

# Collectivism

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For the magazine, see [Collectivism \(magazine\)](#).

Not to be confused with [collecting](#).

**Collectivism** is any philosophic, political, religious, economic, or social outlook that emphasizes the [interdependence](#) of every human being. Collectivism is a basic cultural element that exists as the reverse of [individualism](#) in human nature (in the same way [high context culture](#) exists as the reverse of [low context culture](#)), and stresses the priority of group goals over individual goals and the importance of cohesion within social groups (such as an "in-group", in what specific context it is defined). Collectivists usually focus on [community](#), [society](#), or [nation](#). It is used and has been used as an element in many different and diverse types of government and political, economic and educational philosophies throughout history. Most societies contain elements of both individualism and collectivism.

Collectivism can be divided into **horizontal collectivism** and **vertical collectivism**. Horizontal collectivism stresses collective decision-making among relatively-equal individuals, and is thus usually based on decentralization. Vertical collectivism is based on hierarchical structures of power and on moral and cultural conformity, and is therefore based on centralization. A cooperative enterprise would be an example of horizontal collectivism, whereas [monarchy](#) would be an example of vertical collectivism.<sup>[1]</sup>

In [political economy](#), horizontal-collectivism is often associated with the economic theories of socialism, which call for some form of [co-operative](#) or collective ownership of the [means of production](#) and collective decision-making or [worker's self-management](#) within economic enterprises.<sup>[2]</sup>

[Corporatism](#) refers to a form of collectivism that views the whole as being greater than the sum of its individual parts, and gives priority to group rights over individual rights.<sup>[3][4]</sup>

## Typology

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Collectivism has been used to refer to a diverse range of political and economic positions, including democracy, totalitarian nationalism, monarchy and communism. In modern times, collectivism is sometimes thought to be synonymous with socialism or specifically [Leninism](#) for its emphasis on a hierarchical [Vanguard party](#) organization, though collectivism more accurately simply means "group oriented" or "group orientation".

## Politics

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According to Moyra Grant, in political philosophy "collectivism" refers to any philosophy or system that puts any kind of group (such as a class, nation, race, society, state, etc.) before the individual.<sup>[5]</sup> According to Encyclopædia Britannica, "collectivism has found varying degrees of expression in the 20th century in such movements as socialism, communism, and fascism. The least collectivist of these is social democracy, which seeks to reduce the perceived injustices of unrestrained capitalism by government regulation, redistribution of income, and varying degrees of planning and public ownership. Historically, in Socialist systems collectivist economics were carried to their furthest extreme, with a minimum of private ownership and a maximum of planned economy."<sup>[6]</sup>

However, political collectivism is not necessarily associated with support for states, governments, or other hierarchical institutions. There are variants of anarchism, such as collectivist anarchism and anarcho-communism, which are collectivist. Collectivist anarchists, particularly Mikhail Bakunin, were among the earliest critics of authoritarian communism. They agree with communists that the means of production should be expropriated from private owners and converted to common property,<sup>[7]</sup> but they advocate the ownership of this property to be vested by a loose group of decentralized communes rather than to be held in common by all of society. Nevertheless, unlike anarcho-communists, collectivist anarchists supported a wage system and markets in non-capital goods. Thus, Bakunin's "Collectivist Anarchism", notwithstanding the title, is seen as a blend of individualism and collectivism.<sup>[8]</sup>

Anarcho-communism is a more comprehensive form of collectivism which advocates not only the collectivization of the means of production but of the products of labor as well.<sup>[9]</sup> According to anarcho-communist Peter Kropotkin, "And as long as dwelling-houses, fields, and factories belong to isolated owners, men will have to pay them, in one way or another, for being allowed to work in the fields or factories, or for living in the houses. The owners will accept to be paid by the workers in gold, in paper-money, or in cheques exchangeable for all sorts of commodities. But how can we defend labour-notes, this new form of wagedom, when we admit that houses, fields, and factories will no longer be private property, and that they will belong to the commune or the nation?"<sup>[10]</sup>

