

Let's Schmooze

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Capitalism ~ Corruption in the Private Sector

Through the media we get constant reports of corruption in the private sector. Usually, these reports concern individuals in positions of trust who abuse their position to personally enrich themselves in some way. Mostly identified with governmental and otherwise public positions of trust, corruption can be found in private settings as well, such as corporations, charities, churches, fellowships, financial funds, associations, etc.

Countless laws have been written and passed in an attempt to contain and minimize corruption in the private sector.

These laws don't seem to work too well. To listen to media reports, corruption flourishes, with no end in sight.

Corruption is widespread, and anyone, wherever they may live on the globe, can find the most recent examples of corruption merely by opening the local newspaper. Corruption is a ubiquitous problem that seems to plague humanity wherever humanity may be found, in groups of many. Solitary individuals don't have to deal with corruption. Corruption is found wherever "the many" want to trust "the one."

The exact dynamic of corruption is not complex. In a societal setting, an individual is put into a position of trust and authority on behalf of the group. That individual is expected to act and make decisions that benefit the group as a whole, and that individual usually takes an oath to that effect.

However, that individual is found acting and making decisions that actually benefit the individual, and not the group. When it is discovered, the group now views the individual

as corrupt. The individual was not able to honor its oath to put the interests of the group ahead of its own interests.

That's corruption. It's that simple.

Corruption is so pervasive and ubiquitous, that it bodes us well to take the time to look at it closely and examine why corruption is so rampant. It is extremely damaging to the interests of the group, and it hampers the group's ability to meet its goals and function efficiently and optimally.

We want to search out anything that suggests to the individual that it is a good thing to look out only for oneself, and to ignore one's oath to the group ~ to take care of the group. If there are any teachings out there to that effect, we want to discover them.

Perhaps, if we stamp those teachings out, we may be able to stamp corruption out as well. Right?

Oops ~ we didn't have to look far, did we? We find these teachings everywhere in both our culture and society. Of course, we are talking about western-style individualism, which blossomed in Western Europe about half a millennium ago, and then spread around the globe, dominating human thinking everywhere. We did a deep chapter analysis of individualism in our book entitled *Expressions of Consciousness*; go to the Books tab at www.heirling.com.

Here, in this text, we'll just hit the highlights from that chapter. The following paragraphs, lifted from that chapter, cut to the raw essence of western-style individualism.

" ... the grounding assumption in modern individualism is the idea that the individual ~per se ~ is of value in and of itself, and not just valued as a member of some group. In fact, individualism is essentially the opposite of collectivism, wherein it is the group that is viewed as of primary value. In collectivism, the needs of the group are viewed as far more important than the needs of any one individual. In modern individualism, it's the opposite ~ the needs of the individual are viewed as far more important than the needs of any

group. In fact, in modern individualism, any group needs are considered as subordinate to and subject to the interests and needs of the individual."

"Given these grounding assumptions of modern individualism, the 'sacred' goals are easy to ascertain ~ the maximization of the individual's happiness and the minimization of the individual's needs and wants. Everything else is secondary. It's all about the individual. The maximization of the individual's happiness and the minimization of the individual's needs and wants are primary, and the sole reason for existence ~ the raison d'etre."

This guiding western assumption as to the importance of the individual is found in America's cherished Declaration of Independence, and it is probably the most quoted text from that Declaration: *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, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.* Again, it's all about the individual ~ living, choosing, and chasing pleasure.

The three most common societal expressions of this concept termed *individualism* are liberalism, libertinism and anarchism.

Liberalism mandates government among individuals, with that government respecting and protecting the rights of the individual. Even though citizenship in government is mandatory, individuals enter into contracts amongst themselves freely, with the understanding that if any disputes arise regarding these voluntary contracts, government will step in to adjudicate fairness. In liberalism, government law rules supreme, and all are subject to it. Of course, through the voting booth, individuals exercise their right to have a voice in how those laws are obtained and administered.

