

# THE CHASM: TWO ETHICS THAT DIVIDE THE WESTERN WORLD

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## WORDS WITHOUT MEANING

There are many words commonly used today to describe political attitudes. We are told that there are conservatives, liberals, Libertarians, Right-wingers, Left-winger, socialists, Communists, Trotskyites, Maoists, Fascists, Nazis; and if that isn't confusing enough, now we have *neo* conservatives, *neo* Nazis, and *neo* everything else. When we are asked what our political orientation is, we are expected to choose from one of these words. If we don't have a political opinion or if we're afraid of making a bad choice, then we play it safe and say we are moderates – adding yet one more word to the list. Yet, not one person in a thousand can clearly define the ideology that any of these words represent. They are used, primarily, as labels to impart an aura of either goodness or badness, depending on who uses the words and what *emotions* they trigger in their minds.

For example, what is a realistic definition of a conservative? A common response would be that a conservative is a person who wants to conserve the status quo and is opposed to change. But, most people who call themselves conservatives are *not* in favor of conserving the present system of high taxes, deficit spending, expanding welfare, leniency to criminals, foreign aid, growth of government, or any of the other hallmarks of the present order. These are the jealously guarded bastions of what we call liberalism. Yesterday's liberals are the conservatives of today, and the people who call themselves conservatives are really radicals, because they want a radical change from the status quo. It's no wonder that most political debates sound like they originate at the tower of Babel. Everyone is speaking a different language. The words may sound familiar, but speakers and listeners each have their own private definitions.

It has been my experience that, once the definitions are commonly understood, most of the disagreements come to an end. To the amazement of those who thought they were bitter ideological opponents, they often find they are actually in basic agreement. So, to deal with this word, *collectivism*, our first order of business is to throw out the garbage. If we are to make sense of the political agendas that dominate our planet today, we must not allow our thinking to be contaminated by the emotional load of the old vocabulary.

It may surprise you to learn that most of the great political debates of our time – at least in the Western world – can be divided into just two viewpoints. All of the rest is fluff. Typically, they focus on whether or not a particular action should be taken; but the real conflict is not about the merits of the action; it is about the principles, the ethical code that justifies or forbids that action. It is a contest between the ethics of *collectivism* on the one hand and *individualism* on the other. Those are words that have meaning, and they describe a chasm of morality that divides the entire Western world.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> In the Middle East and parts of Africa and Asia, there is a third ethic called *theocracy*, a form of government that combines church and state and compels citizens to accept a particular religious doctrine. That was common throughout early European Christendom and it appeared even in some of the colonies of the United States. It survives in today's world in the form of Islam, and it has millions of advocates. Any comprehensive view of political ideology must include theocracy, but time does not permit such scope in this presentation. For those interested in the author's larger view, including theocracy, there is a summary called *Which Path for Mankind?* available at the Freedom Force web site in the section called *The Creed*. A further analysis of Islam will be contained in the author's forthcoming book, *The Freedom Manifesto*, to be available from The Reality Zone, [www.realityzone.com](http://www.realityzone.com).

The one thing that is common to both collectivists and individualists is that the vast majority of them are well intentioned. They want the best life possible for their families, for their countrymen, and for mankind. They want prosperity and justice for their fellow man. Where they disagree is how to bring those things about.

I have studied collectivist literature for over forty years; and, after a while, I realized there were certain recurring themes. I was able to identify what I consider to be the six pillars of collectivism. If these pillars are turned upside down, they also are the six pillars of individualism. In other words, there are six major concepts of social and political relationships; and, within each of them, collectivists and individualists have opposite viewpoints.

## 1. THE NATURE OF HUMAN RIGHTS

The first of these has to do with the nature of human rights. Collectivists and individualists both agree that human rights are important, but they differ over *how* important and especially over what is presumed to be the origin of those rights. There are only two possibilities in this debate. Either man's rights are *intrinsic* to his being, or they are *extrinsic*, meaning that either he possesses them at birth or they are given to him afterward. In other words, they are either hardware or software. Individualists believe they are hardware. Collectivists believe they are software.

If rights are given to the individual after birth, then who has the power to do that? Collectivists believe that is a function of government. Individualists are nervous about that assumption because, if the state has the power to *grant* rights, it also has the power to take them away, and that concept is incompatible with personal liberty.