## Economics

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Leroy-Beaulieu says that that Albert Schäffle gave the first definition to the phrase "collectivism". Collectivism, for them both, is a kind of communism in which quotas are set on quality in addition to those set on quantity. ((*Collectivism. 1908.*))

Generally speaking, economic collectivism can refer to two distinct concepts: that property (usually in reference to productive property) be owned by all of society in common, or that possessions be owned by collective groups that use the property. The first concept is related to Communism, communalism and some forms of socialism, while the latter concept is related to forms of socialism based on independent cooperative organizations such as Syndicalism, Guild socialism, libertarian socialism and market socialism. Additionally, capitalist systems that largely consist of either cooperative or

corporate ownership structures, with ownership being vested in collective entities of legal owners rather than the producers/users of the property, can be characterized as being collectivist to some degree.

Collectivism in the field of economics holds that some things should be owned by all of society and used for the benefit of all rather than being owned by just individuals or private parties. Central to this view is the concept of the commons, as opposed to private property. Early economic systems such as communalism and tribal societies practiced this form of collectivism. Collectivism can also apply to public ownership over the means of production, while others argue that all valued commodities, like environmental or consumer goods, should be regarded as public goods and placed under public ownership. In health care, collective action by trade unions and other professional bodies throughout Europe in the early twentieth century established mutual sickness funds and contracts with doctors and hospitals enabling workers to be assured of access to health care and sometimes sick pay collectively funded by all the members of the trade union or profession.

Collectivism in economics may or may not involve a state as a manager and steward of collective property. For instance, company property in corporations is usually managed by specialized managers, despite being owned in some cases by hundreds of shareholders. Anarcho-communists, who argue for the immediate abolition of the state, wish to place all goods under communal access without a state or manager. They argue that since the value of labor cannot truly be measured, individuals should be free to produce and consume to their own self-determined needs. In 1876, at the Florence Conference of the Italian Federation of the International, where the principles of anarcho-communism were first laid out, it was stated:

The Italian Federation considers the collective property of the products of labour as the necessary complement to the collectivist programme, the aid of all for the satisfaction of the needs of each being the only rule of production and consumption which corresponds to the principle of solidarity.

Anarcho-communist Peter Kropotkin believed that a lack of collectivization of goods would be a dis-service to individuals.<sup>[11]</sup>

## Typology

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Collectivism can be typified as "horizontal collectivism", wherein equality is emphasized and people engage in sharing and cooperation, or "vertical collectivism", wherein hierarchy is emphasized and people submit to authorities to the point of self-sacrifice.<sup>[12]</sup> Horizontal collectivism is based on the assumption that each individual is more or less equal, while vertical collectivism assumes that individuals are fundamentally different from each other.<sup>[13]</sup> Social anarchist Alexander Berkman, who was a horizontal collectivist, argued that equality does not imply a lack of unique individuality, but an equal amount of freedom and equal opportunity to develop one's own skills and talents,

equality does not mean an equal amount but equal opportunity. . . Do not make the mistake of identifying equality in liberty with the forced equality of the convict camp. True anarchist equality implies freedom, not quantity. It does not mean that every one must eat, drink, or wear the same things, do the same work, or live in the same manner. Far from it: the very reverse, in fact. Individual needs and tastes differ, as appetites differ. It is equal opportunity to satisfy them that constitutes true equality. Far from levelling, such equality opens the door for the greatest possible variety of activity and development. For human character is diverse, and only the repression of this free diversity results in levelling, in uniformity and sameness. Free opportunity and acting out your individuality means development of natural dissimilarities and variations. . . . Life in freedom, in anarchy will do more than liberate man merely from his present political and economic bondage. That will be only the first step, the preliminary to a truly human existence.<sup>[14]</sup>

