

America's Founding Principles and Multiculturalism [From *Classical Individualism*]

What the United States of America is known for mostly across the world is its tradition of individualism. This is not to say that scholars or diplomats say much about this element of America, except in derogatory terms. Nor is the individualism some clear cut ethical tradition. It is somewhat mixed up, involving elements that are psychological, political, ontological and normative. As such, what it amounts to is something on the order of a rather vague idea that human individuals are at least politically important. This is the feature of American political history that distinguishes it from most others in history and around the globe. The Founders stated that

We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal; that they are endowed, by their Creator, with certain unalienable rights; that among these rights are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. That to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed; that whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or abolish it, and to institute new government, laying its foundation on such principles, and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall most likely to effect their safety and happiness.

These are principles of political individualism.[?] It is this view that is most distinctly American and Western. “Western individualism is...far from expressing the common experience of humanity. Taking a world view, one might almost regard it as an eccentricity among cultures.” (Colin Morris, *The Discovery of the Individual 1050-1200* [New York: Harper & Row, 1972], p. 2.)

Individualism, simply put, is the belief that particular human beings, not some collection of them, are most important, indeed, irreplaceable, where public policy and law are concerned. It implies that a person is not for others, including governments, to use without his or her consent. Everyone is a sovereign being—by nature entitled to self-government, not subject to the rule of others. Everyone must have a

[?] It should be noted that saying that “*we hold* these truths to be self-evident” does not mean what it would to say that they *are* self-evident. It could mean simply that for present purposes these ideas will not be questioned. And that is to be expected in what is but a political declaration, not a treatise on political theory.

significant and final say in what happens in his or her life, within the limits of one's possibilities and the rights of other individuals.

It should be noted that in political philosophy it is not individualism *per se* but liberalism, which has certain connections with some versions of individualism, that is usually discussed in connection with American and Western polities. Individualism is, however, fundamental to liberalism because the value of liberty or the right to it is supposedly based on the nature of the individual. Some forms of liberalism, however, are not so clearly connected with individualism because by their account it is the overall public benefit from regarding people as autonomous individuals that counts. It is this end, public benefit, that makes individualism a kind of instrumental value, not something fundamental to human community life as such. (This is a point made clear in Douglas B. Rasmussen and Douglas J. Den Uyl, *Liberalism Defended: The Challenge of Post-Modernity*, forthcoming)

There are different versions of individualism, of course, as there are different versions of collectivism, its opposite. At its heart the idea, albeit not entirely precise, pretty much speaks for itself: the individual and not some group—state, race, gender, family, tribe or clan—matters most for public policy purposes. This is not the same as the claim advanced by some, namely, that ethical individualism is the correct ethical theory. Some versions of individualism do, however, hint at that thesis as well, aside from the political point suggested above as central to the individualism of the American and Western political traditions. (See, for example, Tibor R. Machan, *Classical Individualism* [Routledge], forthcoming.)

In contrast to individualism, even loosely conceived, the collectivist thinks that some *grouping* of individuals is of central value we ought to pay attention to in politics and law. Family, tribe, neighborhood, race, sex, nation, or humanity as a whole are candidates in collectivism as to what takes political priority.

Now just because the United States of America is closely associated with individualism it does not follow that most of the ideals and institutions of the country reflect individualist principles. Indeed, many laws and customs in this country are far from individualist. One of the most beloved presidents of recent times can become famous for his statement, "Ask not what your country can do for you but what you can do for your country." As if it isn't you for whom the country is supposed to exist but you must exist for the country. Such popular sentiments make it clear that individualism is not the only idea championed in the United States of America. Indeed, many of those who have an important role in leading the discussion of political ideas in America are anything but individualists. Of the thousands

of think tanks, foundations, institutes, and universities where people work to develop and advance ideas, very few are openly and directly, not to mention primarily, individualistic. Indeed, one of the most prominently featured intellectual movements today is communitarianism, a social philosophy whose advocates make a special point of criticizing individualism at every turn. And until very recently half the world was openly committed to developing and advancing socialism and communism. Even many who claim to be upholding American ideals actually promote not individualism but family values and the like. And many also associate individualism with bad things. One scholar put it this way:

[I]ndividualist cultures devour their own moral capital and slide into debt-ridden stagnation as individualism corrodes family life and long-term planning and investment. (John Gray, "From Post-Modernism to Civil Society," *Social Philosophy and Policy*, Vol. 10 [1993], p.44.)

Individualism supposedly makes people careless, mere pleasure seekers, as well as reckless and thoughtless.

Other scholars argue that individualism is unrealistic because persons are not really individuals at all but parts of larger groups. Many have claimed that it is false that you and I have, as a vital aspect of our identity, our individuality. You and I are, instead, just *parts* of society, the race, etc.

