

A BIBLIOGRAPHIC ESSAY ON INDIVIDUALISM

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INDIVIDUALISM IS A COMPLEX AND VAST CONCEPT, interrelated with a number of other value-laden concepts—such as autonomy, freedom, rights, equality, justice, identity, and ethics—that permeate public discussions of what social arrangements are appropriate for our democratic society. The varying uses of these concepts are imbued with particular notions of the good, both what constitutes the good life and what constitutes the good society. As one of these fundamental societal values, individualism has been confronted and debated by scholars across a wide variety of disciplines: political theory, moral philosophy, sociology, literary analysis, law, education, economics, and religion. This bibliography strives to give a sense of the interdisciplinary breadth of concern with individualism and the issues surrounding it.

Central is the relationship between the individual and society. Neither is possible without the other, but the two exist in constant tension: Which is prior? How ought we to balance private interest with public goods? Can either the individual or society be given greater importance without crippling the other? Individualism, very broadly defined, is the position that gives priority to the individual as both source and beneficiary of social action and as the ultimate measure of what is good. The books included in this bibliography discuss the meaning of individual-

ism, provide a picture of American individualism, and map the contours of several debates organized around the central tension between the individual and society.

Ideas about individualism defy easy categorization because the labels that are often used in relevant debates (e.g., liberal, communitarian) are sometimes imposed on thinkers that do not themselves use such labels to describe their positions. Furthermore, the recognized “camps” are divided—both champions and critics of individualism are to be found, for example, within the ranks of conservatives, liberals, feminists, and communitarians. There is, therefore, considerable overlap between the categories presented here. For the sake of brevity, however, works have been included in only one section.

Conceptualizing Individualism

The concept of individualism is rooted in the philosophy of the Enlightenment and was first articulated in the nineteenth century. Steven Lukes’ semantic history of nineteenth-century uses of the term reveals no less than eleven different senses in which the word was used. These include the intrinsic value of the individual human being, autonomy or self-direction, privacy, self-development, political individualism, economic individualism, religious individualism, and ethical individualism. In the early twentieth century, social thinkers such as Emile Durkheim, Georg Simmel, Norbert Elias, and John Dewey grappled further with the changes wrought by modernization in the fundamental relationship between the individual and the social collective. Although the current tendency is to think of individualism in a positive relationship with modernization, this view has not always held sway. In the 1930s Dewey was concerned with what he saw as the “decline of the old-fashioned individual and individualism” and the need to create a new individualism suitable for modern conditions.¹

¹ John Dewey, *Individualism, Old and New* (1930; Amherst: Prometheus, 1999) 21.

Lawrence Friedman argues that there was a fundamental shift in the conceptualization of individualism during the twentieth century. The nineteenth-century conception of individualism was conceived of as relevant in the public spheres of economics and politics; private life was still guided by long-standing traditions that de-emphasized the individual in relation to the social group. Over the course of the twentieth century, the conception of individualism extended from the public to the private, encompassing the matters of lifestyle and self-expression that most contemporary Americans tend to think of when discussing individuality.

For roughly the past thirty years, discussions of individualism typically have closely associated the concept with liberal political theory. John Rawls' theory of justice has been hugely influential in contemporary liberal theory. At the core of the theory are the premises that "society is a cooperative venture for mutual advantage" and that the justness of any form of social order must be evaluated on the basis of its benefit to individuals.² Among both his students and his critics, Rawls' individualistic notion of the good has spurred discussion and debate on how individualism is to be conceptualized. Typical of the association of individualism with liberal theory is Arblaster's assertion that "the metaphysical and ontological core of liberalism is individualism.... In this way of thinking the individual comes before society in every sense."³ Similarly, David Conway regards individualism with respect to both means and ends as fundamental to classical liberal political theory. Colin Bird, in contrast, challenges the assumption that the ideals of the liberal political tradition should be viewed as exclusively individualistic.

- Arblaster, Anthony. *The Rise and Decline of Western Liberalism*. New York: Basil Blackwell, 1984.
- Bauman, Zygmunt. *The Individualized Society*. Cambridge: Polity, 2001.

² John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971) 4.

³ Anthony Arblaster, *The Rise and Decline of Western Liberalism* (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1984) 15.