Indeed, horizontal collectivists argue that the idea of individuals sacrificing themselves for the "group" or "greater good" is nonsensical, arguing that groups are made up of individuals (including oneself) and are not a cohesive, monolithic entity separate from the self. But most social anarchists do not see themselves as collectivists or individualists, viewing both as illusory ideologies based on fiction .<sup>[15]</sup>

Horizontal collectivists tend to favour democratic decision-making, while vertical collectivists believe in a strict chain of command. Horizontal collectivism stresses common goals, interdependence and sociability. Vertical collectivism stresses the integrity of the in-group (e.g. the family or the nation), expects individuals to sacrifice themselves for the in-group if necessary, and promotes competition between different in-groups.<sup>[13]</sup>

## Collectivist societies

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There are few examples of societies around the world which have characterized themselves or have been characterized by outsiders as "collectivist".

On the one hand, at the country scale, there are the Communist states, which have often collectivized work activities. If these states practice agricultural collectivism, they are often called Communist states. On the other hand, at the community scale, there are Israeli kibbutzim (voluntary communes where people live and farm together without private ownership), the Federation of Egalitarian Communities (non-hierarchical income-sharing intentional communities), and communities such as the Freetown Christiania in Denmark (a small anarchist political experiment centered on an abandoned military installation in Copenhagen; Christiania has laws abolishing private property).

Another type is fascism which emphasize certain ideologies such as nationalism and patriotism which can be considered reactionary forms of collectivism, as they emphasize the role of the nation or the state over individuals. Fascists and Nazis also supported class collaboration which was a reactionary form of collectivism related to nationalism but opposed to socialist forms of collectivism such as workplace democracy. However, Fascism and Nazism also ascribe to Social Darwinism, which is an anti-collectivist reactionary form of individualism.<sup>[16]</sup>

Harry Triandis and Michele Gelfand argue that horizontal collectivist societies are those based on communal living, such as Israeli kibbutzim, while vertical collectivist societies are for example Stalinist and fascist countries or traditional communities with strong patriarchal leaders; vertical collectivism also correlates with Right-wing Authoritarianism.<sup>[13]</sup>

Democracy, with its emphasis on notions of social contract and the collective will of the people, can be characterized as a form of political collectivism because it is defined as a form of government in which all adult citizens have an equal say in the decisions that affect their lives.<sup>[17]</sup> Some right-wing libertarians, such as Ron Paul<sup>[18]</sup> and Ayn Rand,<sup>[19]</sup> were pessimistic about democracy because they saw it as inherently collectivist in nature.<sup>[20][21]</sup> Left-wing libertarians, such as libertarian socialists and most anarchists, embrace democracy, especially direct democracy and/or participatory democracy specifically because it can be a form of horizontal collectivism.<sup>[22][23]</sup>

## Criticisms

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### Classical liberal critique

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There are two main objections to collectivism from the ideas of liberal individualism. One is that collectivism stifles individuality and diversity by insisting upon a common social identity, such as nationalism, racialism, or some other group focus. The other is that collectivism is linked to statism and the diminution of freedom when political authority is used to advance collectivist goals.<sup>[24]</sup>

Criticism of collectivism comes from liberal individualists, such as classical liberals, libertarians and individualist anarchists. Perhaps the most notable modern criticism of economic collectivism is the one put forward by Friedrich Hayek in his book The Road to Serfdom, published in 1944.

Ludwig von Mises wrote:

On the other hand the application of the basic ideas of collectivism cannot result in anything but social disintegration and the perpetuation of armed conflict. It is true that every variety of collectivism promises eternal peace starting with the day of its own decisive victory and the final overthrow and extermination of all other ideologies and their supporters. ... As soon as a faction has succeeded in winning the support of the majority of citizens and thereby attained control of the government machine, it is free to deny to the minority all those democratic rights by means of which it itself has previously carried on its own struggle for supremacy.<sup>[25]</sup>

