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## UNIT 5

## INDIVIDUALISM\*

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### Structure

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### 5.0 OBJECTIVES

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The objectives of this units are,

- Examining key philosophical/ metaphysical discussions encompassing and developing the idea of Individualism.
- Construing Individualism as a social and political philosophy.
- Critically assessing the concept of Individualism.

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### 5.1 INTRODUCTION

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Individualism is perceived as an incremental phenomenon, in evidence largely in modern Western countries, and by implication, in those societies that have been impacted by the civilization of the West. The connotations of “individualism” can be commendatory/derogatory, depending on our cultural perceptions. Many social scientists have observed the increasing individualism among the Millennials’ preoccupation with their own lives in its diverse aspects, and a corresponding decline of interest in matters political and collective. We need to disentangle individualism from a blatant egoism. Here it is pertinent to quote a French aristocrat called Alexis de Tocqueville, who was one of the most prominent thinkers to engage with individualism. He observes that while selfishness “originates in blind instinct”, individualism is more of “a mature and calm feeling.”\* Individualists have often been associated with hedonism, consumerism and in obsessive pursuit of the entrepreneurial spirit.

This Unit will be aimed at extricating individualism from these overtly negative meanings that have gripped popular imagination. The Unit will show that individualism has been a normative theory, and, moreover, one to be examined in a cultural context. Construed positively, individualism aims to maximize autonomy, thereby endorsing libertarian values, and self- development, in the sense of enlarging one’s potential. The unit shall examine the philosophical/ metaphysical traditions in which individualism finds articulation. A discussion of individualism as a social and political philosophy will form one key section, as also a critical assessment of the same.

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## **5.2 INDIVIDUALISM AND PHILOSOPHY**

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### **5.2.1 The Greeks**

One may begin a discussion on Individualism by asking— Did we have any concept that vaguely resembled “individualism” in the post- Socratic traditions? In response we may observe that while the conversation regarding “autonomy” was not unfamiliar to the Greeks, this term applied to the city states rather than individuals. Additionally, given the inseparable relationship between the city-state and its residents, the concept of citizen was important. For example, we all know about the death-sentence which was given to Socrates in 399 BC in Athens, Greece. The charges were: refusing to recognize gods recognized by the state, introducing new gods, and corrupting the morals of the youth. These were entirely specious

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\* Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, Wordsworth Editions, 1998, p. 208.

allegations; friends of Socrates were passionately engaged in persuading Socrates to challenge them. In at least two Dialogues that Plato, Socrates' disciple, wrote on this matter because it touched him so deeply, namely, *Apology* and *Crito*, the reader finds Socrates declining to question his undeserved death-sentence. He observes very clearly that the State is the guardian of its people, and any orders it passes against any of its citizens, should not be contested by the affected party despite a certain knowledge about their unfairness. In other words, the laws of the land must be uncritically followed by its citizens. Now, obviously, the term "citizen" evokes notions of responsibility and obligation, rather than "freedom" that is integral to individualism.

In general, despite a dual-worldview, and a definitive privileging of the "ideal" as contrasted to the "real," Platonic writings are largely preoccupied with human issues, such as education, justice and art. However, despite the evidence of this humanism at a fairly early period of philosophy, there is an undeniable metaphysical preoccupation with a teleological vision of nature. A telos as a concept precludes the notions of choice and individuality. A corollary to this teleological conception of the universe was the perception of values as "objective." Both Plato and Aristotle affirmed this thesis of the objectivity of values. For Plato, the Forms, as contrasted to the sensible objects, the idealities, as opposed to the perennially changing, ephemeral reality, were ultimately real. Thus, for example, "Humanity" as a Form is indestructible, though particular human beings who embody this form are mortal. Aristotle, though critical of the Platonic theory of Forms, reappropriated the "form" as one of the dual terms in the analysis of any object; the other was "matter." Matter and form are to be found at the structure of each and every object, "form" being read as purpose, or the overall plan of the object, how it is designed in order to discharge a specific function. In these theories a pre-determined goal or telos precludes human agency, it is, rather, presented as a plan to which our social and political arrangements must submit.

