

# Individualism and collectivism



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Individualism and Collectivism Individualism emphasizes the value of self-reliance and personal responsibility. It is a philosophy which places the importance of the individual's will above that of the community, or rather than one does not have to place the wishes and desires of society or the community above one's own personal wishes or desires. This viewpoint is in direct contrast to collectivism, which states that the opposite is true - that the importance of the community is high above that of the individual, and that the good of the community to which one belongs should be considered more important than one's personal needs or wishes. Societies characterized as collectivist are commonly communist or communal societies.

Democratic society is more or less based on individualism, and how as individuals we are all free to decide our own path and determine our own fates. These days, we all say that the individual has the right to decide how to live their own lives, and individuals, societies, or institutions should not be allowed to interfere. A common argument against individualism is that it is little more than selfishness or egotism. However, individualism is more about providing personal choices rather than explicitly providing benefit to individuals.

Perhaps the most glaringly obvious downside to this is that the increasing emphasis on the importance of the individual has by necessity occurred in conjunction with de-emphasis on the importance of community. In deciding that we are free to determine our fates regardless of any other considerations, we have lost that feeling of community that used to be considered so important. Too many people have stopped believing they have any responsibility to their wider community, and this is reflected in increasing crime rates, especially of violent crime. If there is one single thing

that collectivism could teach us, it is that even though personal liberty is important, the importance of community should not be allowed to degrade to the point that individuals no longer believe they have any responsibility to their community.

Collectivist societies place a great deal of emphasis on conformity and common goals. This is perhaps one of its greatest failings, as it does not take into account that the human race is composed of unique individuals. Even individuals in a collectivist society are unique, with thoughts and ideas and feelings that are simply not the same as everyone else's. Collectivist societies may not recognize this, and people may feel isolated and under pressure to conform. If collectivist society could learn something important from individualism, it might be that even within a society that places a high level of importance on community and achieving common goals, the rights and individual needs of people should still be recognized and respected. Of course, there are other things that each society could learn from one another. An ideal society might contain elements of both individualist and collectivist societies. A society where the individual and the community are considered equally important might be one in which communities are stronger and more tight-knit, people are safer, and where individual's needs and rights are respected.