Furthermore, individualism, for its critics, is but a recent *invention*. Major political theorists across the world, working at prestigious colleges and universities, have argued that only in the 16th century or so did human beings decide that thinking of ourselves as basically individuals, sovereign citizens, consumers, producers, voters, lovers, scholars and so forth was useful. Supposedly thinking—that is, entertaining the myth—that we each matter individually served the purpose of getting us to work harder—to seek greater prosperity for ourselves and this way to build up the society's wealth. Individualism is seen by these critics as a kind of temporarily useful delusion, a fiction we needed to advance society's prosperity but a fiction, nonetheless.

Karl Marx—on a version of whose philosophy the Soviet Union's failed experiment with socialism and building communism rested—argued that, in fact, humanity is an "organic whole." Individuals are but "specie-beings," bits and pieces of this organic whole, the way one bee is but a bit of the whole bee hive or one ant is but a bit of a whole ant colony. Following this Marxian idea, many thinkers—including very many who teach America's students politics and political philosophy—hold that after a while individualism will be erased from our minds.

[t]he further back we go into history, the more the individual, and, therefore, the producing individual seems to depend on and belong to a larger whole: at first it is, quite naturally, the family and the clan, which is but an enlarged family; later on, it is the community growing up in its different forms out of the clash and the amalgamation of claims. It is only in the eighteenth century, in 'civil society', that the different forms of social union confront the individual as a mere means to his private ends, as an external necessity. (*Grundrisse*, p. 17)

Accordingly, individualism is but a relic of the modern era, to be superseded by what is being called the "post-modern, post-liberal age." It is predicted, by John Gray for example, that "as individualism corrodes,...the nonindividualist market economies are likely to achieve an ever greater comparative advantage over the declining individualist cultures over the coming decade." As Gray sees it, "the East Asian economies have achieved their spectacular success without accepting any of the Western liberal shibboleths of constitutionalism, individualism, cultural pluralism, universalism, fundamental rights, the idea of progress, and other relics of the Enlightenment." And they note all of this with triumph, not dismay, because they do not value these "shibboleths," and do not believe that they deserve to be valued. Rather we ought to abandon the idea that individualism applies to all human beings everywhere and content ourselves with its role in our narrow corner of the globe.

One of the more recent criticisms of individualism is that it fails to square with multiculturalism. Broadly put, multiculturalism holds that every culture, however unusual, however offensive to members who do not belong to it, is worthy of respect. This respect is to be granted regardless of the fact that many cultures embrace mutually exclusive social and political principles. Accordingly, it is wrong to condemn some culture as flawed, barbaric or otherwise unworthy since such condemnation must stem from a cultural perspective, one the critic hails from. No one can, in turn, escape hailing from some culture? even the so called internationalist or universalistic viewpoint, embraced by human rights organizations such as Amnesty International, aren't free of cultural biases, so when they make various moral and political criticisms of certain countries, they are, in fact, practicing a form of cultural imperialism.

From this multiculturalist perspective what we need is a social-political framework that can make room for all varieties of culture. No preference must be shown to European, Latin, Russian, Chinese, US, ancient Greek, or Arabic culture in a truly just society. Every culture must be treated fairly, without exception. The

educational institutions of a society ought, then, to treat these different cultures neutrally, with no preference given to the products of any of them.

Well, I want to argue that this is wrong. I am not so much concerned with why anyone would wish to argue these points—some, I am sure, believe them true, others find it useful for their political purposes, yet others believe that it is provocative to say such things. What is much more important is to examine whether it is right. After I do just that, I want to show why the individualist outlook can make perfectly good sense of the fact that it is not adopted everywhere, that some places may even make progress without it, that there is much resistance to it in certain places around the world, etc. I will also show why individualism is no enemy of certain kinds of communities and fellow feelings, why it does not oppose generosity, neighborliness, even patriotism.

There are some very serious problems with multiculturalism. To start with, it is an outlook that seems new only if one has very little knowledge of human history. The idea that no culture is better than any other, so it is only fair for us to pay heed to them all, appears to imply that the emphasis on the Great Books, for example, needs to be dropped in our colleges and universities, since these were written mostly by Europeans. Various campuses are requiring that students encounter and treat with equal artistic, literary, philosophic respect writings from all cultures. Well, not really all of them, since cultures are almost as numerous as people, at least over time. Also, who knows all the cultures that exist now? or, even, what exactly defines a unified culture.