The view of individualism was expressed clearly in the United States Declaration of Independence, which said:

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 are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness. That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among men....

Nothing could be more clear than that. "Unalienable Rights" means they are the natural possession of each of us upon birth, not granted by the state. The purpose of government is, not to *grant* rights, but to *secure* them and protect them.

By contrast, all collectivist political systems embrace the opposite view that rights are granted by the state. That includes the Nazis, Fascists, and Communists. It is also a tenet of the United Nations. Article Four of the UN Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights says:

The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize that, in the enjoyment of those rights provided by the State ... the State may subject such rights only to such limitations as are determined by law.

I repeat: If we accept that the state has the power to *grant* rights, then we must also agree it has the power to *take them away*. Notice the wording of the UN Covenant. After proclaiming that rights are provided by the state, it then says that those rights may be subject to limitations "as are determined by law." In other words, the collectivists at the UN presume to grant us our rights and, when they are ready to take them away, all they have to do is pass a law authorizing it.

Compare that with the Bill of Rights in the United States Constitution. It says Congress shall pass *no* law restricting the rights of freedom of speech, or religion, peaceful assembly, the right to bear arms, and so forth – not *except as determined by law*, but *no* law. The Constitution embodies the ethic of individualism. The UN embodies the ethic of collectivism, and what a difference that makes.

## 2. THE ORIGIN OF STATE POWER

The second concept that divides collectivism from individualism has to do with the origin of state power. Individualists believe that a just government derives its power, not from conquest and subjugation of its citizens, but from the free consent of the governed. That means the state cannot have any legitimate powers unless they are given to it by its citizens. Another way of putting it is that governments may do only those things that their citizens also have a right to do. If individuals don't have the right to perform a certain act, then they can't grant that power to their elected representatives. They can't delegate what they don't have.

Let us use an extreme example. Let us assume that a ship has been sunk in a storm, and three exhausted men are struggling for survival in the sea. Suddenly, they come upon a life-buoy ring. The ring is designed only to keep one person afloat; but, with careful cooperation between them, it can keep two of them afloat. But, when the third man grasps the ring, it becomes useless, and all three, once again, are at the mercy of the sea. They try taking turns: one treading water while two hold on to the ring; but after a few hours, none of them have enough strength to continue. The grim truth gradually becomes clear: Unless one of them is cut loose from the group, all three will drown. What, then, should these men do?

Most people would say that two of the men would be justified in overpowering the third and casting him off. The right of self-survival is paramount. Taking the life of another, terrible as such an act would be, is morally justified if it is necessary to save your own life. That certainly is true for individual action, but what about collective action? Where do two men get the right to gang up on one man?

The collectivist answers that two men have a greater right to life because they outnumber the third one. It's a question of mathematics: *The greatest good for the greatest number*. That makes the group more important than the individual and it justifies two men forcing one man away from the ring. There is a certain logical appeal to this argument but, if we further simplify the example, we will see that, although the action may be correct, it is justified by the wrong reasoning.

Let us assume, now, that there are only *two* survivors – so we eliminate the concept of the group – and let us also assume that the ring will support only one swimmer, not two. Under these conditions, it would be similar to facing an enemy in battle. You must kill or be killed. Only one can survive. We are dealing now with the competing right of self-survival for each individual, and there is no mythological group to confuse the issue. Under this extreme condition, it is clear that each person would have the right to do whatever he can to preserve his own life, even if it leads to the death of another. Some may argue that it would be better to sacrifice one's life for a stranger, but few would argue that *not* to do so would be wrong. So, when the conditions are simplified to their barest essentials, we see that the right to deny life to others comes from the *individual's* right to protect his *own* life. It does not need the so-called group to ordain it.

In the original case of three survivors, the justification for denying life to one of them does not come from a majority vote but from their *individual and separate* right of self-survival.

In other words, either of them, acting alone, would be justified in this action. They are not empowered by the group. When we hire police to protect our community, we are merely asking them to do what we, ourselves, have a right to do. Using physical force to protect our lives, liberty, and property is a legitimate function of government, because that power is derived from the people as *individuals*. It does not arise from the group.