- Berlin, Isaiah. *Two Concepts of Liberty*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1958.
- Bird, Colin. *The Myth of Liberal Individualism*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999.
- Dewey, John. *Individualism, Old and New*. 1930; Amherst: Prometheus, 1999.
- Elias, Norbert. *The Society of Individuals*. Trans. by Edmund Jephcott. Ed. by Michael Schroter. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991.
- Friedman, Lawrence M. *The Republic of Choice: Law, Authority, and Culture*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990.
- Hayek, Friedrich A. von. *Individualism and Economic Order*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1957.
- Heller, Thomas C., Morton Sosna, and David E. Wellbery, eds. *Reconstructing Individualism: Autonomy, Individuality, and the Self in Western Thought*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1986.
- Kateb, George. *The Inner Ocean: Individualism and Democratic Culture*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992.
- Lukes, Steven. *Individualism*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1973.
- Mill, John Stuart. *On Liberty*. 1859; New York: Legal Classics Library, 1992.
- Rawls, John. *A Theory of Justice*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971.
- ————. *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001.
- Taylor, Charles. *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989.
- Watt, Ian. *Myths of Modern Individualism: Faust, Don Quixote, Don Juan, Robinson Crusoe*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

American Individualism

Historical Development

The books in this section draw out a number of themes important in the historical development of American individualism. In his description of American culture in the mid-nineteenth century, Alexis de Tocqueville is widely regarded as the first to bring the term “individualism” to prominence. Projecting backward from the time of Tocqueville’s observations, American history has often been thought of

as particularly individualistic. Robert Bellah's essay in this issue of *The Hedgehog Review* attributes contemporary American individualism in large part to the distinctly Protestant origins of American culture. In contrast, Barry Alan Shain counters this assumption in *The Myth of American Individualism*, arguing that the roots of American society were more communal than individualistic.

In our history and literature, the American dream is, in large part, a dream of social mobility and is reinforced by legendary historical accounts of "self-made men" (see Howe). Beginning with such authors as Emerson and Thoreau, the image of the "rugged individual" has figured prominently in American literature (see Anderson). In *Domestic Individualism*, Gillian Brown reveals that the not-so-rugged individual, too, has had a significant role in the literary history of America. With the great legends of history and literature reflecting an individualistic heritage, it is little wonder that individualism is an important part of American national identity (see Arieli and McClay).

- Anderson, Quentin. *Making Americans: An Essay on Individualism and Money*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1992.
- Arieli, Yehoshua. *Individualism and Nationalism in American Ideology*. Baltimore: Penguin, 1966.
- Brown, Gillian. *Domestic Individualism: Imagining Self in Nineteenth-Century America*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990.
- ————. *The Consent of the Governed: The Lockean Legacy in Early American Culture*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001.
- Hartz, Louis. *The Liberal Tradition in America: An Interpretation of American Political Thought Since the Revolution*. 1955; New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1991.
- Howe, Daniel Walker. *Making the American Self: Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997.
- McClay, Wilfred M. *The Masterless: Self and Society in Modern America*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1994.
- Shain, Barry Alan. *The Myth of American Individualism: The Protestant Origins of American Political Thought*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994.

- Tocqueville, Alexis de. *Democracy in America*. Trans. by Henry Reeve. Ed. by Phillips Bradley. 1945; New York: Random House, 1990.

Contemporary American Culture

Since the mid-twentieth century, social observers have pointed out increasingly individualistic tendencies in American culture. Of particular interest to a number of authors has been the perceived shift from 1950s conformity to the “me” generation. David Riesman’s *The Lonely Crowd*, published in 1950, explored the nature of American individualism and conformism. Riesman detailed a “sea change” that he saw taking place in American culture: the very character of individuals was changing from the “inner-directed” person, whose internal goals were implanted by long-standing tradition and elders, to the “other-directed” person, oriented toward the ever-changing expectations projected by peer groups and mass media. In *The New Individualists*, Paul Leinberger and Bruce Tucker reveal the generational transformation between the 1950s “organization men” and their children, who value self more than loyalty.

Many who write about individualism in contemporary America are at least vaguely pessimistic, if not outright alarmist, about its impact on American culture. In *Habits of the Heart*, Robert Bellah and others discuss how individualism has transformed aspects of American culture—from the self, to family, to civic involvement, work, religion, citizenship, and the national society. In *The Hearts of Men*, Barbara Ehrenreich explores the impact of individualizing tendencies on the structure of the American family. The rise of individualism among the baby boomers is Cheryl Russell’s “master trend,” to which she attributes all manner of social problems. Robert Putnam’s *Bowling Alone* provides an historical discussion of the American public’s changing levels of involvement in various civic organizations. Mary Ann Glendon discusses the ways that the overwhelming emphasis on individual rights in political discourse serves to undermine aspects of democracy.

- Bellah, Robert N., Richard Madsen, William B. Sullivan, Ann Swidler, and Steven M. Tipton. *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985.