### **5.2.2 The Medievalists**

Medieval philosophy, on the whole, could be characterized as being consumed by the desire to corroborate the existence of a benevolent God, whose largesse is evidenced in creation. Like the Greeks, the medievalists continue to subscribe to a teleological view of the world. The universe, in turn was perceived as "created" by a supremely good God, and interpreted as an ecclesiastical system that prodded us to go beyond it towards "salvation," which is the ultimate goal of our life. Acclaimed theologians, such as Saints Augustine, Anselm and

Aquinas, proposed arguments for the existence of a morally righteous, charitable being, with unrestricted powers. The perception of the world as “creation” foregrounds the Creator, here, God. The individual, by implication, is transformed into a “believer.”

### Check your progress I

**Note:** a) Use the space provided for your answer.

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit.

1. Was there an awareness of Individualism for ancient Greeks?

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2. What was the status of the individuals during medieval times in Europe?

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## 5.3 RENAISSANCE

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Jones, a celebrated scholar of history of Western philosophy, observes, “...if it can be said that classical philosophy was overthrown by Christianity’s discovery of God, then it can be said that medieval philosophy was overthrown by the scientist’s discovery of nature.”\* Beginning in the Renaissance, the “God” discourse got somewhat decentred. A revitalized humanism became manifest that lay a this-worldly emphasis on the individual in his/her social and physical milieu, rather than in a primordial relationship with God. Most crucially, the Copernican revolution in physics demystified the “skies,” hitherto perceived as an abode of Gods, but now increasingly seen as an adventurous space, potentially open to the telescope. A significant upshot of this new physics was a repudiation of the teleological view of “creation,” common to both the classical and the medieval mind, though obviously in very

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\* W.T. Jones, *Hobbes to Hume: A History of Western Philosophy*, Harcourt Brace & World, New York, 1969, p.vii.

different senses. The medieval image of man as fundamentally finite, and as being in a state of sin, was unacceptable to the Renaissance man, who had newly discovered his individuality, and was predisposed increasingly towards this world, rather than allured by the promise of salvation. Petrarch (1304-74), an Italian who had moved to Avignon, was the first thinker who was credited with having fashioned the movement called Humanism. He embodied the new spirit as he decided to climb Mont Ventoux, the highest mountain in his neighbourhood, not just functionally, but in order to view the surrounding landscape from a high altitude. The medieval attitude to nature, that believed nature to be symptomatic of God's indulgence, was surmounted in this gesture. This frame of mind was a sign of the scientific temper that would be evidenced soon, a turn to naturalism being only a prelude.

Besides, the various voyages and discoveries of new lands, motivated initially by the religious urge to spread Christianity and to enlarge the Kingdom of God, brought in unprecedented wealth both to the capitalist who financed these voyages, and the adventurers who actually undertook them. For reasons religious and political, many Europeans left their homelands, and settled down in the newly-discovered Continent called America. Pragmatism, initiative, and hard work were required to deal with the challenges of this new residence, rather than a religious state that encouraged its subjects to transcend the "passions" of this world. Over time, beginning with France and England, that had assertive monarchs, the clerical power was severely undermined, and the nation-states began to emerge. Colonization witnessed the physical expansion of the European Continent. In this radically altered political and social milieu, the individual person, hungry for adventure and possessed of a terrific energy, and submerged neither by the Alter or the Throne, was birthed.

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## **5.4 REFORMATION**

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Simultaneous with this major change in the outlook of the world was the Protestant Reformation. This was a religious movement that swept through Europe in the 1500s. Its rise was influenced by currents of nationalism, anticlericalism, and opposition to vested property interests in the hands of the church that had begun in the late fourteenth century. It resulted in the creation of a branch of Christianity called Protestantism, a name used collectively to refer to the many religious groups that separated from the Roman Catholic Church due to differences in doctrine. Now, according to Protestants, religion is related to personal assent to religious beliefs, a religiously individualistic outlook. They rejected the Pope and Catholic priests as being holier or more sacred than ordinary people.

The combined impact of Renaissance and Reformation is, each in a different way, to forefront the individual, as against the institutions to which he/she was affiliated. Established institutions, such as feudalism and the Guild diminished in importance during the Renaissance, while the Church was deprecated during the Reformation. A decline of these institutions resulted in the relative independence of the individual.