Now this multiculturalism seems innocent enough, mainly because we tend to think of cultural differences largely in terms of food, dress, music, dance, customs, etc. And such multiculturalism has always been part of American society. In 1798 a young man, J. M. Holley, wrote to his brother that “the diversity of dress, manners, & customs is greater in America, than in any other country in the world, the reason of which, is very obvious. It is considered as a country where people enjoy liberty and independence; of course, persons from almost every nation in the world, come here as to an assylum from oppression; Each brings with him prejudices in favor of the habits of his own countrymen....” (Quoted in “Endpaper,” *The New York Times Book Review*, November 5, 1995, p. 46).

While diversity is rampant in a free society, when it comes to such differences as religious practices, political regimes, forms of jurisprudence, types of marriages, and so forth, one cannot have such an easy way with multiculturalism. In some countries criminals are punished so severely that it is simply intolerable for

any society that recognizes individual rights and prizes human decency. Women in certain places are so subservient to men that even to suggest some changes meets with violent rebuffs. That cannot be dismissed a mere cultural difference—it does violence to anyone's essential humanity, whether so recognized or not. In many cultures throughout the world children are beaten and tortured in the name of discipline, practices that in ours are regarded as forms of child abuse. Once again, these differences are far from benign.

Interestingly, just at a time when so many people are concerned about other people's sensibilities? so that how and we talk about, and even whether we talk to, various people is virtually mandated, so as to avoid offending them? we also insist that all sorts of different cultures should be honored for their incredibly diverse ways of thinking and talking. Yet, if we really honored the way some cultures talk about others, we would have to honor contradictory practices. We would at once allow insults to fly and demand that everyone speak with equal respect about everyone else. The simple fact is that in some cultures it is perfectly acceptable to insult members of other cultures. I know this for a fact about numerous European and Asian cultures. In many of these people openly and unhesitatingly debase and deride members of other cultures for being such members, not for any other reason.

Consider, also, how many people in the academic world urge us to honor native Americans or Indians. Yet, do they realize that there were many different groups of such natives on this continent, not all of them deserving of admiration? Not all native Americans were equally peaceful and gentle, quite the contrary.

Even African Americans could not sensibly defend all the practices of their ancestors, some of whom actually spurred on the black slave trade and conducted such trade in North America.

The crux of it is that the demand for fairness to all cultures is predicated on a misunderstanding, namely, that cultures consist mainly of benign characteristics, nothing mean and nasty. Once we admit that different cultures may exhibit various degrees of evil, not simply benign dissimilarities, it immediately becomes perfectly justified to ask which, on the whole, exhibit the best characteristics. This is not an easy thing to deal with, since what is "best" is itself often unthinkingly determined from within a culture. Few people take the time and trouble to consider more stable and universal standards than those they have picked up in their own cultures.

Yet, the very points multiculturalists are stressing, namely, practicing fairness and paying careful attention, are not embraced everywhere. In certain parts of India people do not give a hoot about fairness and tolerance but proceed to kill anyone

who defies local custom. Tolerance of diversity is rare even in Western Europe, outside of the major cosmopolitan cities.

One reason why in most of our universities we have stressed the tradition of the Great Books, focusing, for example, on the works of Greek, European and British philosophers, is that these thinkers have grappled hard with just the issues that even multiculturalists find irresistible. What is truth? What is justice? What is art? What is knowledge? What is nature? What is God? What is liberty, equality or order? What is law? What are rights?

Many other cultures, however, have tended to focus their concerns much more narrowly. And the result has been that they remained a tad parochial. In such cultures any suggestion of multiculturalism would meet with ridicule—not even a gesture of consideration would be forthcoming.

So, while it is informative and even courteous to open one's mind to what other people across the world are thinking and doing, it is by no means a foregone conclusion that all these are of equal merit. The very fact that multiculturalism has made its inroads in our culture suggests that ours is indeed something of a special culture, even if its problems are evident as well.

Multiculturalists may, however, suggest that raising these points is unfair. Let us just leave it at that, without any disputation. Even if this is right, we can raise the question, in what other culture would it be acceptable to make such a suggestion and to have it carefully listened to and peacefully debated?

Finally, there is a point raised recently by my friend and former colleague, Randal Dipert, who now teaches at West Point's US Military Academy. This is that multicultural studies tend, in the main, to be very shallow. To immerse oneself in a culture requires not merely a quarter or semester long study, let alone one course that is specifically called multicultural studies. Cultures are complex, multifaceted and dynamic, incapable of being merely sketched in broad outlines, especially by people who aren't actually raised in them. Multicultural education is akin to those tours one takes in Europe caricatured in that old movie entitled, I think, "It's Tuesday, this must be Belgium."

