

Philosophy final



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Individualism: Different Perspectives The concept of individualism is not new for anyone today. The modern societies emphasize more and more on this concept knowing the success of achieving an ideal society rests in following the individualistic approach. Decades after decades change the use and characteristics of this concept, however, the concept of individualism did not vanish from the scenario in any age. The emergence and rise of capitalism during eighteenth and nineteenth century witness the biggest change in the thoughts and conceptuality of individualism. In the modern society it can be seen that individualism is maintained and promoted by everyone.

Individualism is believed to be a factor which is being promoted in the society to maintain the balance in society. Adam Smith was a proponent of capitalism along with liberty as he believed in individualism in every individual. He believed that if everyone realizes his or her advantages in accordance to his needs then he would be able to balance the needs of the society too. Adam Smith is considered to be the first promoter of individualism in the society. Nowadays a similar change can be felt in the society when everyone is realizing his own individual advantages and disadvantages in accordance to his needs.

Similarly Jeremy Bentham believed that a social policy could be a great way to promote individualism in which the benefits of every individual could be noted down without any moral judgment. By this he meant that every individual has a right to be happy in the way he likes and his happiness cannot be judged on moral grounds. Bentham proposes that a social policy must include clauses and ideas which are equally beneficial for all people living in a society without any indication of discrimination or bias on any grounds. His approach is more inclined towards democracy of thoughts,

judgment and social order. Nowadays in the modern society similar events can be seen when people are not able to judge their happiness by being rich only. Even a poor old man can be happier than a rich man because of his realization of individualism. The equal opportunity rights, bills condemning discrimination and social policies for the minorities are all translating the idea of creating individualism in a democratic manner i. e. by creating self-regulating attitudes. People are motivated to think, judge and choose for themselves. They are given the autonomy to choose the career that best suits them, vote for the leader which they truly trust in, go for a decision which find the most appropriate and form individual judgments when they find it important. This emphasis on individuals' personal views and choices is the representation of their freedom of thought, expression and actions.

The concept of individualism has since then been followed by many philosophers who put forward different concepts relating to it. Friedrich Nietzsche is one of the philosophers who supported individualism at a very early stage. In the modern society it is seen that different societies exist together and these societies are either classified into the group of collectivists or individualists. However the concept of individualism is spreading far and entering the collectivist societies where the people are realizing the potential benefits of individualism (Carus 2001, pp. 128-139).

The United States of America is currently the society in which the platform of individualism is practiced the most in this world. The word 'I' is emphasized in these regions where people represent their actions themselves and do not carry forward a group with them. In regions like Hong Kong, collectivism is practiced in which it can be seen that the people work in collaboration to benefit each other. The benefits of individualism are cited by many

philosophers and one of these philosophers was Alexis de Tocqueville. Alexis believed that individualism is a perspective which everyone should practice in order to attain inner satisfaction and reliance. It would not only help an individual to grow on himself but would also help him to grow his confidence which he otherwise might lose. According to Tocqueville collectivism promotes activities in a group rather than alone and this may discourage the ability of the person himself. In collectivism he states that a person will go into distress because of less time for his own leisure.

However some philosophers also deny that individualism should not pertain to the relationships in the society as it may harm the integrity of the society.

Tocqueville supports individualism in a way that he does not want the equality of individuals to be affected. In Tocqueville's view equality is basis of social relations and individualism has effects on the social relations. If a person goes into deep individualism, according to Tocqueville, then it is possible that he will fall into a world of his own in which he would face the problem of egoism along with repression of qualities that he possesses (Denning 1998, pp. 13-14). On the other hand, collectivism can promote a group action which all the individuals in the world desire. The utilitarian thought of philosophy supports the view that an action is considered to be correct if the action brings about happiness of the greatest number of people. John Stuart Mill was a philosopher of the utilitarian idea and claimed that Rule Utilitarianism is the rule for leading a proper and a moral life. Mill explained that Rule Utilitarianism was the rule that worked towards maximizing happiness. According to this rule an act is moral and correct if it brings about happiness for the maximum number of people. In the same way it puts an action to be morally incorrect if it brings about unhappiness and is