### Check your progress II

**Note:** a) Use the space provided for your answer.

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit.

1. Discuss the role that Renaissance and Reformation played in generating an awareness of Individualism in the West.

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## 5.5 THE METAPHYSICAL SELF

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The dawn of modern philosophy in the West is epitomised in Descartes' thought in his Meditations of 1641. No longer content with the self as anima, Descartes foregrounds "man" as the pivot that is foundational in the otherwise shifting plethora of reality. This is a humanist premise, Descartes expresses this newly-awakened optimism in the phrase cogito, ergo sum, I think, therefore I am. Denouncing truth to be an ecclesiastic privilege, Descartes affirms it to be a human prerogative, accessible to disciplined, rational thought. This thinking is a clear precursor of individualism in the modern West. Further, Descartes goes on to draw a distinction between mind and body, and held thinking to be pivotal to the subject. According to Jonathan Ree, a Cartesian scholar, this dualism is a secularized version of the Judeo-Christian teaching of the separateness of body and soul.\* Implicit in much of the medieval thinking was the assumption that the "essence" of existence would have to be non-somatic. This is reflected in Descartes' formulation in the Discourse on the Method, Cogito, ergo sum, I think, therefore I am. He writes, "I knew I was a substance whose whole essence

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\* Ree, Descartes, *Descartes*, Allan Lane, London, 1924, p.100.

or nature is simply to think, and which does not require any place, or depend on any material thing, in order to exist. Accordingly, this ‘I’- that is, the soul by which I am what I am- is entirely distinct from the body.”\*

The Cartesian legacy may be summarised thus:

Descartes was a forerunner of the dissociation of philosophy from theology which became evident in much of Europe in the centuries to come. The Protestants, following this lead, would affirm the supremacy of the individual conscience.

The cogito does not have a purely cognitive connotation in Descartes’ thought, it also is a soul, this is borne out by the Sixth Meditation, that is devoted to proving the immortality of the soul. This shows the Janus-faced philosopher, working under the dual influence of Scholasticism and rationalism.

Much later, the transparent consciousness that Descartes had talked about was challenged when Freud highlighted the phenomena of repression and the unconscious.

Ego- based philosophies in the West, inspired by Descartes, did not resort to a foundational principle of divinity. Consciousness, in these traditions, such as phenomenology, was sufficiently armed to tackle objectivity on its own without invoking a metaphysical guarantee.

The next milestone in this tale of the evolution of the individual is seen in the Humean scepticism pertaining to the substantialist view of the self. Hume’s affirmation about each of us being “nothing but a bundle or collection of different perceptions, which succeed each other with an inconceivable rapidity, and are in a perpetual flux and movement”<sup>†</sup> created a powerful impact. For Hume, the inference from these atomic perceptions to a self is illegitimate. Mention must be made that Hume was important because of his undertaking of a complete secularization of philosophy.

Immanuel Kant, awakened from his “dogmatic slumbers” by Hume, endeavoured to recover the self from this threatened extinction. The self in Kant was conceived as an epistemological subject, as well as an object of knowledge, or the empirical self. Finally, it was the moral

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\* Descartes, Rene, *Discourse on the Method*, Discourse IV, in *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, trans, John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff and Dugald Murdoch, Cambridge University Press, London, 1985.

<sup>†</sup> Hume, David, *A Treatise of Human Nature: Being an Attempt to Introduce the Experimental Method of Reasoning*, Ed., L.A. Silby-Bigge, Oxford, 1960, p. 252.

individual, or the noumenal self. Kant resolved the problematic duality that had plagued Descartes' thought, and, far from debunking the physical world, made it amenable to human subjectivity. In *Critique of Pure Reason*,<sup>\*</sup> Space and Time, and the Categories, together constitute the formal ingredients of experience that structure our perceptions and give us knowledge. And, most crucially, the objects of our knowledge being always a unity, Kant asserted that this unity could not have been derived from experience. Hence is birthed the famous transcendental self, described also as the principle of "transcendental apperception."

