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*“What is rational for the individual may not be rational for the community”*¹ to quote Lord Stephen Green, I feel that this sentence embodies the very nature of the debate regarding individuality and the role of the self in society. This is because it encompasses the struggle between prioritizing the individual or prioritizing the common good in an instance of moral issues whereby both interests may not align. When it comes to matters relating to the law and climate change, the singular individual is not as well-versed in such issues as for example; a congressman or a president. Nonetheless, such individuals are entitled to their own opinion on how they feel their government is handling the issue at hand. In order to further understand prioritizing the individual or society, it is important to define said beings.

Individuality is seen as a state of being; whereby the person is seen as being able to be separate from others in what they do and feel and having your own individual and personal goals or needs.² When individuals are born, they go through the processes of both primary and secondary socialization, in order to be able fit into society in an appropriate manner. Therefore; this may instill the notion that any individual’s destiny in life is; to be able to form part of society both on an individual basis but also being able to form part of a community and uphold your civic duties towards their community, this line of thought can be put forward when questioning the idea of individuality and the role of the self in society. In sociology several sociologists put forth several arguments and theories as to how society functions and how individuals in society function.

For the sake of upholding my view on the argument previously presented, I would like to look at the view of society and identity from a functionalist’s perspective. The theory of functionalism states to believe that society works on the idea of “interconnectedness”³ whereby each part in society plays a pivotal role in keeping society stable and ensuring all parts work together for the greater good and the smooth running of society. One may also choose to compare the idea of functionalism to the human body; each organ in the body has a specific role and if one organ stops working, then this will cause a ripple effect towards all the organs and none of them

¹ Direct quote taken from a guest lecture with Lord Stephen Green at Regent’s University, on 14th November 2019

² Gracie, Jorge J. E. (1988)

³ Mooney, Knox & Schacht, 2007

will be able to function adequately; which is ultimately the common goal for all individuals in society.⁴

Working towards the greater good of society does not undermine an individual's ability and right to have and form their own identity and possess a sense of individuality – on the contrary society encourages individuality and would like each individual to bring forth their own individual skill-set to use for the bettering of society. For an individual cannot exist; if they do not form part of something bigger than themselves. Forming part of a community in-itself is an identity; albeit a collective one.

When an individual forms part of a community, they are exposed to the different social, political and moral issues and adversities that their specific community faces daily. By being informed like this, it gives the individual a chance to voice their own individual opinion and stand up for what they believe in – whether or not it aligns with the majority view. - Individuality in my opinion is the human beings vital right to 'stand up and be accounted for' to make a difference no matter how big or small.⁵

In his novel *'The Human Odyssey; East, West and the search for Universal Values'* Lord Green discusses the imperative task that individuals face as being; 'to move from the first person singular to the first person plural – without dissolving the person.' (Green, 2019) I would like to use this quote to further explain my view on individuality. As previously explained from external influences⁶, it is my understanding that human beings are born as individuals, yet they are set to form part of a community which accentuates their individuality and leaves room for personal growth, all the while still contributing towards the growth of society. As I feel it a collective effort in preserving society which can only be reached through the individuals working together in society as they form part of something that is bigger than themselves. I would like to use the example of 'climate change' for this argument. Whereby it affects the entire world, and that all officials from every country make a collective effort to fight this catastrophe, rather than limiting

⁴ The common goal in terms of functionalism is to be able to have society running smoothly through each individual's cooperation together.

⁵ This of course is only possible in democratic countries, where individuality is favored, and everyone is given a collective amount of rights and responsibilities. Such as the right to vote in general elections, which gives the individual the right to voice their concerns on the running of their country, amongst other moral and political issues.

⁶ At present, the external influences I make reference to in this text are influences from the functionalist perspective of individuality and the self in society that have been cited respectively.

their resources to their country. Understanding that the world has more pressing matters than pleasing one individual, can be described as a great sense of self-awareness.

When looking at interests of the *common good*, one is not in a position where they can look at everyone in society. Most countries amass a population of well over one million, which is why they call it the ‘greater’ good. Sometimes the bigger picture needs to be looked at, in order to make certain changes. In the same way that government would not use a magnitude of resources for a singular individual, its nonsensical. The whole point of individuals in society and individuality is to be different, to think differently and to contribute towards society in ways that others can’t. Of course, many of these individuals will share similar political and moral ideologies, but none of them will ever be 100% alike.⁷

By using the functionalist perspective, I believe that this theory does help me in order to explain my views on the role of the self in society and the function of individuality. I believe that the two are interconnected in a way that; every person is an individual in society and they must act as individuals ‘collectively’. Allowing individuals, the chance to express themselves freely is an integral part of a democratic society – yet this is not always possible especially when countries follow more dictatorial political styles when governing a country. In my opinion, if an individual is not allowed to express themselves (many times due to fear of retribution/punishment or retaliation from governmental authorities) then the society in which they find themselves in can never flourish.

I do believe that it is always important to prioritize the common good, rather than the individual because when their interests do not align, it is far better, for long term solutions in moral and political issues to serve the greater good, rather than a singular individual.

In conclusion, I believe that promoting individuality in society is imperative towards constructive self-growth for persons in any society, which aids individuals in gaining self-

⁷ Adversity and diversity are very important in society because it gives each person in said society, the chance to thrive and come into their own, creating their own person that they aspire to be, all the while being inspired by the daily occurrences around them. Some individuals may be inclined to take part in rallies against climate change, whilst others feel that poverty is a more important issue. They individually choose what is important to them, yet depending on how the government and the dominant powers in society (such as NATO, Japan, America etc....) feel what is a more pressing matter, they will act accordingly to protect the greater good. Countries all over the world choose to work together for the greater good of the world, they do not only look at how their country and populations will be benefitted.

awareness and working towards prioritizing the common good of either their society⁸ or the world⁹ through social cohesion and ensuring the common good is prioritized in instances of moral or political dilemma's, because ultimately prioritizing the common good is also indirectly prioritizing the individual's in society – especially of future generations, as any decisions made on political matters pave the way for how individuals will live in future generations.

Bibliography

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⁸ For example issues that would be limited towards the society are; excessive noise pollution or vandalism

⁹ Issues that would affect the world and require governments to join forces are; climate change, immigration, etc