Here's one more example – a lot less extreme but far more typical of what actually goes on every day in legislative bodies. If government officials decide one day that no one should work on Sunday, and even assuming the community generally supports their decision, where would they get the authority to use the police power of the state to enforce such a decree? Individual citizens don't have the right to compel their neighbors not to work, so they can't delegate that right to their government. Where, then, would the state get the authority? The answer is that it would come from itself; it would be self-generated. It would be similar to the divine right of ancient monarchies in which it was assumed that governments represent the power and the will of God – as interpreted by their earthly leaders, of course. In more modern times, most governments don't even pretend to have God as their authority, they just rely on swat teams and armies, and anyone who objects is eliminated. As that well-known collectivist, Mao Tse-Tung, phrased it: "Political power grows out of the barrel of a gun."

When governments claim to derive their authority from any source other than the governed, it always leads to the destruction of liberty. Preventing men from working on Sunday would not seem to be a great threat to freedom, but once the principle is established, it opens the door for more edicts, and more, and more until freedom is gone. If we accept that the state or any group has the right to do things that individuals alone do not have the right to do, then we have unwittingly endorsed the concept that rights are *not* intrinsic to the individual and that they, in fact, *do* originate with the state. Once we accept that, we are well on the road to tyranny.

Collectivists are not concerned over such picky issues. They believe that governments do, in fact, have powers that are greater than those of their citizens, and the source of those powers, they say, is, not the individuals within society, but society itself, the *group* to which individuals belong.

### **3. GROUP SUPREMACY**

This is the third concept that divides collectivism from individualism. Collectivism is based on the belief that the group is an entity of its own, that it has rights of its own, and that those rights are more important than the rights of individuals. If necessary, individuals must be sacrificed for the benefit of the group, and the justification is that this is for "the greater good of the greater number."

Individualists on the other hand say, "Wait a minute. Group? What is *group*? That's just a word. You can't touch a group. You can't see a group. All you can touch and see are individuals. The word *group* is an abstraction and doesn't exist as a tangible reality. It's like the abstraction called forest. Forest doesn't exist. Only trees exist. Forest is the concept of many trees. Likewise, the word *group* merely describes the concept of many individuals. Only individuals are real and, therefore, there is no such thing as group rights. Governments cannot derive authority from groups, because groups don't have any to give. Only individuals have rights. Only individuals can delegate them.

Just because there are many individuals in one group and only a few in another does not give a higher priority to the rights of individuals in the larger group. Rights are not based on a

head count. They are not derived from the power of numbers. They are *intrinsic* with each human being.

When someone argues that individuals must be sacrificed for the greater good of society, what they are really saying is that *some* individuals are to be sacrificed for the greater good of *other* individuals. The morality of collectivism is based on numbers. Anything may be done so long as the number of people benefiting supposedly is greater than the number of people being sacrificed. I say supposedly, because, in the real world, those who decide who is to be sacrificed don't count fairly. Dictators always claim they represent the greater good of the greater number but, in reality, they and their support groups comprise less than one percent of the population. The theory is that someone has to speak for the masses and represent their best interest, because they are too dumb to figure it out for themselves. So collectivist leaders, wise and virtuous as they are, make the decisions for them. It is possible to explain any atrocity or injustice as a necessary measure for the greater good of society. Totalitarians always parade as humanitarians.

Because individualists do not accept group supremacy, collectivists portray them as being self centered and insensitive to the needs of others. That theme is common in schools today. If a child is not willing to go along with the group, he is criticized as being socially disruptive and not being a good "team player" or a good citizen. Those nice folks at the tax-exempt foundations had a lot to do with that. But individualism is not based on ego. It is based on principle. If you accept the premise that individuals may be sacrificed for the group, you have made a huge mistake on two counts. First, individuals are the *essence* of the group, which means the group is being sacrificed anyway, piece by piece. Secondly, the underlying principle is deadly. Today, the individual being sacrificed may be unknown to you or even someone you dislike. Tomorrow, it could be you.

## REPUBLICS VS DEMOCRACIES

We are dealing here with one of the reasons people make a distinction between Republics and Democracies. In recent years, we have been taught to believe that a Democracy is the ideal form of government. Supposedly, that is what was created by the American Constitution. But, if you read the documents of the men who *wrote* the Constitution, you find that they spoke very poorly of Democracy. They said in plain words that a Democracy was one of the worst possible forms of government. And so they created what they called a Republic. That is why the word Democracy doesn't appear anywhere in the Constitution; and, when Americans pledge allegiance to the flag, it's to the *Republic* for which it stands, not the Democracy. The bottom line is that the difference between a Democracy and a Republic is the difference between collectivism and individualism.