It is crucial to halt here and take stock of the developments in the notion of the self since the latter provides the conceptual underpinnings for the individual. Descartes certainly liberated the mind from a theological structure, though, as pointed out earlier, the "soul" is intertwined with this cognitive consciousness. However, this consciousness is disembodied, and effectively without any socio-cultural base. The Kantian self fares no better, being only a logical postulate—the vicissitudes of a sensory world bypassing it completely. Later, Hegel would attempt to overcome the dualisms in the philosophers' world, but his Spirit will lend to the world a teleological movement that would perceive the world as a collective, rather than peopled by particular beings.

Robert Solomon, a scholar of Continental thought, and a reputed figure, has coined a phrase that he calls "the transcendental pretence." This, according to Solomon, is the thesis that beneath diverse humans is an underlying unity. To put this in Solomon's own memorable words, "This was a thesis that was coming of age just as world-wide exploration and colonization was having its full effect, and as transportation, travel, communications, and what was then called 'the conquest of nature' were about to achieve global efficiency...the transcendental pretence is no innocent philosophical thesis, but a political weapon of enormous power... it also justified unrestricted tolerance for paternalism and self-righteousness—the white philosopher's burden'. Philosophers who never left their home towns declared themselves experts on 'human nature', and weighed the morals of civilizations and 'savages' thousands of miles beyond their ken. Kant never left the provincial town of Königsberg, insisting that in its busy port he had the opportunity to observe all of humanity."<sup>†</sup> In other words, the transcendental pretence makes the unjustified assumption that there is universality in the fundamental modes of human experience. This leads to

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<sup>\*</sup> Kant, Immanuel, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans., Norman Kemp Smith, The McMillion Press, London, 1973.

<sup>†</sup> Solomon, Robert C., *Continental Philosophy since 1750: The Rise and Fall of the Self*, Oxford University Press, 1988, p.6-7



Eurocentrism as a hegemonic worldview. From this perspective, both Kant and Hegel would appear to be guilty of this.

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## 5.6 SUBJECT IN SOCIAL AND POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

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### 5.6.1 Thomas Hobbes: (1588-1679)

Let us begin our discussion of Hobbes by employing a set of adjectives that locate him in the philosophical traditions of the West. Hobbes was a mechanist and a materialist, who looked upon ‘man’ as necessarily embodied, and, further, governed by motion. He looked upon the traditional subject-matter of metaphysics, comprising a perfect, eternal and immutable reality as avoidable claptrap. Significantly, for our purposes, Hobbes delivered a conceptual framework that enables us to conceive of individuation, as he believed that each body is non-duplicable and unique. However, he does engage in a certain generalization pertaining to human behaviour, the principal one being that self-preservation is a fundamental human drive. He said, “...in the nature of man, we find three principal causes of quarrel. First, competition; secondly, diffidence; thirdly, glory. The first, maketh men invade for gain; the second, for safety; and the third, for reputation...it is manifest, that during the time men live without a common power to keep them all in awe, they are in that condition which is called war; and such a war, as is of every man, against every man.”\*

Hobbes contended that, while men display blatant selfishness, they also desire peace, and are amenable to any rule that offers them security. Left on their own devices, people will not spontaneously cooperate to bring about peace. Thus, a sovereign is elected by the voluntary actions of the governed, so that they may be protected.

Hobbes can be seen as having anticipated the fundamentals of a democracy in his requirements of a consent, and his explicit disavowal of the divine-right doctrine.

### 5.6.2 John Locke: (1632-1704)

Locke was a liberal who believed that faith must arise from individual convictions, rather than being imposed from above. He was an empiricist who opposed the teleological worldview from the Middle Ages, as also the belief that the soul is equipped with essential knowledge at birth. Locke, importantly gave to posterity the notion of “natural rights,” the

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\* *Leviathan*, in *Works*, edited by Molesworth, Part I, Chs. 11 and 13.

rights to life, liberty, health and possessions. He affirmed our equality and independence in the natural state, the only reason that a civil society is chosen is to ensure an effective governance that protects these rights. A chosen sovereign automatically loses his political authority if he fails in this mission.

