

Project on The Evolution of Individuality

Purpose

Our objective is to explore the hypothesis that development of individuality fosters greater accomplishment and fulfillment both in personal life and in the life of the community. Individuation fosters self-actualization and social development in all spheres – intellectual, artistic, political, economic, social and cultural. Therefore, fostering individuality and individuation is one of the most effective means for society to promote human welfare, well-being and social evolution.

Scope

History celebrates the achievements of outstanding individuals -- original thinkers, creative artists, political leaders, entrepreneurs, inventors, social innovators and pioneers. Individuality is the crown of human evolution and the catalyst for all social progress. This e-conference will explore the essential characteristics and myriad expressions of individuality, its relationship to personal accomplishment and social progress, and the best means of fostering it.

In recent times, *Individuality* has emerged in an unprecedented manner as a pre-eminent social value and driving force for change. It contributes to and is augmented by all the dominant levers of social progress – human rights, democratic participation, universal education, economic opportunity, social tolerance, freedom of thought and expression, individual innovation and inventiveness. It is a defining characteristic of the pioneer, explorer, entrepreneur, inventor, social innovator, political leader, creative artist, original thinker and spiritual seeker. Yet, fundamental questions remain unanswered regarding the true nature of individuality and individuation, the right relationship between formed individuals and society, and the role of individuality in social and psychological evolution.

The rapid speed of social development in the 21st Century necessitates that society acquire the capacity to adapt, respond and innovate creatively without being encumbered by outdated ideas and outmoded ways of action. Democracy has generated the external atmosphere of freedom necessary for people to adapt and develop creatively to fully utilize their individual and collective potential. Yet, without a corresponding inner liberation from the confines of social conformity and psychological conditioning, democracy only replaces the tyranny of external authority with the equally stifling and uncreative demands of internal authority.

This trans-disciplinary dialogue is intended to examine existing thought and explore new perspectives on individuality that may have profound bearing on our understanding of social processes, personality development and the evolution of consciousness. It will examine the concept of individuality, its defining characteristics, its role in social progress, the process by which it develops and acts on the collective, and – most importantly – the measures that can be taken to promote the development of individuality as a means of enhancing global society's capacity for creative and intelligent adaptation. Both the eminence and diversity of its membership uniquely qualifies the World Academy to lead a global exploration of this crucial issue and invite both Fellows and a wider general public to contribute to the discussion.

Questions

This project will seek to formulate answers to the following major research questions related to individuality

1. *What is Individuality?* – What distinguishes the outstanding creative individual from other members of society? What is the difference between individuality, egoism and selfishness? Is individuality the opposite or complement to social responsibility? What is the relationship between individuality and accomplishment? Leadership? Entrepreneurship? Creativity? Original thinking?
2. *What is the process of Individuation?* – How does individuality develop in a person, community and society? What are the factors that determine it? What are the stages through which it passes?
3. *What is the role of society and culture in the fostering and formation of Individuality?* – What is the relationship between social capital and individuality formation? What is the impact of democracy, education, technological development, information, prosperity, travel and other social advances on the process of individuation? What is the role of multi-cultural social environments, globalization and international experience?
4. *What is the relationship between individuality and personal accomplishment?* – Do more formed individuals achieve more than other people? If so, why? How does individuality foster accomplishment in intellectual discovery, artistic creativity, leadership, entrepreneurship, personal relationships, romance, spirituality and other fields of life?
5. *What is the role of the individual in social development and evolution?* – What distinguishes Individuality from self-centered egoism and selfishness?
6. *Is Individuation an evolutionary direction?* – If so, what is its significance? How can it be fostered? How can each person best foster his/her own individuality and the individuality of others?

Major Themes

This project will examine several major themes related to individuality

1. *Conceptions and Characteristics of Individuality* – Definitions of individuality, individuation and individualism and how they relate with concepts of leadership, entrepreneurship, personality, character, identity, independence, self-reliance, imagination, original thinking, uniqueness, rationality, egoistic vs. unselfish individuality, society, culture, psychological maturation, self-actualization, and spiritual realization; distinguishing characteristics of individuals who make a significant contribution to society; stages or levels of individuality; individuality as a stage of self-organization, personal maturation or self-realization; relationship between individuality and transcendental values such as dignity, respect, honour, rights, love and salvation; individuality as a static vs. evolutionary concept.
2. *Relationship between the Individual and the Social Collective* – Conditions under which individuality develops; cultural variations in emphasis on individuality vs. conformity; process of differentiation of the individual from the collective; individuality and globalization; conflict and complementarity between the individual and collective; legal, political and social conditions conducive to the emergence of individuality; emergence of individuality in social evolution; relationship between freedom, democracy, education, mind and individuality; promoting individuality as a strategy for social development.

3. *Role of the Individual in Social Advancement* – Pioneers, innovators, entrepreneurs, creative artists and original thinkers as conscious agents of social progress; reconciling individual freedom with collective welfare and progress; legal, political and social conditions conducive to creative social contributions by individuals.
4. *Evolution of Individuality* – Relationship between development of civilization and emergence of individuality; role of society in fostering emergence of individuality; physical and biological aspects of evolution in terms of 'speciation' of functional diversity and their impacts in ecological evolution; ways of fostering constructive forms of individuality that promote self-actualization and social advancement; individuation and personal fulfillment.
5. *Individuality & Social Capital* – The various types of social and cultural forces shaping the evolution of individuality, including the impact of different types of social-cultural milieu, and its relationship to development and to local-global crises.
6. *Types of Individuality* – Examples of the development and expressions of individuality in various fields in contemporary life, biography, history and literature. Distinctions between masculine and feminine as well as mental, social and physical expressions of Individuality.
7. *Individuation, Consciousness & Spirituality* – Relationship between individuation, self-actualization, a widening of consciousness and spiritual experience.
8. *Personal Connectivity* – Role of individuality in love and romance, shared experiences, conscious or subconscious relationships between people, conscious connectivity in time and space.