In a pure Democracy, the concept is that the majority shall rule; end of discussion. You might say, "What's wrong with that?" Well, there could be *plenty* wrong with that. What about a lynch mob? There is only one person with a dissenting vote, and he is the guy at the end of the rope. That's pure Democracy in action.

"Ah, wait a minute," you say. "The majority should rule. Yes, but not to the extent of denying the rights of the minority."

That is precisely what a Republic accomplishes. A Republic is simply a *limited Democracy* – a government based on the principle of limited majority rule so that the minority – even a minority of one – will be protected from the whims and passions of the majority. Republics are characterized by written constitutions that spell out the rules to make that possible. That was the function of the American Bill of Rights, which is nothing more than a list

of things the government may not do. It says that Congress, even though it represents the majority, shall pass no law denying the minority their rights to free exercise of religion, freedom of speech, peaceful assembly, the right to bear arms, and other “unalienable” rights.<sup>2</sup>

These limitations on majority rule are the essence of a Republic, and they also are at the core of the ideology called individualism. And so here is another major difference between these two concepts: collectivism on the one hand, supporting any government action so long as it can be said to be for the greater good of the greater number; and individualism on the other hand, defending the rights of the minority against the passions and greed of the majority.

#### **4. COERCION VS FREEDOM**

The fourth concept that divides collectivism from individualism has to do with responsibilities and freedom of choice. We have spoken about the origin of rights, but there is a similar issue involving the origin of responsibilities. Rights and responsibilities go together. If you value the right to live your own life without others telling you what to do, then you must assume the responsibility to be independent, to provide for yourself without expecting others to take care of you. Rights and responsibilities are merely different sides of the same coin.

If only individuals have rights, then it follows that only individuals have responsibilities. If groups have rights, then groups also have responsibilities; and, therein, lies one of the greatest ideological challenges of our modern age.

Individualists are champions of individual rights. Therefore, they accept the principle of individual responsibility rather than group responsibility. They believe that everyone has a personal and direct obligation to provide, first for himself and his family, and then for others who may be in need. That does not mean they don't believe in helping each other. Just because I am an individualist does not mean I have to move my piano alone. It just means that I believe that moving it is my responsibility, not someone else's, and it's up to me to organize the voluntary assistance of others.

The collectivist, on the other hand, declares that individuals are *not* personally responsible for charity, for raising their own children, providing for aging parents, or even providing for themselves, for that matter. These are group obligations of the state. The individualist expects to do it himself; the collectivist wants the government to do it for him: to provide employment and health care, a minimum wage, food, education, and a decent place to live. Collectivists are enamored by government. They worship government. They have a fixation on government as the ultimate group mechanism to solve all problems.

Individualists do not share that faith. They see government as the creator of more problems than it solves. They believe that freedom of choice will lead to the best solution of social and economic problems. Millions of ideas and efforts, each subject to trial and error and competition – in which the best solution becomes obvious by comparing its results to all others – that process will produce results that are far superior to what can be achieved by a group of politicians or a committee of so-called wise men.

By contrast, collectivists do not trust freedom. They are afraid of freedom. They are convinced that freedom may be all right in small matters such as what color socks you want to wear, but when it comes to the important issues such as the money supply, banking practices, investments, insurance programs, health care, education, and so on, freedom will not work.

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<sup>2</sup> It should be noted that, even without the Bill of Rights, the American Constitution was a strong bulwark against abusive, centralized government. After explaining in detail what the powers of the federal government were, it said that any powers not specifically mentioned were reserved to the states or to the people.

These things, they say, simply must be controlled by the government. Otherwise there would be chaos.

There are two reasons for the popularity of that concept. One is that most of us have been educated in government schools, and that's what we were taught. The other reason is that government is the one group that can legally force everyone to participate. It has the power of taxation, backed by jails and force of arms to compel everyone to fall in line, and that is a very appealing concept to the intellectual who pictures himself as a social engineer.