Locke's contribution to political discourse is that he has given to us a "will" theory of political authority. "Liberty" in Locke's theory stands for political equality. This does not preclude states of subordination through circumstances of birth, or natural talents. Rather, the employment of force is justified, but, and this is significant, only when force derives from consent does it acquire a moral legitimacy. For Locke, it is the people who are sovereign, and, further, this classification of "the people" is not monolithic, but applies to autonomous individuals. Locke believed in the concept of a majority, but only as it is an outcome of a consent. Locke's emphasis on consent marks him out as a thinker who projected an incremental sense of individuality that was characteristic of his era, and thus, laid down the foundation for democracy.

### **5.6.3 Jean-Jacques Rousseau: (1712-1778)**

In order to understand this important thinker, we need to discuss, briefly, two crucial movements on the Continent, namely, Enlightenment and Romanticism, these form the historical context of Rousseau. Enlightenment began in England in the mid-seventeenth century, and spread thence to France and Germany in the eighteenth century. The hallmark of this movement was its unalloyed celebration of scientific rationality, and a passionate support for change and progress. Humanism was another major outcome of Enlightenment. This meant that the focus shifted from God, the Creator of the world, to Humans, into whose safekeeping the world had been assigned. Philosophers began talking about an essential human nature, attributing rationality to the latter. Reason, being a universal human trait, began to be employed by thinkers to cross-examine all matters, secular and religious. The belief in the universality of human nature led, by a logical route, to confidence in individual autonomy,\* each and every individual may arrive unilaterally at truth, obviously on the assumption that he/she had received the right education.

Romanticism, as an intellectual current, first arose in Germany as a critical reaction to the kind of universalism about human dispositions that had originated with Enlightenment.

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\* Solomon, Ibid. p.11

Physically, Germany was fragmented into hundreds of principalities and small kingdoms. Germans were reluctant to accept a cosmic humanism that came with Enlightenment, and was alien to their own experience. Solomon has averred that Romanticism is a part rejection of the political imperialism of nations such as England and France, which were hosts to Enlightenment; and a defence of traditional religion against a fanatic rationalism.\* David Hume (1711-1776), Rousseau's friend, famously observed, "Reason is and ought to be the slave of passions."<sup>†</sup>

To sum up, while Enlightenment is a fervent support of science and rationality, Romanticism is suspicious of science, and relies on intuitions and feelings. However, both these contrary currents converge on the importance that they place on the significance of the individual. This is the formative context of our next thinker Rousseau. While committed to rational reform for humanity at large (Enlightenment), Rousseau argued passionately for a life of sentiment, and gave to posterity an organic conception of the individual which was a highpoint of Romanticism.

As against the Cartesian cogito, self-sufficient and introspective, Rousseau introduces a self that is expressive, oriented to the world, and aspiring to a future. This self is social, political, as well as moral. He believes that autonomy characterizes each and every individual, thus enabling us to enter into a 'social contract' which creates society. General Will defines the transition from the individual to a community. As Solomon has succinctly observed, "In England and America the demand for freedom emerged in the concept of the individual, working, acquisitive self, but in Europe the concept of self that emerged in the name of freedom was a supra-human, non-individual self, like Rousseau's General Will."<sup>‡</sup>

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## 5.7 CONTEMPORARY THINKERS: MILL AND BERLIN

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Berlin perceived a lot of promise in the Copernican Revolution that Kant had affected in philosophy. That the human intellect is not a passive recipient of knowledge/opinions that are thrust on it by religious or political forces, but an active interjector in its value- perceptions, was a watershed insight that was to impact on significant movements on the Continent, such as phenomenology and existentialism. Berlin, in the footsteps of his forbear John Stuart Mill, saw liberalism as facilitating individual freedom. Berlin repudiated moral monism, and

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\* Ibid., p.13

<sup>†</sup> Hume, David, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, originally published in 1739, Silby-Bigge edition

<sup>‡</sup> Ibid., p.20

emphasized a pluralism of values, without an objective moral hierarchy. Different kinds of goals are being sought, such as increasing one's material possessions, promoting a religious cult, popularizing a green movement, or leading a nomadic existence, are, each of them, perfectly legitimate, but none of these values can be elevated to a position of moral centrality in any society. They are value- perceptions because they have been endorsed by someone, this is the position of liberalism. Mill believed that "individuality," the license to live one's own life volitionally, is a fundamental value. For Berlin, individual freedom gets deepened in a world where there is a profusion of heterogenous perceptions of the good, without an objective moral hierarchy.