- Curry, Richard O., and Lawrence B. Goodheart, eds. *American Chameleon: Individualism in Trans-National Context*. Kent: The Kent State University Press, 1991.
- Ehrenreich, Barbara. *The Hearts of Men: American Dreams and the Flight from Commitment*. Garden City: Anchor, 1983.
- Gans, Herbert J. *Middle American Individualism: The Future of Liberal Democracy*. New York: Free, 1988.
- Glendon, Mary Ann. *Rights Talk: The Impoverishment of Political Discourse*. New York: Free, 1991.
- Leinberger, Paul, and Bruce Tucker. *The New Individualists: The Generation After The Organization Man*. New York: Harper Collins, 1991.
- Putnam, Robert D. *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000.
- Riesman, David, with Nathan Glazer and Reuel Denney. *The Lonely Crowd: A Study of the Changing American Character*. 1950; New Haven: Yale Nota Bene, 2001.
- Russell, Cheryl. *The Master Trend: How the Baby Boom Generation is Remaking America*. New York: Plenum, 1993.
- Wuthnow, Robert. *Acts of Compassion: Caring for Others and Helping Ourselves*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991.

Champions of Individualism

Those who advocate individualism begin from a range of intellectual positions, including liberalism, feminism, and concern for human rights. Ronald Dworkin, David Gauthier, David Johnston, and Robert Nozick approach individualism from their commitments to liberal political theory. Both Dworkin and Johnston defend the idea of individual human rights as necessary to liberal theory. Johnston is adamant that the commitment to individualism is “the most fundamental commitment of the liberal tradition.”⁴ David Conway argues for individu-

⁴ David Johnston, *The Idea of a Liberal Theory: A Critique and Reconstruction* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994) 186.

alism of a specific form that he calls “classical liberalism,” distinguished from the “modern liberalism” he associates with Rawls and Dworkin. In his typology, classical liberalism places emphasis on equality before the law and, unlike modern liberalism, does not concern itself with matters of distributive or economic equality.

With a somewhat different agenda, feminists such as Susan Brown, Zillah Eisenstein, and Joan Kennedy-Taylor also advocate individualism. The feminist commitment to individualism is directed in general toward securing equal rights for women. Whereas Eisenstein’s preferred form is liberal individualism, Brown rejects liberal individualism in favor of what she calls “existential individualism.”

- Brown, L. Susan. *The Politics of Individualism*. New York: Black Rose, 1993.
- Conway, David. *Classical Liberalism: The Unvanquished Ideal*. New York: St. Martin’s, 1995.
- Dworkin, Ronald. *Taking Rights Seriously*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977.
- Eisenstein, Zillah R. *The Radical Future of Liberal Feminism*. New York: Longman, 1981.
- Gauthier, David. *Morals by Agreement*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1986.
- Johnston, David. *The Idea of a Liberal Theory: A Critique and Reconstruction*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994.
- Kennedy-Taylor, Joan. *Reclaiming the Mainstream: Individualist Feminism Rediscovered*. Buffalo: Prometheus, 1992.
- Nozick, Robert. *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*. New York: Basic, 1974.

Critics of Individualism

Much like the champions of individualism, its critics are also to be found in many camps. Although they identify with different labels and agendas, there are a number of points of similarity in the communitarian, liberal, feminist, and religious critiques of individualism.

Communitarian Critiques

The key question in the liberal-communitarian debate is: Is community voluntary? Liberals see the individual as prior to community; that is, community can only be formed through the conscious, voluntary association of free individuals. Communitarians, on the other hand, see the community as prior to individual identity; that is, the individual is embedded in and shaped by communal identity and obligation. A vital part of the communitarian critique of liberal individualism is that the individualistic bias in evaluating the good ignores the possibility of collective goods that cannot be individually distributed. The volumes edited by Shlomo Avineri and Avner de-Shalit, C. F. Delaney, and Stephen Mulhall and Adam Swift offer good overviews of the viewpoints and arguments on both sides of the liberal-communitarian debate. Daniel Bell and Will Kymlicka, though leaning in opposite directions on the issue, both offer quite even-handed and thorough considerations of this debate.

- Avineri, Shlomo, and Avner de-Shalit, eds. *Communitarianism and Individualism*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1992.
- Bell, Daniel. *Communitarianism and its Critics*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1993.
- Delaney, C. F., ed. *The Liberalism-Communitarianism Debate: Liberty and Community Values*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1994.
- Kymlicka, Will. *Liberalism, Community and Culture*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1989.
- MacIntyre, Alasdair. *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988.
- Mulhall, Stephen, and Adam Swift, eds. *Liberals and Communitarians*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1992.
- Sandel, Michael. *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982.

Liberal Critiques

Despite the typical close association between liberalism and individualism, several critiques of individualism have come from advocates of liberal agendas. These liberals argue that individualism is either conceptually (Crittenden) or morally (Raz) inadequate to the tasks required by liberalism.

- Crittenden, Jack. *Beyond Individualism: Reconstituting the Liberal Self*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1992.
- Raz, Joseph. *The Morality of Freedom*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1986.