Collectivists say, "We must force people to do what we think they should do, because they are too dumb to do it on their own. We, on the other hand, have been to school. We've read books. We are informed. We are smarter than those people out there. If we leave it to them, they are going to make terrible mistakes. So, it is up to us, the enlightened ones. We shall decide on behalf of society and we shall enforce our decisions by law so no one has any choice. That we should rule in this fashion is our obligation to mankind."

By contrast, individualists say, "We also think we are right and that the masses seldom do what we think they should do, but we don't believe in forcing anyone to comply with our will because, if we grant that principle, then others, representing larger groups than our own, could compel *us* to act as *they* decree, and that would be the end of our freedom."

One of the quickest ways to spot a collectivist is to see how he reacts to public problems. No matter what bothers him in his daily routine – whether it's littering the highway, smoking in public, dressing indecently, sending out junk mail – you name it, his immediate response is; "There ought to be a law!" And, of course, the professionals in government who make a living from such laws are more than happy to cooperate. The consequence of this mindset is that government just keeps growing and growing. It's a one-way street. Every year there are more and more laws and less and less freedom. Each law by itself seems relatively benign, justified by some convenience or for the greater good of the greater number, but the process continues *forever* until government is total and freedom is dead. Bit-by-bit, the people, themselves, become the solicitor of their own enslavement.

## **THE ROBIN HOOD SYNDROME**

A good example of this collectivist mindset is the use of government to perform acts of charity. Most people believe that we all have a responsibility to help others in need if we can, but what about those who disagree, those who couldn't care less about the needs of others? Should they be allowed to be selfish while we are so generous? The collectivist sees people like that as justification for the use of coercion, because the cause is so worthy. He sees himself as a modern Robin Hood, stealing from the rich but giving to the poor. Of course, not all of it gets to the poor. After all, Robin and his men have to eat and drink and be merry, and that doesn't come cheap. It takes a giant bureaucracy to administer a public charity, and the Robbing Hoods in government have become accustomed to a huge share of the loot, while the peasants – well, they're grateful for whatever they get. They don't care how much is consumed along the way. It was all stolen from someone else anyway.

The so-called charity of collectivism is a perversion of the Biblical story of the Good Samaritan who stopped along the highway to help a stranger who had been robbed and beaten. He even takes the victim to an inn and pays for his stay there until he recovers. Everyone approves of such acts of compassion and charity, but what would we think if the Samaritan had pointed his sword at the next traveler and threatened to kill him if he didn't also help? If that had happened, I doubt if the story would have made it into the *Bible*; because, at that point, the

Samaritan would be no different than the original robber – who also might have had a virtuous motive. For all we know, he could have claimed that he was merely providing for his family and feeding his children. Most crimes are rationalized in this fashion, but they are crimes nevertheless. When coercion enters, charity leaves.<sup>3</sup>

Individualists refuse to play this game. We expect everyone to be charitable, but we also believe that a person should be free *not* to be charitable if he doesn't want to. If he prefers to give to a different charity than the one we urge on him, if he prefers to give a smaller amount than what we think he should, or if he prefers not to give at all, we believe that we have no right to force him to our will. We may try to persuade him to do so; we may appeal to his conscience; and especially we may show the way by our own good example; but we reject any attempt to gang up on him, either by physically restraining him while we remove the money from his pockets or by using the ballot box to pass laws that will take his money through taxation. In either case, the principle is the same. It's called stealing.

Collectivists would have you believe that individualism is merely another word for selfishness, because individualists oppose welfare and other forms of coercive re-distribution of wealth, but just the opposite is true. Individualists advocate true charity, which is the voluntary giving of their own money, while collectivists advocate the coercive giving of other people's money; which, of course, is why it is so popular.

One more example: The collectivist will say, "I think everyone should wear seatbelts. That just makes sense. People can be hurt if they don't wear seatbelts. So, let's pass a law and require everyone to wear them. If they don't, we'll put those dummies in jail." The individualist says, "I think everyone should wear seatbelts. People can be hurt in accidents if they don't wear them, but I don't believe in forcing anyone to do so. I believe in convincing them with logic and persuasion and good example, if I can, but I also believe in freedom of choice."

