

Individualism vs. Collectivism

By Samuel Blumenfeld

The American form of government has been based on the concept of individual rights from its very beginning. The Declaration of Independence states: “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, and that among these 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.”

In those few lines were contained a revolutionary new concept of self-government based on individual rights. To the signers of the Declaration, these precepts were “self-evident,” based on the knowledge that all human societies are made up of individuals. In monarchies, individuals were individual subjects to the king. Even in primitive tribal societies, the patriarch had authority over the different individuals in the tribe. Indeed, the idea of individualism goes back to the Bible and the Ten Commandments, in which individuals are held accountable for their actions. In the New Testament, salvation is an individual affair, requiring the adherence of an individual conscience.

The signers wrote that “all men are created equal.” Even though slavery existed in the American colonies and existed in Biblical times, they knew that it was a violation of an individual’s right to own one’s own body. If we think of property rights, we must begin with the right to own one’s own body. A slave’s body was stolen from him by a kidnapper by the use of force, thus depriving the enslaved of his freedom, liberty being one of the unalienable rights endowed on human beings by their Creator. But Southern slaveholders insisted that slaves were property, their property. And that is why the issue of slavery was finally resolved by a horrendous Civil War between North and South.

The pursuit of Happiness is an individual quest, requiring individual freedom. “All men are created equal” does not mean that all men are equal. We are “created” equal in the sense that God creates us as individuals, with individual talents, gifts, desires, and qualities that the individual human being will use to make his way in life. And that is why no two individuals are alike.

Each conceived human being is an individual unto himself, with his or her own programmed DNA, which guarantees that no two human beings will be alike. That was God’s idea, not ours. If God had wanted uniformity, He would have made us all alike. He would have made us into robots. But He didn’t. Why? Because in His love for us, he wanted to make life worth living. He wanted to make life a great pleasure and a great adventure. But then it was man who, in his disobedience, created sadness, war, murder, and misery.