Libertinism acknowledges the need for mandatory government among people, but focuses far more on the rights of the individual than on the power of the government or the rights of other individuals. Government is absolutely minimized. The individual is practically freewheeling ~ hedonism comes to mind. The libertine individual acts to maximize personal pleasure without consideration to the consequences, unless those consequences reflect back upon self. It's all for self ~ nothing for other. Contracts with other individuals

are made to be broken the minute that it serves the individual. Contracts are only honored to the degree that they provide benefits to the libertine individual.

Anarchism goes a step further ~ actually, quite a step further. Whereas liberalism promotes mandatory government, and libertarianism allows for mandatory government as long as it is minimized ~ anarchism disavows mandatory government. Anarchism only acknowledges voluntary membership as legitimate. Consequently, anarchists are viewed as anti-government, as anti-state, and as having chaotic agendas ~ from the viewpoint of those who view centralized government as beneficial to the group. Anarchism views any type of mandatory membership in any type of group or organization as illegitimate ~ and to be resisted.

All three forms of societal individualism ~ liberalism, libertarianism and anarchism ~ can be readily found in all of today's world societies. In fact, one can surmise that yesterday's all-inclusive liberalism is morphing today into libertarianism at the higher societal levels and into anarchism at the lower societal levels. We see signs of societal decay all around us.

Individualism is not only found in our political and cultural arenas. It is found in our economic systems. In fact, individualism rules our economic systems, and it incessantly urges our people to look out for self, at the expense of other.

Capitalism started in Western Europe at about the same time as western individualism, about half a millennium ago. In fact, they tend to be found hand-in-hand. We did a deep chapter analysis of capitalism in our book; entitled *Expressions of Consciousness*; again, go to the Books tab at www.heirling.com.

Here, in this text, we'll just hit the highlights from that chapter. The following paragraphs, lifted from that chapter, cut to the raw essence of western-style capitalism.

"Capitalism does not espouse just the maximization of wealth, but the individual, or private, maximization of wealth. Capitalism wants individuals trying to become as wealthy as they can during their lifetimes."

"That is why, in capitalist systems, there exists the grounding assumption that the most fundamental duty of the group, or government, is to protect the right of individuals to privately own things."

"... Capitalism teaches . . . that the group's duty is to protect that sacred right of individual privacy and ownership. It suggests that because private ownership is paramount, an individual's self-worth and social-worth are best measured by an individual's wealth, or private holdings. And, because of that, it naturally follows that the sacred goal in life is to maximize private holdings, in order to maximize the measure of self-worth."

So there we have it. Our prevailing economic system encourages individuals to use any means possible to individually enrich themselves. In fact, it linguistically legitimizes this individualistic approach to life by euphemistically redefining personal greed as "rational self-interest" ~ and considering it a virtue.

We have found a lot of teachings that promote corruption ~ both in our culture and in our economic systems. And, these teachings do that by aggressively promoting the concept that the wants of the individual are superior to the needs of the many.

We shouldn't be surprised that corruption in the private sector runs amuck amongst us. Through our cultural and economic values, we are subtly teaching corruption to ourselves every minute of every day.

It leaves us in the same psychological situation that we found ourselves in many thousands of years ago ~ in the world of the jungle. Do any of these sayings sound familiar, and naturally appropriate to jungle behavior?

every man for himself
anything goes
survival of the strongest
kill or be killed
dog eat dog
eat or be eaten
code of survival
be all you can be

That's how we would expect jungle animals to speak amongst themselves ~ yet ~ that's how we tend to speak amongst ourselves. Technologically, we are far removed from the jungle, but psychologically we are still in the caves.

A dangerous situation, don't you think? A jungle species with its collective finger on the trigger of weapons of mass destruction? That would be like giving a young child a match to a keg of dynamite.

Now, we have a bit more of a realistic perspective on unbridled corruption in the private sector. Everyone expresses shock whenever we trip over it, yet we are quietly watering its roots through deep cultural and economic values.

When someone is labeled as "corrupt," should we blame the individual, or should we rather question the value we place on these intriguing concepts ~ individualism and capitalism?

~ 'til we meet again ~