One of the most popular slogans of Marxism is: "From each according to his ability, to each according to his need." That's the cornerstone of theoretical socialism, and it is a very appealing concept. A person hearing that slogan for the first time might say: "What's wrong with that? Isn't that the essence of charity and compassion toward those in need? What could possibly be wrong with giving according to your ability to others according to their need?" And the answer is, *nothing* is wrong with it – as far as it goes, but it is an incomplete concept. The unanswered question is *how* is this to be accomplished? Shall it be in freedom or through coercion? I mentioned earlier that collectivists and individualists usually agree on objectives but disagree over means, and this is a classic example. The collectivist says, *take* it by force of law. The individualist says, *give* it through free will. The collectivist says, not enough people will respond unless they are forced. The individualist says, enough people will respond to achieve the task. Besides, the preservation of freedom is also important. The collectivist advocates legalized plunder in the name of a worthy cause, believing that the end justifies the means. The individualist advocates free will and true charity, believing that the worthy objective does not justify committing theft and surrendering freedom.

There is a story of a Bolshevik revolutionary who was standing on a soap box speaking to a small crowd in Times Square. After describing the glories of Socialism and Communism, he said: "Come the revolution and everyone will eat peaches and cream." A little old man at the back of the crowd yelled out: "I don't like peaches and cream." The Bolshevik thought about

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<sup>3</sup> Let's be clear on this. If our families really were starving, most of us *would* steal if that were the only way to obtain food. It would be justified by our intrinsic right to life, but let's not call it virtuous charity. It would be raw survival.



that for a moment and then replied: “Come the revolution, Comrade, you *will* like peaches and cream.”

This, then, is the fourth difference between collectivism and individualism, and it is perhaps the most fundamental of them all: collectivists believe in coercion; individualists believe in freedom.

## **5. EQUALITY VS, INEQUALITY UNDER LAW**

The fifth concept that divides collectivism from individualism has to do with the way people are treated under the law. Individualists believe that no two people are exactly alike, and each one is superior or inferior to others in many ways but, *under law*, they should all be treated equally. Collectivists believe that the law should treat people *unequally* in order to bring about desirable changes in society. They view the world as tragically imperfect. They see poverty and suffering and injustice and they conclude that something must be done to alter the forces that have produced these effects. They think of themselves as social engineers who have the wisdom to restructure society to a more humane and logical order. To do this, they must intervene in the affairs of men at all levels and redirect their activities according to a master plan. That means they must redistribute wealth and use the police power of the state to enforce prescribed behavior.

The consequence of this mindset can be seen everywhere in society today. Almost every country in the world has a tax system designed to treat people *unequally* depending on their income, their marital status, the number of children they have, their age, and the type of investments they may have. The purpose of this arrangement is to redistribute wealth, which means to favor some classes over others. In some cases, there are bizarre loopholes written into the tax laws just to favor one corporation or one politically influential group. Other laws provide tax-exemption and subsidies to favored groups or corporations. Inequality is the whole purpose of these laws.

In the realm of social relationships, there are laws to establish racial quotas, gender quotas, affirmative-action initiatives, and to prohibit expressions of opinion that may be objectionable to some group or to the master planners. In all of these measures, there is an unequal application of the law based on what group or class you happen to be in or on what opinion you hold. We are told that all of this is necessary to accomplish a desirable change in society. Yet, after more than a hundred years of social engineering, there is not one place on the globe where collectivists can point with pride and show where their master plan has actually worked as they predicted. There have been many books written about the collectivist utopia, but they never happened. The real-world results wherever collectivism has been applied are more poverty than before, more suffering than before, and certainly more injustice than before.

There is a better way. Individualism is based on the premise that all citizens should be equal under law, regardless of their national origin, race, religion, gender, education, economic status, life style, or political opinion. No class should be given preferential treatment, regardless of the merit or popularity of its cause. To favor one class over another is not equality under law.

## **6. PROPER ROLE OF GOVERNMENT**

When all of these factors are considered together, we come to the sixth ideological division between collectivism and individualism. Collectivists believe that the proper role of government should be positive, that the state should take the initiative in all aspects of the affairs of men, that it should be aggressive, lead, and provide. It should be the great organizer of society.