In any case, having debunked multiculturalism a bit, it is now time to take some of it seriously. It is very unlikely that any one culture can lay truthful claim to having all the virtues embodied within its institutions, let alone its population. So, to start with, multicultural education could well contribute to one's development as a human being on numerous fronts. Then there is the point about variety being the spice of life, if I may employ a cliché for a moment. Cultures offer up diverse tradi-

tions in art, politics, mores, even morals, not to mention those more pleasurable than erudite attributes of cuisine, garb, language and dialect, and even temperament. There can be little argument about whether gaining some familiarity with these will tend to enhance one's life in the contemporary world, one that is likely to make work and play across the globe for many people the rule rather than the exception.

So the question can then arise, what kind of legal, political and economic order is likely to be most hospitable to a society in which some of the saner attitudes toward multiculturalism are to prevail? I wish to argue here that such an order would be far more individualistic than most multiculturalists suspect.

The first thing I wish to note is that individualism in human life is actually quite inescapable. Even to argue about it presupposes it: any theorist who advances ideas, who makes arguments and criticizes others for their arguments, anyone who acknowledge that human beings do some original things in their lives, have to admit to a significant measure of individualism.

It's the creativity of a human being that is the first major clue to our individuality. We make things happen, they do not simply happen *to* us. We bring novelty into the world, with our artistic, philosophical, commercial, technological, scientific, poetic, literary and other contributions. These are all evidence of the fact that we individually make things happen as (in part) independent beings with a mind of our own. Even when we don't actually do so, we can, and thus we have the essential capacity for individuality, even though we may not exercise it all the time and everywhere. Indeed, in a certain sense our individuality is an option we ought to choose, not simply a given fact. Individualism is, in this sense, a normative condition, just as democracy or friendship—we are free to elect such conditions or reject them. The question is which we ought to do. And our actions, especially at the very personal levels, show that we in fact often choose individuality over conformity.

Although everyone is taught a language already in widespread use, even at the earliest stage of a person's life he or she will form sentences originally, uniquely. My 7 year old daughter, as she was about to dose off in my arms, turned to me and said, "Papa, before I fall asleep I want to change places with my feet," and then she gave me a knowing smile, realizing she said something utterly unique. Philosophers who argue with others claim, at least implicitly, that what their adversaries should have said is different from what they did say, so they hold their adversaries responsible to act in certain ways, they imply that others make choices of their own and must take responsibility for the quality of these. Communitarians, communists, socialists, tribalist, nationalists, etc., may all believe that the most important and vital

aspect of human life is the community, but when they blame the rest of us for failing to accept this, for being wrong not to agree, they are being individualists.

What then of the fact that in many societies little if any individuality is evident and that individual lives are cheap? What about the fact that ethnic groups are thought of as supreme, that the nation comes first?

Individualism, as the philosopher David L. Norton put it, is everywhere in potentia:

Beneath the accretions of contemporary epochs and cultures a vestige of the original eudaimonistic intuition endures today ... in the individual's conviction of his own irreplaceable worth. But this small conviction is wholly unequipped to withstand the drubbing it takes from the world, and from which all too often it never recovers.

That is to say, despite all the drubbing, there is a basic idea that the good human life, the proper way for us to live, is to strike out as individuals, with others who choose to join us, to make our lives as good as it can be. (Eudaimonism is the idea of living a fully self-developed, self-excelled life!)

But, of course, there is no guarantee that cultures will acknowledge the worth of individuals. This is no less true than that members of many societies refuse to acknowledge the importance of good nutrition, the harm cigarette smoking does to us, the importance of rearing children without permanently hurting them, or that some forms of treatment of the environment is destructive.

In other words, human beings are notorious not only in the fact that they can do wonderful things but also in their destructiveness. And in some cultures certain destructive tendencies have become well embedded, while in others improvements have been and are being made all the time. Human beings are notable for the fact that they can make original choices but there is absolutely no assurance that these will be wise ones, or that they will follow what is true rather than what is false. We know this in many ways—even those who advocate anti-individualism claim, by implication, that we are wrong not to accept their views. So they admit that we can do wrong things, we can act on false beliefs. Well, the failure in many societies to acknowledge that human beings are fundamentally individuals, leading to the treatment of people as if they were common resource to be used by others, is wrong. It is to live by false beliefs. But it is not evidence of the falseness of individualism, any more than it would be evidence of the falseness of healthful nutrition that many people eat badly. Anti-individualism no more supports the falseness of individualism than ignorance supports the falseness of modern physics.

But perhaps all this does not address the value or worth of the individualist idea. And as suggested already, the question of individualism's truth is really a question about its worth, since individualism is a regulative idea, a recommendation of how we ought to treat ourselves and other persons.

Many people are very skeptical about the possibility of showing regulative ideas to be true or false but, instead, declare them to be mere preferences or culturally induced but ultimately optional habits. We are familiar with this outlook from how some of us respond to moral judgments by saying, "That's just what you'd prefer, but that's not necessarily true for me." Thus for them individualism would simply be a preference in some societies but not true as to how we ought to act or organize our societies. And there is something to this outlook because moral judgments cannot be made long distance, without knowing the particulars of a situation.