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## 5.8 PHENOMENOLOGY AND EXISTENTIALISM

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One philosopher who was deeply distrustful of Hegel was Kierkegaard (1813-1855). He believed that the Spirit displayed Hegel's contempt for the individual. Kierkegaard repudiated an entire philosophical tradition that had endeavoured to lay down absolute moral rules, objective truths, or the categorical imperatives. In place of reason, he substituted 'subjective truths', feelings and personal needs. He, more than any philosopher preceding him, awarded a lot of importance to the individual human being, looking at "the Public" rather contemptuously.

This trend continues in the post-war existentialists such as Heidegger and Sartre. Unlike phenomenology, that was charged with a solipsism, "the Other" for the existentialist is a primordial given. In the historical context of the Second World War, the Other, whether as a political state, or a socially and culturally established structure, is viewed with suspicion. The Other is responsible for the Dasein's (the self) deterioration into inauthenticity. Somewhat similarly, conflict is an irreducible dimension of a Sartrean universe, he puts it rather dramatically when he observes that the other causes him to "bleed."

In some sense the phenomenologist and the existentialists could be perceived as seeking to create private areas for the self which will preserve its authenticity and uniqueness. Husserl's project was guided mainly by epistemic considerations, the existentialists by their quest for an existence that was not borrowed, but volitional. Suffice is to observe how these two traditions also contributed a theoretical/intellectual framework for what was later to be seen as an individual.

### Check your progress III

**Note:** a) Use the space provided for your answer.

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit.

1. Examine the salient features of Individualism.

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## 5.9 LET US SUM UP

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We can summarize our discussion with the help of the following points,

- Individualism has been incremental over time, evidenced largely in modern Western countries, and, in those societies that have been impacted by the civilization of the West.
- The connotations of individualism can be positive or negative.
- A need to put across individualism as a normative theory.
- The first Section is on Individualism and Philosophy. The early Greece city-states had “citizens” rather than individuals.
- The medievalists had a teleological orientation on the world, humans were perceived as fundamentally finite and flawed. The individual was looked upon as a believer. A religious subject.
- Renaissance in Europe witnessed a dwindling of teleology, and a revival of interest in human life and human institutions. Many voyages undertaken in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, leading to the discovery of new lands.
- The Protestant Reformation resulted in currents of thought such as nationalism, anticlericalism and the emphasis on religion as a matter of personal consent, leading to the heightening of individual outlook.
- Descartes, although he inaugurated the era of the subject, delivered a disembodied subject. Kant’s self was a logical, epistemic postulate.

- The Section on the Social and Political subject undertakes a discussion of the Social Contract theorists, Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau. These philosophers laid the foundations of liberalism in the West, as also, initiated a discourse on rights of the individuals. The notions of “consent” and “majority” is also owed to them.
- These philosophers drew from the Enlightenment and Romanticism. While Enlightenment supported scientific rationality, Romanticism promoted intuitions and feelings. However, both these movements saw the foregrounding of the individual.
- The contemporary liberal tradition exemplified by Mill and Berlin has furthered and facilitated individual freedom. A repudiation of moral monism, and a thesis about a basic plurality of values, follow from their theories.
- Phenomenology and existentialism have, in their own ways, contributed substantially to individualism, although the context of their discussions was very different.

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## 5.10 KEY WORDS

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**Enlightenment** : A European intellectual movement of the late 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries emphasizing reason and individualism rather than tradition. It was heavily influenced by 17<sup>th</sup>-century philosophers such as Descartes, Locke, and Newton, and its prominent figures included Kant, Goethe, Voltaire, Rousseau, and Adam Smith.

**Individualism** : a social theory favouring freedom of action for individuals over collective or state control. Individualism encompasses a value system, a theory of human nature, and a belief in certain political, economic, social, and religious arrangements.