Individualists believe that the proper function of government is negative and defensive. It is to protect, not to provide; for if the state is granted the power to provide for some, it must also be able to take from others, and once that power is granted, there are those who will seek it for their advantage. It always leads to legalized plunder and loss of freedom. If government is powerful enough to give us everything we want, it is also powerful enough to take from us everything we have. Therefore, the proper function of government is to protect the lives, liberty, and property of its citizens; nothing more.<sup>4</sup>

## THE POLITICAL SPECTRUM

We hear a lot today about Right-wingers versus Left-wingers, but what do those terms really mean? For example, we are told that Communists and Socialists are at the extreme left, and the Nazis and Fascists are on the extreme right. Here we have the image of two powerful ideological adversaries pitted against each other, and the impression is that, somehow, they are opposites. But, what is the difference? They are not opposites at all. They are the same. The insignias may be different, but when you analyze Communism and Nazism, they both embody the principles of Socialism. Communists make no bones about Socialism being their ideal, and the Nazi movement in Germany was actually called the National Socialist Party. Communists believe in *international* Socialism, whereas Nazis advocate *national* Socialism. Communists promote *class* hatred and *class* conflict to motivate the loyalty and blind obedience of their followers, whereas the Nazis use *race* conflict and *race* hatred to accomplish the same objective. Other than that, there is no difference between Communism and Nazism. They are both the epitome of collectivism, and yet we are told they are, supposedly, at opposite ends of the spectrum!

There's only one thing that makes sense in constructing a political spectrum and that is to put zero government at one end of the line and 100% at the other. Now we have something we can comprehend. Those who believe in zero government are the anarchists, and those who believe in total government are the totalitarians. With that definition, we find that Communism and Nazism are together at the same end. They are both totalitarian. Why? Because they are both based on the model of collectivism. Communism, Nazism, Fascism and Socialism all gravitate

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<sup>4</sup> There is much more to be said than is permitted by the time constraints of this presentation. One important issue is the fact that there is a third category of human action that is neither proper nor improper, neither defensive nor aggressive; that there are areas of activity that may be undertaken by the state for convenience – such as building roads and maintaining recreational parks – provided they are funded, not from general taxes, but entirely by those who use them. Otherwise, some would benefit at the expense of others, and that is coercive re-distribution of wealth, a power that must be denied to the state. These activities would be permissible because they have a negligible impact on freedom. They would be more efficiently run and offer better public service if owned and operated by private industry, but there is no merit to being argumentative on that question when much more burning issues are at stake. After freedom is secure, we will have the luxury to debate these finer points. Another example of an optional activity would be a law in Hawaii to prevent the importation of snakes. Most Hawaiians want such a law for their convenience. Strictly speaking, this is not a proper function of government because it does not serve to protect the lives, liberty, or property of its citizens, but it is not improper either so long as it is administered in such a way that the cost is borne equally by all, not by some at the exclusion of others. It could be argued that this *is* a proper function of government, because snakes could threaten domestic animals that are the property of its citizens, but that would be stretching the point. It is exactly this kind of stretching of reason that demagogues use when they want to consolidate power. Almost any government action could be rationalized as an *indirect* protection of life, liberty, or property. The ultimate defense against word games of this kind is to stand firm on the ground that forbids funding such programs in any way that causes a shift of wealth from one group of citizens to another. That strips away the political advantage that motivates most of the collectivist schemes in the first place. Without the possibility of legalized plunder, most of the brain games will cease. Finally, when issues become murky and it really is impossible to clearly see if an action is acceptable for government, there is always a rule of thumb that can be relied on to show the proper way: That government is best which governs least. These and other issues relating to *The Creed of Freedom* will be included in the author's forthcoming book, *The Freedom Manifesto*, to be available from The Reality Zone at [www.realityzone.com](http://www.realityzone.com).

toward bigger and bigger government, because that is the logical extension of their common ideology. Under collectivism, all problems are the responsibility of the state and must be solved by the state. The more problems there are, the more powerful the state must become. Once you get on that slippery slope, there is no place to stop until you reach all the way to the end of the scale, which is total government. Regardless of what name you give it, regardless of how you re-label it to make it seem new or different, *collectivism is totalitarianism*.