Yet some moral principles apply very widely. We should all be honest, at least unless something even more important requires us to disregard honesty—say justice (as when we lie to a Nazi about where our Jewish friends are hiding in order to preserve justice and not permit the Nazis to kill them). And even where moral principles need to be upheld by all of us, how they are applied in one situation may be very different from the way they are in another. For example, honesty on e-mail may be different from honesty in a direct personal conversation.

It is even more obvious that in different regions or historical periods human beings may face very different situations which will require them to act differently. For example, although all parents ought to help their children grow up to face the world competently, just exactly how a child should be raised in 4th century AD will differ from how this should happen now. And in Alaska children will need different upbringing from what they need in sub-Saharan Africa.

But very general moral principles, broad guidelines as to what is the right thing to do, do not vary much from age to age and region to region. That is because human beings as human beings remain pretty much the same. The human species is, after all, distinct and we know enough of what makes human beings what they are anywhere, anytime. Without clear evidence that they have changed—as when, for example, someone suffers from paralyzing illness or has fallen into a coma—there is no reason to reject the general principles of conduct that should guide them in their lives. Thus, as philosophers from Plato, Aristotle, Aquinas, Spinoza, Kant, to Wittgenstein have discerned, the most general thing for any human being to do is to pay close attention, with his or her mind, to the world and one's relationship to it. In short, being animals of the thinking type, our most basic

responsibility is to realize our potential and think clearly and persistently. It is by this means that we survive and flourish in life, nothing less.

The same can be said about political principles. Some very general ones may be identified to apply to all human communities. For example, the idea of human rights is such a very general guiding principle as far as how we should organize our legal systems. Certainly this idea needed development and it has only been about 400 years since it was developed into its present form, as individual rights to life, liberty and property. But there have been hints about this in the works of nearly all political commentators from time immemorial. Alcibiades, the 5th century military leader, had already suggested that laws that came about without the consent of the governed were not just laws. Aristotle mentioned Lykophron, a sophist, who advocated that government's role must be the "guarantee of mutual rights," nothing more. In the middle ages the laws governing local communities, including church dealings, made many references to individual rights, as did William of Ockham.

It might be argued that, well, this is all evidence only of the development of the idea of human rights in Western societies. Actually, that is wrong. Taoism, for example, expressed a very serious concern about individual liberty, comparable to some of the views we find in more recent classical liberal literature—e.g., that of F. A. Hayek and Milton Friedman. The point offered by them is that since no one knows much about what is right, no one may force others to act in certain ways. Thus we all have the right to the liberty required for us to lead our own lives.

It is not that all of these arguments and claims for individual rights are equally sound, only that they have been around and thus refute those who claim that only the modern times gave rise to, or that only Western culture gives evidence of, individualist ideas.

In any case, what is crucial for our purposes is to make it clear that human rights are a framework for human living anywhere and any time. Which is a relatively modest claim about how we ought to live and does not encroach on the responsibility of people everywhere and anytime to discover how they should live their own lives, given their special circumstances. Human nature involves creative thought, original action, and for these to flourish in their multifaceted ways, so that different circumstances are all properly adjusted to for the sake of living well, certain community principles are required. Where such principles fail to be recognized, the conditions are missing for a proper human community, even if some other accomplishments are evident enough. We all know that utter misery has often

existed in human history side by side with grand architecture or brilliant military strategy.

This is just what human rights watch organizations, such as Amnesty International, as well as the United Nations, suggest, even if not in terms that are fully consistent and can stand up to logical scrutiny. And it is just this notion that has excited the world about the United States of America: by protecting, not perhaps perfectly but more so than elsewhere, the basic human rights of all individuals to life, liberty and property, there would be a chance for any individual to strike out to live a reasonably successful life. It is this that has been referred to, by the Harvard philosopher Robert Nozick, the framework for utopias, experiments of all kinds in how men and women can and should live.

But there are some who find the idea of human rights not only wrong but pernicious. One professor, John O. Nelson of the University of Colorado, writing in a *Philosophy*, the well respected philosophy journal of the Royal Institute for Philosophy, said that "such a designation [of rights as *human* rights] is not only fraudulent but, in case anyone might want to say that there can be noble lies, grossly wicked, amounting indeed to genocide." What he objected to is the idea that we can identify human nature and infer from human life in general that people have rights by virtue of being human beings in a context of human community life. He argued that human nature, instead of having some firm and consistent attributes, is really more like a "crazy quilt," with nothing stable about it, so nothing from which one might infer common rights for all human beings.