**Reformation** : The Reformation was the start of Protestantism and the split of the Western Church into Protestantism and the Roman Catholic Church. It shaped major features of Western culture, including freedom of religion, freedom of conscience, the dignity of the individual, and political democracy.

**Renaissance** : Renaissance is a French word meaning “rebirth.” It refers to a period in European civilization that was marked by a revival of Classical learning and wisdom. It is a period in European history, marking the transition from the Middle Ages to modernity and covering the 15<sup>th</sup> and the 16<sup>th</sup> centuries.

**Romanticism** : It was an artistic, literary, musical, and intellectual movement that originated in Europe towards the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. It emphasized the individual, the subjective, the irrational, the imaginative, the personal, the spontaneous, the emotional, the visionary, and the transcendental.

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## 5.12 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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### *Some Questions and Their Answers in an Outline*

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1. In ancient times Greece had many city-states, each a self-enclosed unit. Norms, social, political and ethical, were formulated and enforced in order to maintain internal unity within each city-state.

2. Hence, the individuals were perceived as "citizens," with obligation and loyalty towards the city-state.

3. A certain amount of authoritarianism was an inevitable outcome of this situation.
4. No Individualism, in the modern sense of the term, was present in Greece during ancient times.
- 2.
1. The theologians during the Middle Ages, such as Saint Anselm and Thomas Aquinas, were deeply committed to making Christianity into a rational belief.
2. A teleological orientation was characteristic of medieval thinking.
3. The individual was perceived more as a “believer” than as a person in his/her own right.
4. There was a latent contempt for this world, and its “sinning” subjects.
5. Hence, no real awareness of the individual as a secular subject.

### **Check Your Progress II**

- 1.
1. Renaissance, meaning “rebirth,” witnessed major changes in the perceptions of the people in the West.
2. A gradual shift from looking at the world as “creation” to a this-worldly pursuits.
3. A teleological view on the world begins to give away, an interest in the socio-political milieu of the subject is witnessed.
4. Various voyages undertaken that lead to the discovery of new lands. Migrations undertaken on a large scale to these newly- found countries.
5. Pragmatism and industry, rather than divine determinism become predominant.
6. New- found wealth through trading encourages individual enterprise.
7. Reformation resulted in a sustained critique of the clergy and the corruption within the Church.
8. Protestantism born as a break-away sect from the Roman Catholic Church. This sect stressed on individual consent in religious matters.



9. The combined impact of the Renaissance and Reformation resulted in enhanced significance of the individual.

### **Check Your Progress III**

1.

1. In the history of philosophy, Individualism has had both commendatory and derogatory connotations.

2. It has been perceived as a blatant form of egoism, or, on the opposite end, as “a mature and calm feeling” (Alexis de Tocqueville).

3. This Unit has tried to present Individualism as a normative theory. An historical survey has been undertaken, ranging from early Greek philosophers, to phenomenologists and existentialists, in an effort to determine the antecedents of Individualism in the West.

4. Individualism as a normative criterion advocates maximum autonomy for the self, liberal values and development of one’s latent talents to the greatest extent possible.

5. Renaissance and Reformation in Europe in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries launched an attack on the clergy, and the oppressive hold that they had on the people. Teleology, an inheritance from the Middle Ages, was challenged as it looked upon redemption in a transcendental world. Various voyages resulted in the discovery of new lands, opening up new trade routes, and thus, getting more wealth for those who went on these ventures. The allure of this world became compelling, resulting in a lot of private enterprise.

6. The individual acquired a significant position.

7. Locke talked about natural rights, equality and independence in the state of nature.

8. The Social Contract theorists focussed on individual consent as foundational to the election of any political authority.

9. Thinkers such as Kant, through the Copernican Revolution highlighted the Understanding as dynamic in awarding sense to the world.

10. Descartes’ cogito was a secular insight, anyone could access the truth, unmediated by any ecclesiastic authority, thus, democratizing knowledge.

11. Isaiah Berlin was a major proponent of Individualism; he advocated a fundamental pluralism of values.

12. Phenomenology and existentialism, though not self-consciously in a political context, put a lot of emphasis on the subject's interjection in constituting its social and political reality.