the cause of displeasure for the maximum number of people. Mill explained this rule with the aid of the principle of utility. According to this principle which is also sometimes referred to as the principle of happiness, for a person to be happy himself he should consider the happiness of others to be as important as his own happiness (Mills 1867). This can be said to be an example of collectivism as it is promoting the happiness of a whole group. Marx had a very different concept of individualism and it astonishes the thoughts of people who were earlier inspired by other philosophers. His theory of individualism is complex yet based on his true interpretation of the social affairs and relationships dwelling in the society. He does not take individualism as a concept which is related to a single unit of the society i. e. an independent person. He is not in favor of the proletarian movement which identified individuals by their status and membership in a particular class of society. The individuality of a person, according to Marx is the identification of individuals as per the class to which they belong. He believes in classifying individuals on the basis of the groups, social class or community they belong to. He believes that individuals must follow the rules for an average member of a particular class and the individuality of a member is identified by the rules, regulations, status and distinction that a particular class of society enjoys. Their opinions, judgments and worldviews are all the reflection of a class to which they belong. Independent ideas and thoughts about situations and topics are not the true translators of individuality according to Marx. Hence, Marx's concept of individuality lies in the collaborative approach, thoughts, views and methodology of a particular class to other people, incidents and events.

Marx's ideal view about individualism is contradictory to the most popular

kinds and definitions of individualism. He does not view personal traits and ideas as one of the features which establish the social institutions. He believes that individuals are recognized by the complex social arrangements that they belong to. According to Marx, the individuality of a person is not defined by the distinct thoughts or ideas he holds. He further illuminates the concept of individuality by claiming that individuals do not make a society but the relationships, similar traits and the common beliefs they hold make a society. Hence, Marx proposes a concept of social individuality which represents a particular social relationship to which the social individuals belong. He refuses and refutes the claims which promote bare individualism (Little 1986, pp. 149-153). He believed in communal equality to pursue the freedom of individuals. He emphasized on the concept of liberty but not for a single class or regional population but for all. He, like Rousseau emphasized and affirmed that equality for all brings the real liberal society which is required for a contented and satisfied population living in a particular society.

The concept of individuality is a complex phenomenon which requires closer attention by the individuals of the society. The social policies, laws and regulations are all affected by this concept if we give proper attention to what is actually meant by 'individualism' and if we actually need to follow the rules of criterion of individualism. Globalization and technological advancements have made the world smaller for people as people now have the ease to move from one place to the other without much difficulty. There is a growing trend of diversification and immigration. The need for higher education, good jobs and aim to excel in one's career encourages individuals to move from their homelands to other places. Their aims encourage them to

move and find their destiny in far off places. They start working, studying and struggling for themselves Thomas & Woodruff 1999 p. 71). Does individuality refer to a person seeking his own good and taking steps according to his desire without giving a second thought to others? Is this individuality to think about one's own self without giving any consideration to others, their rights, moral and ethical obligations towards them and the effects of one's action on them? Is a person's personal interest of more importance than others happiness? Does the concept of individuality teach selfishness? Of course it depends on the individual how and in what circumstances do he considers this concept. However a completely self-centered approach to individuality may end up creating chaos in the society. The rights of minorities in today's diversified society may be harmed and violated. Hence, following an exhaustive approach to individuality may not be welcomed today (Postmes & Jetten 2006, pp. 48-52).

In the modern society, there is a growing emphasis on equality, freedom and liberty. This growing emphasis is mainly because people are moving from one country to the other and the laws, society and rules of the new society may or may not suit them. In order to protect such people from being forced or compelled to follow the same rules, the governments, people and different organizations are working together to form such rules which would aid the immigrant population in the work places, educational institutions and other areas. Their individuality and personal and moral values are hence, protected. Their personal views are welcomed in general and political debates. Their rights are protected indifferent ways like equal opportunity rights, anti-discriminatory laws and so on. The society today emphasizes a lot on the individuality and protecting the rights of individuals. This, indeed,

is helpful for people moving abroad. Their religious, moral and ethical values are protected as well as their efforts to maintain the individuality of judgment and forming opinions. They are not only given the right to speak but also are given opportunities to flourish according to their capability and capacity. Their distinct way of working, ideas and thoughts about issues are welcomed. However, people take the meaning of individuality as personal freedom and ideas to protect their own good and seek their own benefits. However, this selfish attitude to think, act and achieve personal aims may harm others or their individuality. A person having a different cultural background may try to implement rules or promote acts which are highly regarded in his culture; however, others who are not in favor may not feel comfortable with it. Individuality, hence, should be controlled by a proper definition or explanation in order to maintain individuality on a communal basis which translates the happiness and satisfaction of the society rather than of a group or class of people.

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