No doubt human beings are like crazy quilt, in that they have the capacity to live extremely diverse lives. This is evident throughout history and the globe today. Yet it is just this fact that suggests very strongly that what human beings are, basically, is beings who depend for their lives and flourishing on the use of their minds. But because the use of one's mind is optional—one may not do it and may wish to go at living without using it all of the time, or use it for very select purposes—all kinds of consequences can be expected from people, based on their different employment of their rational capacities. Here is where we find free will, underlying not only diversity but also misuse.

Despite the fact that the diversity of what people can do and how, as a result, cultures and communities have emerged, we can identify a certain core similarity among all humans, namely, their capacity to think (and to choose either to do so or do so sporadically or very little). In the diverse circumstances of human living, with the diverse characteristics of different individuals, the result of thinking will be di-

verse, as will the result of failing to think. In any case, however, if this capacity is suppressed or thwarted, the very conditions for human living will be missing from societies. Granted, even if those conditions are present, there is no guarantee that all persons will make the best use of it. But, still, such communities would be more conducive to human living and more people could do their very best in such societies.

In contrast what do we get from collectivist systems? Well, we have seen two such systems, National and Soviet socialism, demonstrate just how miserable life is when the individual is officially dispensed with and, instead, the welfare of some collective is placed before us as the most important objective to serve. Hitler was an explicit collectivist, championing the German *Volk* or people as a whole, not the individuals who comprised the citizenry of Germany. Marx, as we have already noted, championed humanity as an whole, with individuals comprising little more than this whole's body parts. Tatyana Tolstaya observes, in an essay written for *The New Republic* magazine shortly after the fall of the Soviet Union, that according to collectivism,

Taken individually...everyone is not good. Perhaps this is true, but then how did all these scoundrels manage to constitute a good people? The answer is that "the people" is not "constituted of." According to [collectivists] "the people" is a living organism, not a "mere mechanical conglomeration of disparate individuals." This, of course, is the old, inevitable trick of totalitarian thinking: "the people" is posited as unified and whole in its multiplicity. It is a sphere, a swarm, an anthill, a beehive, a body. And a body should strive for perfection; everything in it should be smooth, sleek, and harmonious. Every organ should have its place and its function: the heart and brain are more important than the nails and the hair, and so on. If your eye tempts you, then tear it out and throw it away; cut off sickly members, curb those limbs that will not obey, and fortify your spirit with abstinence and prayer.

What about smaller collectivities? Do these fare any better? Bosnia-Herzegovina is only the most recent example of what happens when the welfare and success of ethnic groups are placed at the top of the list of priorities for people to serve. In the African country of Burundi, as in Somalia, people are sacrificed by the thousands for the sake of tribal supremacy. In South Africa, until recently, white Afrikaners, as a group, placed themselves above members of other races and treated them with nearly total disregard for their well being and sovereignty. In the Northern Irish vs. British conflict children and innocent bystanders are sacrificed

for the greater good of religious, regional or some other collective group. Even in the United States of America we find that the heritage of individualism has given way to a clamoring for collective identity. Blacks are supposed to live for African-American emancipation and individuals who do not conform are denounced. Women, especially in the academic community, are supposed to toe the line of certain versions of feminism. Native Americans are lumped into one horde by many shallow historical references, as if there never existed individual, diverse persons on the continent Columbus encountered when he sailed to look for China. We have Hispanics, Canadians, members of labor unions, teachers, artists, lawyers, farmers, and hundreds of other groups identifying themselves as some super entity, deserving of special loyalty and service, so that whereas initially our government was supposed to serve sovereign individuals, these days it tends more in the direction of distributing some mythical collective wealth among all these special interest groups.

What is noteworthy in connection with this trend is that it is in the United States of America in particular and in Western countries as a rule that diverse communities linked culturally, ethnically, racially, religiously and so forth are likely not only to flourish but to co-exist peacefully. This was noted by Robert Nozick in Part 3 of his *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, where he noted that experimenting with different conceptions of the good life is far more welcome in a free society than in one that imposes severe limits on individual liberty. And we have already seen that Americans were self-consciously aware of this aspect of American society. It is worth repeating what J. M. Holley said back in 1798, namely, that “the diversity of dress, manners, & customs is greater in America, than in any other country in the world, the reason of which, is very obvious. It is considered as a country where people enjoy liberty and independence; of course, persons from almost every nation in the world, come here as to an assylum from oppression; Each brings with him prejudices in favor of the habits of his own countrymen...” (Quoted in “Endpaper,” *The New York Times Book Review*, November 5, 1995, p. 46).

One contemporary philosopher who has worried a great deal about the compatibility of individualism and liberalism with multiculturalism is Isaiah Berlin. What he is concerned with is the fact that while liberalism is politically neutral between different approaches to living a good human life, this may very well be its undoing. Berlin’s view has been the focus of attention of many political philosophers, including most recently of John Gray, whose book *Isaiah Berlin* (Princeton University Press, 1996) focuses on the compatibility of the aforementioned value pluralism and the polity of individual liberty.

