

November 19th 2021

THE ATOMISED INDIVIDUAL

(An Excerpt from the publication by Dr. The Hon. Ralph E. Gonsalves, Prime Minister of St. Vincent and the Grenadines entitled “The Atomised Individual, the Social Individual and the Covid Vaccine”)

In its most pristine form the “atomised individual” insists that the interests of the individual should take precedence always over the public interest, the society and the social groups therein, the nation, and the State. The “atomised individual” extols selfishness, his or her own individual interest, personal self-reliance bordering on autarky, and his or her own personal independence with little or no regard for others. These ideas and perspectives of the “atomised individual” lead him or her to proclaim absolute, or near absolute, individual rights with little or no limitation or restraint, without a sufficiency of regard for the public interest or anyone else’s individual interest or rights.

As such, the “atomised individual” advocates total or near total freedom from government regulation in the pursuit of his or her economic goals, personal agendas, or interests, including little or no regulation of the right or freedom relating to his/her person, expression, assembly, property, religion, the right to bear arms (in the context of the USA), and so forth, or of any subject in which the community or public has an interest reasonably required to be protected and advanced.

The atomising forces of global capitalism, the increasing homogenisation of modern culture, the glorification of individual personalities, and the revolution in information communication technology have so mesmerised large swathes of our population that many hanker, uncritically, for what they mistakenly believe to be “the good life” of the atomised individual. Paradoxically, these very persons consider that this atomised individualism delivers unto them the largest possible expanse of personal liberty or freedom and personal acquisition of material things, when in fact it does nothing but enthralls them to, and subjugates them under, the impersonal forces such as global

capitalism and intelligence-gathering by monolithic corporations, such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. Such atomised individuals, unwittingly, become easily manipulated in the social laboratory of life, living, and production by their impersonal masters in very much a similar way as the scientist manipulates the atoms in the scientific laboratories. If one doubts this socio-political manipulation in the social laboratory, please look at the nefarious work of Donald Trump and his Republicans in the USA, Cambridge Analytica, Strategic Communications Laboratories, (inclusive of its activities on behalf of the opposition New Democratic Party in St. Vincent and the Grenadines), and imperialism's "Deep State".

In a fascinating essay entitled, The Death of Community and the Rise of Individualism (July 16, 2018 – The Internet), a political scientist Sami Omais, aptly explores the phenomenon of "social atomisation" as follows:

"One ---phenomenon that we often fail to reflect on is the disintegration of our social fabric, namely, social atomisation, or the basic unit of society being broken down into smaller parts ----. Today, the joint effects of technology, the principles of modern citizenship, and relatively open borders give people the ability to decide where to live, with which nation to align, and what lands to call home. As individuals become accustomed to frequently moving and breaking ties with their community of birth, communal identification becomes transient. People lack deep links to any singular culture; globalisation makes the individual a sponge that soaks up the norms and beliefs of whichever locale they find themselves in. The result is the absence of a clear and permanent identity, without which the individual cannot truly/fully belong to any community. Without community, they have no culture to provide shared customs and understandings that create common links and trust between a people. Overall, ties of community dissipate and the individual becomes the basic unit of society." [My Emphasis]

As Omais correctly observes:

“The underlying cause of this atomisation and the overall ideology that encourages this development in the western world is liberalism; a classical philosophy that posits individual autonomy and equality between individuals as the two ultimate moral values ----- . Liberalism’s unit of analysis is the individual, caring neither for the community nor any collective. As such, economic, political, moral, and legal questions are resolved with the individual in mind, making it unsurprising that it was in liberal parts of the world, namely the United States [of America] and Europe, that extreme individualism first emerged.”

To be sure, the notion of “the individual” in the “Age of Enlightenment” contributed immensely to humanity’s progress in the dissolution of despotic monarchical regimes, feudalism, religious dogmas of Catholicism, and unscientific follies, and in giving rise to worthy achievements, hitherto unrealized, such as representative government, individual liberties, capitalism, religious diversity and tolerance, advanced science and technology, and democratic governance. These very accomplishments, however, contain multiple contradictions which, if unresolved or left in an unbalanced condition, engender unacceptably high social costs and/or debilitating personal consequences.

Unbridled or pristine individualism has engendered huge socio-economic contradictions in free-enterprise capitalism, the decay of community and social solidarity, the persistence of poverty and inequality amidst material abundance for a small minority, a resurgence of religious intolerance, the misuse and abuse of aspects of modern science and technology, the undermining of a system of public order and the democratic state based on aggregated community or public interests, and the assault on the quality of life, personally.

From the beginning, it was the genuine quest of liberalism to balance carefully individual interests and public interests. Constitutions and laws were accordingly so framed. However, this balance has been put under immense strain with the emergence and consolidation of

a parallelogram of forces which have exalted an atomised individualism over the public good or the public interest. This imbalance is destructive of the very society and the individuals themselves therein.

This reality, and prospect, is evidently manifest among those who claim a jaundiced, pristine or atomised individualism which retards and undermines the fight against the novel coronavirus by their opposition to any effective roll-out of the vaccine, which is the best, and safest, tool in the tool box to defeat COVID-19. Those who embrace an atomised individualism rail against the profound social solidarity manifested by its practitioners. And the established, mainstream science and the governments of the 193 member-states of the United Nations accept and conclude, after careful study and analysis that the vaccine is safe, with its use overwhelmingly beneficial to the individual and society. In St. Vincent and the Grenadines, the vaccine is available, and free, to the public, but the anti-vaxxers and the permanently vaccine hesitant deploy every specious, unfounded argument against taking the anti-COVID vaccine, including seductive, but wrong, reasoning grounded in a philosophy of atomised individualism.