

# The Free and Independent Individual

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In Ayn Rand's 1943 novel, *The Fountainhead*, newspaper columnist, arch manipulator, and promoter of absolute collectivism, Ellsworth Toohey, tells his social-climbing weak-kneed follower, Peter Keating: "If you learn how to rule one single man's soul, you can get the rest of mankind. It's the soul, Peter, the soul. Not whips or swords or fire or guns. That's why the Caesars, the Attilas, the Napoleons were fools and did not last. We will. The soul, Peter, is that which can't be ruled. It must be broken. Drive a wedge in, get your fingers on it—and the man is yours...enshrine mediocrity."

There is a whole army of experts, whose job is to tell you success only comes with you being part of a group.

They imply your status as an individual is transmitted to you through some diabolical portion of your brain that is loaded with false messages. Therefore, give up. Take the elevator down to the basement, get off, and join The Group. That's where the love is. That's where your useless courage dissolves into sugar, and you discover a paradise of the lowest common denominator. You're home. The sun never rises or sets. Nothing changes. Sameness rules.

Since the 1960s, many people have decided that, in order to create the future they want, they should engage in a certain amount of introspection.

Spiritual or psychological introspection.

I have encountered a large number of such people, who have swung the balance to the point where introspection has become indecision and paralysis.

There are "so many issues to consider."

Starting in the 1960s, we saw the import of various Eastern philosophies and practices. They arrived here in diluted and distorted forms. They introduced their own versions of "karma" and "balance" and "surrender" and "abdication to the wishes of the universe."

"If it doesn't happen, it wasn't meant to be."

In the end, it amounts to waiting around in a cosmic station for a train that never arrives.

Or in psychological terms, it is: "I have to resolve my past before I can pursue my future." "How can I know what I want if I'm trapped in past conflicts?"

The effect of all this was to diminish the potential realm of human action. It was a kind of court case where all the priors of the defendant were allowed into evidence and dominated the verdict.

More recently, another limiter came on to the scene. It is expressed this way: "Now I see through fake reality, I see how reality is being manipulated by the powers-that-be, so what can I do? We're at the mercy of these forces."

These vectors were and are an intentional operation, whose purpose is to demoralize the individual and cut him off from his own freedom, independence, and power.

Here is the superior principle: even if the individual determines, in a worst-case scenario, that all is hopeless, he should launch the life and future he desires ANYWAY. Despite

all the good reasons to give up, he should ignore all of them and launch.

Because if he does that, he soon begins to see his own view change. It's not the same anymore.

Many, many individuals, since the dawn of time, have thought themselves into smaller and smaller boxes until there was no space left—and then some of those individuals, who were spiritual riverboat gamblers, shoved in all their chips on projecting action into the world anyway...and they revolutionized their destinies.

We can go even deeper. What is the ultimate purpose of thought and reflection and introspection? Is it to arrive at certain conclusions, after which the thinker (the person) serves those conclusions like a slave? Or is thought itself a process through which ideas then serve the individual and his goals?

It is the latter.

The first great philosopher of the West, Plato, followed the first path. Which is to say, he applied his mind to understand the basis of reality, and he came to the conclusion that there were immortal and pure Ideas that existed in a higher realm, and they were unchangeable. Society, therefore, could only triumph if certain wise men, who could apprehend these Ideas directly, ruled over everyone else. Thus, the freedom and independence and power of open inquiry led to totalitarianism. Freedom led to slavery.

Give us your huddled masses yearning to be free. Masses? No. A mass can never be free. And even if a mass can successfully demand freedom, on whom does that outcome then fall? The individual. This is where the buck stops, and no one can change that truth.

There are those who believe a quiet lake is the marvelous end of all existence.

And then a boat comes along, and new ripples begin spreading. A dynamic individual has arrived.

You can be the person looking at the lake, banking on no-action, or you can be in the boat, forwarding your best ideas and visions and dreams, despite all the reasons not to.

In 1891, Oscar Wilde wrote: "Art is individualism, and individualism is a disturbing and disintegrating force. There lies its immense value. For what it seeks is to disturb monotony of type, slavery of custom, tyranny of habit, and the reduction of man to the level of a machine."

Every individual has the potential to be an artist and maker of reality. He achieves this by walking through the corridors of what he has learned from others, until he emerges into the sun of his own self-generated thoughts.

No one else can tell him what his thoughts are. Those thoughts don't follow machine patterns. They don't cling to any system. They don't wind up in some superficial trash of generalities.

An individual's mind and imagination aren't asking for convenient generalities.

The key question, as always, is: what do you want to create?

Answering the question and then acting on it transforms a life.