Berlin, Gray and others are concerned about how one can promote individual liberty, which makes value pluralism more likely than another other polity, even while no conception of the good human life is given superior status in the society. How could this done, given without contradiction, namely, without elevating liberalism to a higher level than other value systems?

Berlin and Gray may have to give up on value egalitarianism, which is the view they seem to endorse, in order to retain the possibility of value pluralism. As Michael Walzer has observed,

If value pluralism is true ... and if only liberal minded men and women can fully recognize this truth, then liberalism may just possibly have a different status than other values and ways of life. And how can we say anything about this status if we are committed to value pluralism? Perhaps, if we can't say anything, we had best be silent. (Michael Walzer, "Are There Limits to Liberalism?" Review of John Gray's *Isaiah Berlin*, *The New York Review of Books*, October 19, 1995, p. 28)

But we need not remain silent. We can hold, with the American political tradition and the founders of the American republic that there is a superior way of life, namely, one in which individuals pursue their happiness and respect the rights of all others individuals to their lives, liberty and pursuit of happiness. Accordingly, while a given mode of life is seen as superior to others, all modes are free to be pursued provided those who pursue them do not impose them on unwilling others.

Accordingly, for example, the Amish people in the United States of American pursue their own version of happiness—a life devoted to religious pursuits—as do the Hari Krishna, the followers of the Reverend Moon and, indeed, the members of the approximately 1200 different religious denominations and several more hundred secular groups. The one common requirement by which all must live is to also let live, as it were.

This is not, of course, suit everyone who is following some doctrine or mode of religious, philosophical or political life. Take socialists, for example. They could live in a voluntary commune, share the wealth, follow the principles "from each according to his ability, to each according to his need." But many socialists would find this unsatisfactory. They hold, as we have already learned from Tatyana Tolstaya, that all men and women in society are "species beings," parts of the "organic whole" Marx refers to in his *Grundrisse*.

Now to tell whether the individualist, liberal or the collectivist, more totalist view is right is not easy—I have only hinted above that individualism makes much

better sense. The reason is that values are embedded in a reality with attributes that bear heavily on the nature of those values. Only within a larger philosophical framework can that relationship be spelled out in detail. Accordingly, individualists will draw upon their individualist idea of human nature to defend their value judgments, whereas collectivists will invoke theirs to defend collectivist values and both will draw upon a general ontology and metaphysics to indicate why their individualism or collectivism reflects this world more accurately. To decide between these one must ultimately address very basic philosophical issues.

Suffice it to say that certain facts about human nature alone suggest that there is an indispensable element of individuality in every person. This has to do with every person's capacity for initiative, creative thought (which is not identical with intellectualization), novel conduct, inventiveness, critical judgment, self-evaluation, self-direction, etc. Even as this matter is discussed by the various parties to the dispute, there is no way to erase the individualist element of human life. Adversaries criticize each other, hold them responsible to do better than they do, expect them to have done better before, etc. Accountability, responsibility is not easily combined with collectivism. This is evident even at the common sense level where we find it insidious when people hide their responsibility behind the facade of corporate action—to wit, "It was our committee that decided this, not I." The way the "we" often gets in the way of the "I" seems artificial, despite the fact that in many contexts no mention is made of this oddity.

For our purposes, however, what is crucial about individuality is that the human good, moral virtue, is necessarily related to self-direction. Self-direction is an aspect of any and all moral conduct and indeed qualifies the goodness of morality by virtue of making such goodness a personal achievement. Unlike health or looks or good fortune in general, moral goodness is something that the individual achieves on the basis of personal initiative, the creative power that he or she exercises as a matter of his or her free will. Our putative moral virtues would, whether they be Christian, Buddhist, Hindu, secular, Aristotelian, Augustinian or whatever, can only be credited to us if we chose to act on them. If I am honest, generous, just, prudent or courageous without my having chosen to do so (or, following Kant, if I am these because some objective I happen to be pursuing will be well served by so acting in accordance with these virtues), I have not made myself *morally* better.

It seems, then, that if there is anything at all that unites the various ideals ways of life, regardless of the particular ideals in question, it is the requirement that the person who lives in line with those ideals does so on his or her own initiative. This

is why individualism and liberalism, its political expression, are universal frameworks for human association. They are basic norms of interpersonal social living or, as Rasmussen and Den Uyl have called them, meta-norms—norms as to what kind of political-legal framework should be established, administered and maintained so that all other norms can be pursued by choice. Here is how they put the matter:

...Liberalism, then, is not designed to either promote, preserve, or imply one form of flourishing over another. It is not thereby completely open ended, however. Liberalism does prevent “forms of flourishing” which inherently preclude the possibility of taking place along side of other diverse forms of flourishing....