Actually, the straight-line concept of a political spectrum is somewhat misleading. It is really a circle. You can take that straight line with 100% government at one end and zero at the other, bend it around, and touch the ends at the top. Now it's a circle because, under anarchy, where there is no government, you have absolute rule by those with the biggest fists and the most powerful weapons. So, you jump from zero government to totalitarianism in a flash. They meet at the top. We are really dealing with a circle, and the only logical place for us to be is somewhere in the middle of the extremes. We need government, of course, but, it must be built on individualism, an ideology that pushes always toward that part of the spectrum that involves the *least* government necessary to make things work instead of collectivism, which always pushes toward the other end of the spectrum for the *most* amount of government to make things work. That government is best which governs least.

## **SUMMARY OF DIFFERENCES BETWEEN COLLECTIVISTS AND INDIVIDUALISTS**

1. A collectivist believes that rights are derived from the state.  
An Individualist believes that rights are intrinsic to each human being.
2. A collectivist believes the state may perform acts that are forbidden to individuals.  
An individualist believes the state may do only what individuals have a right to do.
3. A collectivist believes individuals may be sacrificed for the greater good of the greater number.  
An individualist believes individuals must be protected from the greed and passion of the greater number.
4. A collectivist believes coercion is the best way to bring about positive effects in society.  
An individualist believes freedom-of-choice is the best way to bring about positive effects in society.
5. A collectivist believes laws should apply unequally to benefit one group over another.  
An individualist believes laws should apply equally to all groups so that everyone is treated the same.
6. A collectivist believes government should be an aggressive force for solving problems, providing sustenance, and directing human activities. That government is best which governs most.  
An individualist believes government should be a defensive and protective force, limited to safeguarding the lives, liberty, and property of its citizens. That government is best which governs least.

# **THE CREED OF FREEDOM**

## **INTRINSIC NATURE OF RIGHTS**

I believe that only individuals have rights, not the collective group; that these rights are intrinsic to each individual, not granted by the state; for if the state has the power to grant them, it also has the power to deny them, and that is incompatible with personal liberty.

I believe that a just government derives its power solely from the governed. Therefore, the state must never presume to do anything beyond what individual citizens also have the right to do. Otherwise, the state is a power unto itself and becomes the master instead of the servant of society.

## **SUPREMACY OF THE INDIVIDUAL**

I believe that one of the greatest threats to freedom is to allow any group, no matter its numeric superiority, to deny the rights of the minority; and that one of the primary functions of just government is to protect each individual from the greed and passion of the majority.

## **FREEDOM-OF-CHOICE**

I believe that desirable social and economic objectives are better achieved by voluntary action than by coercion of law. I believe that social tranquility and brotherhood are better achieved by tolerance, persuasion, and the power of good example than by coercion of law. I believe that those in need are better served by charity, which is the giving of one's own money, than by welfare, which is the giving of other people's money through coercion of law.

## **EQUALITY UNDER LAW**

I believe that all citizens should be equal under law, regardless of their national origin, race, religion, gender, education, economic status, life style, or political opinion. Likewise, no class should be given preferential treatment, regardless of the merit or popularity of its cause. To favor one class over another is not equality under law.

## **PROPER ROLE OF GOVERNMENT**

I believe that the proper role of government is negative, not positive; defensive, not aggressive. It is to protect, not to provide; for if the state is granted the power to provide for some, it must also be able to take from others, and once that power is granted, there are those who will seek it for their advantage. It always leads to legalized plunder and loss of freedom. If government is powerful enough to give us everything we want, it is also powerful enough to take from us everything we have. Therefore, the proper function of government is to protect the lives, liberty, and property of its citizens; nothing more. That government is best which governs least.

The chasm between collectivism and individualism is primarily a phenomenon of the Western world where the concept of representative government has taken root. Most of the world, however, does not have that heritage. Large parts of Asia, Africa, and the Middle East have little expectation of parliamentary government. They are accustomed to systems that are based on two other ideologies. One is rule by brute force – what I have called barbarism – and the other is theocracy, rule by men who claim to represent the word of God. In today’s world where one-fourth of the population adheres to a theocracy called Islam, it is important that we do not omit this from our matrix of understanding. I have included these additional ideologies in a comprehensive chart that compares the features of all four. The chart is called *Which Path for Mankind?* It can be downloaded from [www.freedom-force.org/whichpath.pdf](http://www.freedom-force.org/whichpath.pdf).

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