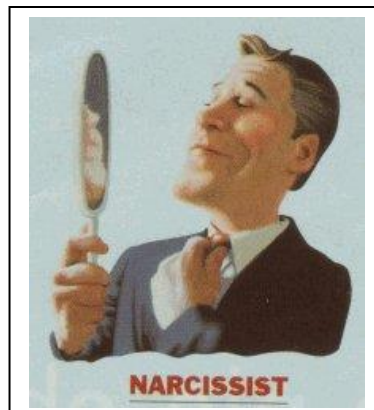
If a person is useful to me and can help me achieve my goals, I will use them. If they are in my way, I will crush them (if I can). However I act towards others, the ultimate motivation for my actions is my OWN SELF-INTEREST. The only reason to limit selfish acts (temporarily) is when they hinder self-interest.

NARCICISM- extreme self-love. Can a person be "in love" with himself/herself? If so, how does this affect that person's relationships with others?

This type of individualism in mild degrees is expressed in such forms as bad manners, and in extremes as acts of violence and crime. **Pure individualism is not without rules:** you know them as the **laws of the jungle:** *might makes right, only the strong survive, get him before he gets you, dog eat dog.*

"IRRATIONAL INDIVIDUALISM." Pure or "extreme" individualism is rejected by the Natural Law tradition and modern objectivism for many reasons. Its morality and practicality are obvious problems. At a more fundamental epistemological level it is not rational; pure individualism is self-destructive unless no one else but **one** practices it. It does not solve the basic reasoning trap- "*For me but not for thee*"...

I ♥ MY
SELF +
THATS
ALL THAT
MATTERS



IT'S ALL
ABOUT
ME!

2. MUTUAL INDIVIDUALISM: "I have needs- as do you."

Mutual individualism is a philosophy which holds that the primary reason for one's existence is to pursue happiness, self-interest, and self-improvement **while acknowledging the same for all other individuals**. In other words, our pursuit of happiness and our own self interest must be *conditional*, or understood within a social context. The key value is **reciprocity**.

Civilization is the progress toward a society of privacy. The savage's whole existence is public, ruled by the laws of his tribe. Civilization is the process of setting man free from men. ...I swear by my life, and my love of it, that I will never live for the sake of another man, nor ask another man to live for mine. -Rand

The mutual individualist views himself/herself AND all other individuals as having **intrinsic worth, each of value and importance merely for existing**. Each person is ultimately his or her own purpose: we were **born to be alive**. While the pure individualist values his/her life above all others and without regard for others, the moral individualist acknowledges that, as individuals, WE ALL value our lives.

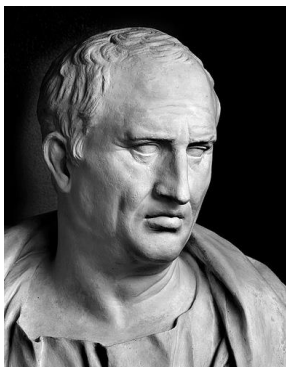
Respect, honor, natural rights, moderation, compassion, self-discipline, and empathy are values of mutual individualism. All of these things require the individual at times to refrain from certain activity he/she might want to do, because that activity would **violate the rights of others** or otherwise injure the dignity and worth of another person. **The mutual individual practices a degree of self-denial and self-discipline not for the greater good or collective, but out of respect for other individuals**.

RESPECT FOR OTHERS MUST BE MUTUAL.

If one examines the mutual individualist position that all individuals are of equal value, worth, and rights, it becomes obvious that such a belief can be taken advantage of.

The mutual individualist identifies ONE situation in which other individuals lose their value, worth, respect, and rights: *when they demonstrate that they do not respect the dignity and rights of other individuals*.

Thus, a person who willfully commits a crime loses his/her rights. This is situational and in degrees: a mutual individualist can lose respect for but still uphold the rights of a rude ##@*!!, while one may believe that a murderer should be put to death.

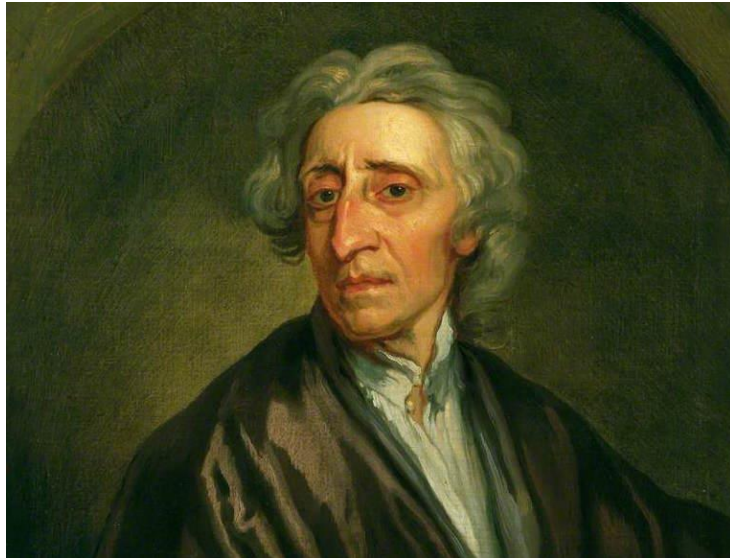


Out of all the philosopher's discussions... nothing is more valuable than the full realization that we are born for Justice, and right is based, not on men's opinions, but upon Nature. This fact will immediately be plain if you [understand] man's fellowship and union with his fellow men. For no single thing is so like another, so exactly its counterpart, as all of us are to one another. -Marcus Tullius Cicero

MUTUAL INDIVIDUALISM CONSIDERS THE FOLLOWING TO BE IRREFUTABLE FACTS:

- We each exist as individuals.
- All humans have the same basic needs.
- There exists Human Nature: the defining characteristics and tendencies of humans. (If there was not such a thing as human nature, the very use of the term *human* would be absurd.)
- Universal human values exist. We all strive to live, be happy, and be respected as fellow humans (barring insanity or extreme circumstances).
- CONCLUSION: The basic respect each of us desires for ourselves is likewise owed to other individuals. This is the basis for recognizing universal Natural Rights.

To love our neighbor as ourselves is such a truth for regulating human society, that by that alone one might determine all the cases in social morality.
J-Locke



NATURAL LAW AND RELATIVIST INDIVIDUALISTS.

Relativism is often closely associated with pure individualism: "I create my own reality, my own truths, my own rules, therefore I can do what I want to others and it can't REALLY be called wrong...."

Nietzsche is perhaps the best example of a relativist-individualist philosopher. Ironically, both the collectivist and the pure individualist can easily embrace relativism, because both philosophies have been observed to reject the belief that there are absolute truths independent of the mind.

Mutual Individualism can also be called Natural Rights Theory. This is, of course, based on the belief in Natural Laws and absolute truth. We will study philosophies of rights in a forthcoming unit...