The Founders of the American republic seem to have been more or less aware of this, probably because they were aware of the great differences, legitimate or not, between the way citizens of American would pursue the morally good life for human beings. Any and all of the limitations placed on cultural diversity in the American political framework? or some consistent version of it in which cultural imperialism is kept to the minimum? are inescapable ones for any community that would enhance the morally good life for human beings as such.

We could take up at this point one of the thorniest issues facing those in the discussion of how multiculturalism may fit within any particular political system. This is whether any and all pursuits of the morally good life qualify for mutual respect. We cannot enter this debate here in full. But it is worth making a suggestions that may serve to set us on the right course in this debate.

Individuals are, of course, also members of groups, large, small, tiny, huge. We are variously as well as conjointly parents, neighbors, colleagues, members of ethnic, racial, sexual, and religious communities, seeking to attain distinct ends and following diverse codes of conduct. In each of these roles we will face moral responsibilities and many of these will not necessarily be shared by others who are not in these groups or will be shared to a greater or lesser degree even within those groups. A father of four and a farther of one; a colleague of a worldwide scientific society versus one who belongs to but a small research facility; a artist who paints versus one who performs, etc., and so forth? they all may share as well as not share various responsibilities. A Polish émigré may have certain responsibilities toward newcomers from Poland that an English émigré does not share toward newcomers from England. All kinds of contingencies will have a bearing on the measure and extent of moral responsibilities of various people, even where some general principles can be shown to apply to large groups of men and women at the same

time? e.g., familial or fraternal ones. While there can be commonality in some of the virtues we should practice, just how we should practice them will often be a matter of our special and even particular circumstances.

Accordingly, ethical value pluralism is natural to human living as such. Thus those societies that demand uniformity of conduct under all circumstances, with no justification that takes account of the above facts, are going to be flawed. But if the individuals choose to accept these demands and choose to act on them, this is one source of their moral quality, one way it is established how morally good they are. Thus, Nazis, Soviets, South Africans, American slave owners and other moral misfits who have consented to the social pressure to conform to such misconduct are complicit in moral evil and not merely practice diverse valid conceptions of the morally good life for human beings. Any version of multiculturalism that implies embracing such conduct, giving it free reign in society, must be deemed impermissible.

Even where misconduct does not involve the violation of liberal values, as in the conduct of members of the above groups, it is possible one to validly conclude? without, however, drawing any public policy implications from this? that the members of the group are moral misfits. For example, sado-masochistic groups may violate no one's rights and yet it is not impossible that we would have to conclude that they are involved in some measure of moral malpractice. Marriages involving the subservience of one mate to the other may also be morally odious. Yet this does not preclude their being legally acceptable, if not morally tolerable, within liberal polities.

In conclusion I wish only to reiterate a point made earlier. The individuality of human beings is undeniable—even as we debate the matter it surfaces relentlessly in our creative thinking, the way we forge new or reworked arguments in discussing the issue. This isn't, of course, recognized by everyone, so the dispute will continue. But if we focus on the matter carefully, it becomes inescapably obvious. Accordingly, those who would advocate an anti-individualist perspective have some fancy footwork to perform to deny the fundamentality of the individuality of human life.

This individuality, however, does not imply isolation or some kind of fake self-sufficiency for individuals. Cooperation, sociability, fellow feeling are just as much a part of human life as is individuality. Sometimes individualists do forget this and make the mistake of issuing hyperbolic slogans that are literally false, although perhaps understandable as ways to call attention to the importance of the

individual human being. The mistakes, furthermore, are not nearly as harmful and tragic as the mistakes of those who would compromise the individuality of human life by lumping us all into some group, whether we choose this or not.

It seems, then, that however much individualism is dismissed by some as just another bias of Western culture, it is actually more of a humanistic philosophical discovery and ethico-political affirmation that happens to have been made, although not exclusively, in the Western world. The point is that every human being anytime or everywhere would do (or would have done) better if his or her community embraced the insight of individualism and paid attention to every person's sovereignty and possession of the right to freedom and independence. Only if this is fully realized, can human beings begin to embark on a truly self-responsible form of life, including in each others company, as well as continue to practice and further develop their unique cultures and customs in peace. While such full realization is not highly probable, it is certainly within our power to clearly articulate it and strive for it with greater vigilance than we are doing.

The fear that seems to motivate many about individualism, namely, that it leaves the sociability of human life neglected, or that it encourages crass egoism, should not be allowed to squelch the essential truth of the doctrine, which is that in human life the initiative and, thus, the liberty of the individual are central ingredients of decency and flourishing.