Feminist Critiques

Many of these critiques of individualism overlap with communitarian thought but identify themselves foremost as feminist. Feminist critiques of individualism are two-fold. Cultural emphasis on individualism, say feminists, ignores the relational commitments important to women—sisterhood, family, and community. Furthermore, individualism, as advocated by liberal political theory with an emphasis on political and economic rights, both masks and reinforces patriarchal structures that work against women's interests. According to Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, "the central problem in the feminist critique of individualism lies in the difficulty of reimagining the collectivity—society as a whole—in such a way as to take account of women's legitimate needs."⁵

- Addelson, Kathryn Pyne. *Moral Passages: Toward a Collectivist Moral Theory*. New York: Routledge, 1994.
- Fox-Genovese, Elizabeth. *Feminism Without Illusions: A Critique of Individualism*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1991.
- Friedman, Marilyn. *What are Friends For?: Feminist Perspectives on Personal Relationships and Moral Theory*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993.
- Weiss, Penny A., and Marilyn Friedman. *Feminism and Community*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995.

Religious Critiques

Like communitarian critiques, religious critiques of individualism favor understandings of the self as inextricably embedded in and sustained by community—more specifically, though, a religious community. As illustrated by both Jacques Maritain and Alistair McFadyen, inclusion

⁵ Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Feminism Without Illusions: A Critique of Individualism* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1991) 243.

of the divine as a point of reference illuminates a middle ground between the extremes of both individualist and communalist answers to questions of the proper relationship between the individual person and society. Theologians Stanley Hauerwas and Peter Schmiechen each call for Protestant theological reforms that avoid capitulation to the pervasive individualism of American culture and instead keep the story of Christ central in order that the church be a true community. In *Unconventional Partners*, Robert Booth Fowler argues that contemporary American religion, by providing a needed sense of community, functions as an escape from the excesses of liberal individualism, but at the same time helps to sustain the liberal order “by being a relief-giving and yet nonthreatening alternative” to liberalism.⁶

- Fowler, Robert Booth. *Unconventional Partners: Religion and Liberal Culture in the United States*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989.
- Hauerwas, Stanley. *A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981.
- Maritain, Jacques. *The Person and the Common Good*. Trans. by John J. Fitzgerald. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1966.
- McFadyen, Alistair I. *The Call to Personhood: A Christian Theory of the Individual in Social Relationships*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990.
- Schmiechen, Peter. *Christ the Reconciler: A Theology for Opposites, Differences, and Enemies*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996.

Individualism, Pluralism, and Human Rights

Questions concerning the relationship between the individual and society have been further complicated by the immense diversity of contemporary societies. In highly pluralistic societies, private interests must be balanced not only with the societal good but also with issues of con-

⁶ Robert Booth Fowler, *Unconventional Partners: Religion and Liberal Culture in the United States* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989) 4.

cern to subcultural and ethnic collectivities. Increasing diversity has created important questions to be addressed in the field of human rights. As little as twenty years ago, human rights almost uniformly meant individual rights (see Cranston). Some contemporary human rights theorists have begun to focus instead on collective or group rights (see, for example, Kymlicka). The questions raised by pluralism for human rights are currently under intense debate. The following works show the directions of recent thought and the contours of the conversation on pluralism, diversity, rights, and citizenship.

- Baumeister, Andrea T. *Liberalism and the "Politics of Difference."* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000.
- Bellamy, Richard. *Liberalism and Pluralism: Toward a Politics of Compromise.* New York: Routledge, 1999.
- Brett, Annabel. *Liberty, Right and Nature: Individual Rights in Later Scholastic Thought.* New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997.
- Cranston, Maurice. *What are Human Rights?* London: The Bodley Head, 1973.
- Edge, Peter W., and Graham Harvey, eds. *Law and Religion in Contemporary Society: Communities, Individualism, and the State.* Burlington: Ashgate, 2000.
- Franck, Thomas M. *The Empowered Self: Law and Society in the Age of Individualism.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.
- Ignatieff, Michael. *Human Rights as Politics and Idolatry.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001.
- Ingram, Attracta. *A Political Theory of Rights.* Oxford: Clarendon, 1994.
- Kymlicka, Will. *Multicultural Citizenship: A Liberal Theory of Minority Rights.* Oxford: Clarendon, 1995.
- Kymlicka, Will, and Wayne Norman, eds. *Citizenship in Diverse Societies.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.
- Nino, Carlos Santiago. *The Ethics of Human Rights.* Oxford: Clarendon, 1991.
- Rosenblum, Nancy L., ed. *Obligations of Citizenship and Demands of Faith: Religious Accommodation in Pluralist Democracies.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000.
- Young, Iris Marion. *Inclusion and Democracy.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.