### Socialist critique

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Many socialists, particularly Libertarian socialists, democratic socialists, individualist anarchists and Marxists criticise the concept of collectivism. Some anti-collectivists often argue that all authoritarian and totalitarian societies are (vertically) collectivist in nature. Socialists argue that modern capitalism and private property, which is based on socialized

production and joint-stock or corporate ownership structures, is a form of organic collectivism that sharply contrasts with the utopian picture of capitalism painted by its proponents as a system of free individuals exchanging commodities.<sup>[26]</sup> Socialists argue that true individualism can only exist when individuals are free from coercive social structures to pursue their own interests, which can only be accomplished by common ownership of socialized, productive assets and free access to the means of life so that no individual has coercive power over other individuals.<sup>[27]</sup>

George Orwell, a dedicated democratic socialist,<sup>[28]</sup> believed that collectivism resulted in the empowerment of a minority of individuals that led to further oppression of the majority of the population in the name of some ideal such as freedom.

It cannot be said too often - at any rate, it is not being said nearly often enough - that collectivism is not inherently democratic, but, on the contrary, gives to a tyrannical minority such powers as the Spanish Inquisitors never dreamt of.<sup>[29]</sup>

Yet in the subsequent sentence he also warns of the tyranny of private ownership over the means of production:

... that a return to 'free' competition means for the great mass of people a tyranny probably worse, because more irresponsible, than that of the state.<sup>[29]</sup>

Marxists criticize this use of the term "collectivism," on the grounds that all societies are based on class interests and therefore all societies could be considered "collectivist." The liberal ideal of the free individual is seen from a Marxist perspective as a smokescreen for the collective interests of the capitalist class. Social anarchists argue that "individualism" is a front for the interests of the upper class. As anarchist Emma Goldman wrote:

'rugged individualism'... is only a masked attempt to repress and defeat the individual and his individuality. So-called Individualism is the social and economic laissez-faire: the exploitation of the masses by the [ruling] classes by means of legal trickery, spiritual debasement and systematic indoctrination of the servile spirit ... That corrupt and perverse 'individualism' is the straitjacket of individuality. ... [It] has inevitably resulted in the greatest modern slavery, the crassest class distinctions driving millions to the breadline. 'Rugged individualism' has meant all the 'individualism' for the masters, while the people are regimented into a slave caste to serve a handful of self-seeking 'supermen.' ... Their 'rugged individualism' is simply one of the many pretenses the ruling class makes to mask unbridled business and political extortion.<sup>[30]</sup>

In response to criticism made by various pro-capitalist groups that claim that public ownership or common ownership of the means of production is a form of collectivism, socialists maintain that common ownership over productive assets does not infringe upon the individual, but is instead a liberating force that transcends the false dichotomy of individualism and collectivism.<sup>[31]</sup> Socialists maintain that these critiques conflate the concept of private property in the means of production with personal possessions and individual production.

## Other critiques

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Ayn Rand, founder of Objectivism, was a particularly vocal opponent who believed the philosophy of collectivism led to totalitarianism. She argued that "collectivism means the subjugation of the individual to a group," and that "throughout history, no tyrant ever rose to power except on the claim of representing *the common good*." She further claimed that "horrors which no man would dare consider for his own selfish sake are perpetrated with a clear conscience by altruists who justify themselves by the common good."<sup>[32]</sup> (The "altruists" Rand refers to are not those who practice simple benevolence or charity, but rather those who believe in Auguste Comte's ethical doctrine of altruism which holds that there is "a moral and political obligation of the individual to sacrifice his own interests for the sake of a greater social good.")<sup>[33]</sup>

