

What has been outlined is the essence of collectivism. The individual will, the individual person and his or her own ideas, values, hopes, and dreams, mean nothing. What matters is the whole of which the individual is a part and which transcends any individual or any set of individuals. The collective—the community—the people—society—the State: *that* is reality. The individual is ultimately a fiction.

To this Individualism says “No.” If ten people are on an island, there are ten individual wills and the relationships between them. There is no eleventh will, a “general will” distinct from and other than the individual wills, and the way those ten wills interact. There is not some “thing” called society distinct from ten individuals, their skills, and their relationships. Should one individual seize power and start exacting tribute from his nine neighbors, what exists is nine bullied victims, one bullying ruler, and a set of relationships marked by coercion. No mysterious new entity called “the State” has come into being. To delude oneself into believing that terms such as “society,” “community,” and “state” signify real entities distinct from human beings, their skills, and their relationships is to fall for what the philosopher A. N. Whitehead calls, “the fallacy of misplaced concreteness.”¹³

It is the individual who thinks.

Certainly, individual minds can interact and stimulate one another, but thought itself demands a particular thinker. It is the individual who initiates purposive action from within. Again, individuals can decide to join forces and, as we say, “act collectively,” but that “collectively acting unit” is not other than or distinct from individual human beings, enjoying particular relationships, individually initiating purposive behavior. It is the individual who perceives, each from his or her own unique spatio-temporal location. It is the individual who dreams, hopes, cares, values, chooses, and loves. Lose sight of the individual in some collective or aggregate or class, and one is in danger of losing contact with reality. So affirms Individualism.

Social scientists are particularly prone to start reifying—that is, turning into existing things—collective terms. I know no better works elaborating this claim than Ludwig von Mises’ *Theory and History*¹⁴ and Friedrich A. Hayek’s *Individualism and Economic Order*.¹⁵

Thought through, Individualism inexorably leads to advocacy of the free market in the free society. It leads us to affirm, as did our forefathers, that no human being is a chattel to be enslaved, debased, or dictated to by another. It leads us to challenge all dominations and all tyrannies, all bigotries and all priv-

ileged classes, all institutions and all social practices, that deny the sacredness of the human spirit.

And it leads us to call deep thanks for those who, many centuries ago, dug a well in the desert of collectivism and privilege, and dug it deep, and called it a name signifying what the word “Individualism” denotes. That well the Philistines have sought to fill and to close. It is for us to start redigging it.

Three wells. Human rights. Private property. Individualism. The damage done by the Philistines is not difficult to see. Nor, however, is our task. How best to go about it each one of us must determine for himself or for herself. In the meantime, we can find strength in the knowledge that there are those whose devotion to liberty we can rely on. I refer, of course to ourselves. ☪

—FOOTNOTES—

¹T. H. Green, *The Works of Thomas Hill Green*, ed. R. L. Nettleship (London: Oxford University Press, 1889).

²M. Rothbard, *The Ethics of Liberty* (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1982), pp. 113–119.

³*Ibid.*, p. 113.

⁴Xu Dixin et al., *China’s Search for Economic Growth* (Beijing: New World Press, 1982), p. 122.

⁵L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1958).

⁶K. Marx, *The German Ideology in Karl Marx: Selected Writings*, ed. D. McLellan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 169.

⁷V. I. Lenin, *Left-Wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder* (New York: International Publishers, 1940), p. 34.

⁸Cited, *The Minor Writings of Jean Jacques Rousseau*, ed. W. Boyd (New York: Hutchins, 1962), p. 131.

⁹J. J. Rousseau, *Emile* (Paris: Garnier Edition, 1935), p. 114.

¹⁰Cf. J. K. Williams, “The End of Schooling,” *The Freeman* (September 1982), pp. 565–73.

¹¹G. W. F. Hegel, *Hegel’s Philosophy of Rights*, trans. T. M. Knox (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1942).

¹²Cf. Ludwig von Mises, *Omnipotent Government* (New Rochelle: Arlington, 1969).

¹³A. N. Whitehead, *Process and Reality* (New York: Macmillan, 1929), p. 11; *idem.*, *Science and the Modern World* (New York: Macmillan, 1929), p. 75.

¹⁴Mises, *Theory and History* (Westport: Arlington, 1969).

¹⁵F. A. Hayek, *Individualism and Economic Order* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948).

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IDEAS ON



LIBERTY

RESOURCES OF THE SPIRIT are like savings: They must be accumulated before they are needed. When they are needed, there is no substitute for them. Sooner or later, the individual faces the world alone, and that moment may overwhelm him if he has no resources within himself. . . . We can escape our physical environment and our neighbors, but we cannot escape ourselves.