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While the world is constantly evolving, many of us still remain stagnant, relying on society to tell us who we should be, or who we are meant to be. The topic of individuality has been increasingly popular throughout the last couple of years, as humanity tries to comprehend the meaning of our existence and our place in this world. The concept of individuality is terrifying yet comforting to some, as it explores how we as a singular being can be influential yet completely overshadowed by the greater good, something that is still debatable till this day. In this essay I will explore how individuality is pivotal to some aspects of our everyday lives and yet how community is the basis on which we should rely on.

Imagine if we lived in a completely dystopian society, where no matter the blood, sweat and tears you put into your work, all your profits and successes are distributed amongst the rest of your peers; where the concept of earning your own achievements are unheard of. At the extreme end of this argument, a society without individuality is a society that would become inherently lazy, unmotivated and indifferent. It is in human nature to desire recognition for our efforts and we have always been evolutionary motivated to acquire tools for our survival. In modern times, this survival 'tool' is money; wealth is what perpetuates every single aspect of our lives. The common phrase 'living the American dream' perfectly illustrates our innate desire to create our own riches and success, which is said to be achievable no matter your race, background or history. While it is quite impossible to create success without any help along the way, the prospect of being able to acquire your own riches and to live a comfortable life is what drives all of us to strive towards our full potential. Therefore, if we were to live in a society where all of our possessions, property and assets were all distributed equally, what would be our motivation to succeed?

While the wage gap between the 1% and everyone else in the world is growing larger at an alarming rate, increasing the taxes on the rich even more and distributing it to the poor is not the answer. By doing so, I believe that it would create more problems than it would solve. There are, of course, exceptions to this rule, as everyone should have access to basic necessities and tools for survival. However, it is essential for human beings to require some sort of incentive to strive for success and it is only by recognising your own agency and individuality in creating your own wealth will this be possible. While it is becoming increasingly difficult in this day and age to get a career, let alone acquire a high standard of living, there are many examples in history that shows that through perseverance and hard work, you can achieve anything. Even my own mother, who grew up working at a Chinese takeaway ever since she was ten years old, understood that while her family was destined for hardship, she as an individual could achieve a different outcome. With no help from her parents, my mother saved up enough money to put herself through university and thirty years later, she now runs her own business. Therefore, in this sense, being able to separate yourself from society and recognise your own responsibility for your future is necessary and can be extremely empowering.

However, has the importance of individuality, especially in Western cultures, been taken too far? As reports on the amount of loneliness people experience on a daily basis increases steadily year after year, perhaps the value society places on being an individual is also having an adverse effect. As the world population continues to increase, and the power of social media grows, there is an overwhelming desire nowadays to be seen or to stand out from the crowd. With the connectivity that comes with social media, we are constantly bombarded with millions of different faces from all over the world that may share the same interests as us or even look like us. In the past, before the rise of social media, a person would only know of their immediate family, friends and acquaintances and therefore, maintaining their sense of individuality. Nowadays, this over-saturation of artificial connectivity inevitably leads to some sort of comparison and jealousy, which ironically, keeps us feeling more isolated from others.

It is important to recognise that even though individuality aids us in achieving our goals, it has also increased the level of competition in the work force. The number of entrepreneurs has grown dramatically in the last couple of years and thus, it has greatly limited the number of solely original ideas that can be created. With millions of people around the world vying to create their own business ventures, the idea of cooperation and teamwork is becoming less important. As I stated earlier, though it is greatly impossible to construct anything without the help of another individual, many people dream of singularly creating their own success and dislike the idea of sharing their profits. This perpetuates the trait of selfishness seen in many individualistic societies, as many would rather have it 'their way or the high way' than to reach a compromise. This idea of selfishness and greed does not promote a healthy and inclusive society and further divides us as a community.

While it is crucial to hold onto a sense of individuality and identity, we must also remain true to our roots and our community. None of us are born with a clean slate and without any previous attachments, whether it would be our family, culture or race, and it is important to remember where we came from. Growing up as a very Westernised Chinese person in Hong Kong, I remember feeling constantly embarrassed of my culture due to the negative stereotypes of Chinese people seen in Western media. My childhood and teenage years were only spent consuming English books and films and I focused on perfecting my literacy in English, while purposely neglecting my Chinese roots. When I finally moved away from home, I realised that I did not fit in in the Western world as well. While I could speak the language perfectly and understood everything that was occurring in pop culture, I never felt like I was truly accepted. Through reflection, I came to the conclusion that by trying to separate myself from my culture, I had denied a large part of my identity that would have given me a sense of belonging. I realised that by purposely detaching myself from my origins, I was only perpetuating a sense of self-hate and disapproval to who I really am.

Therefore, while identifying as an individual in an ever-growing society is pivotal in realising and achieving our dreams, it can also promote selfishness and isolation. A purely individualistic world, where the only interactions seen are acts of competition, is hopeless and void of happiness. In order to feel fulfilled, we have to rely on our community and society. It is impossible to be truly individualistic as we are all born into a hierarchy consisting of our family members. Whether through nature or nurture, they help build a foundation of who we will eventually become. To neglect this part of ourselves is to neglect the very nature of who we are as individuals; in order to feel like a 'whole' person, we must embrace all of the components of who we are, which includes our family, race and culture. In this political climate and as society becomes increasingly divided, we must rely on our community to guide and grounds us now more than ever, as it is the true basis of our happiness. No matter the amount of success you are able to achieve, it would be heart-breaking to have no one to share it with and to rely upon. Thus, while the idea of individuality is beneficial in many ways, it is also promoting loneliness and separation from our community.