## See also

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## References

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- <sup>1</sup> ↑ <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/collectivist>
- <sup>2</sup> ↑ Chakrabarty, S (2009) The Influence of National Culture and Institutional Voids on Family Ownership of Large Firms: A Country Level Empirical Study. Journal of International Management, 15(1)
- <sup>3</sup> ↑ *Ratner, Carl (2003). "Theoretical and Methodological Problems in Cross-Cultural Psychology". Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour. **33** (1): 72. doi:10.1111/1468-5914.00206.* Unknown parameter |coauthors= ignored (|author= suggested) ([help](#))
- <sup>4</sup> ↑ Grant, Moyra. Key Ideas in Politics. Nelson Thomas 2003. p. 20
- <sup>5</sup> ↑ Encyclopædia Britannica. 2007. Encyclopædia Britannica Online. 12 Jan 2007 <<http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-9024764>>
- <sup>6</sup> ↑ Anarchism. Bottomore, T. B. The Dictionary of Marxist Thought. Blackwell Publishing, 1992. p. 22
- <sup>7</sup> ↑ Morris, Brian. *Bakunin: The Philosophy of Freedom*. Black Rose Books Ltd., 1993. p. 115
- <sup>8</sup> ↑ At the Florence Conference of the Italian Federation of the International in 1876, held in a forest outside Florence due to police activity, they declared the principles of anarcho-communism, beginning with: "The Italian Federation considers the collective property of the products of labour as the necessary complement to the collectivist programme, the aid of all for the satisfaction of the needs of each being the only rule of production and consumption which corresponds to the principle of solidarity."

9. ^ Kropotkin, Peter. Chapter 13 The Collectivist Wages System from *The Conquest of Bread*, G. P. Putnam's Sons, New York and London, 1906.
10. ^ Shatz, Marshall. Introduction to Kropotkin: The Conquest of Bread and Other Writings, Cambridge University Press 1995, p. xvi "Anarchist communism called for the socialization not only of production but of the distribution of goods: the community would supply the subsistence requirements of each individual member free of charge, and the criterion, 'to each according to his labor' would be superseded by the criterion 'to each according to his needs.'"
11. ^ Jump up to: [a](#) [b](#) [c](#) Triandis, Harry C. (1998). "Converging Measurement of Horizontal and Vertical Individualism and Collectivism". *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*. **74** (1): 119. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.74.1.118. Unknown parameter `|coauthors=` ignored (`|author=` suggested) ([help](#))
12. ^ Payne, Stanley G. *A History of Fascism, 1914–1945*. Routledge, 1996. pp. 485–486.
13. ^ Larry Jay Diamond, Marc F. Plattner (2006). Electoral systems and democracy p.168. Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006.
14. ^ Libertarian Socialism
15. ^ Heywood, Andrew. Key Concepts in Politics. Palgrave Macmillan. p. 122
16. ^ The Fallacy of Collectivism
17. ^ *Capital, Volume 1*, by Marx, Karl. From "Chapter 32: Historical Tendency of Capitalist Accumulation": "Self-earned private property, that is based, so to say, on the fusing together of the isolated, independent laboring-individual with the conditions of his labor, is supplanted by capitalistic private property, which rests on exploitation of the nominally free labor of others, i.e., on wage-labor. As soon as this process of transformation has sufficiently decomposed the old society from top to bottom, as soon as the laborers are turned into proletarians, their means of labor into capital, as soon as the capitalist mode of production stands on its own feet, then the further socialization of labor and further transformation of the land and other means of production into socially exploited and, therefore, common means of production, as well as the further expropriation of private proprietors, takes a new form. That which is now to be expropriated is no longer the laborer working for himself, but the capitalist exploiting many laborers."
18. ^ *Market Socialism: The Debate Among Socialists*, by Schweickart, David; Lawler, James; Ticktin, Hillel; Ollman, Bertell. 1998. From "Definitions of market and socialism" (pp. 58–59): "The control over the surplus product rests with the majority of the population through a resolutely democratic process...The sale of labour power is abolished and labour necessarily becomes creative. Everyone participates in running their institutions and society as a whole. No one controls anyone else."
19. ^ Orwell, George *Why I Write*
20. ^ Red Emma Speaks, p. 112 and 443
21. ^ <http://marxists.org/glossary/terms/i/n.htm#individualism>
22. ^ Rand, Ayn. The Only Path to Tomorrow, *Readers Digest*, January 1944, pp. 88–90



