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THE MEANINGS OF "INDIVIDUALISM"

BY STEVEN LUKES

We shall begin with the fact that the same word, or the same concept in most cases, means very different things when used by differently situated persons.¹

"The term 'individualism,'" wrote Max Weber, "embraces the utmost heterogeneity of meanings," adding that "a thorough, historically-oriented conceptual analysis would at the present time be of the highest value to scholarship."² His words remain true. "Individualism" is still used in a great many ways, in many different contexts and with an exceptional lack of precision. Moreover, it has played a major role in the history of ideas, and of ideologies, in modern Europe and America. The present study seeks to contribute to the analysis Weber desired. But clearly, what is still needed is to carry the analytical task further: to isolate the various distinct unit-ideas (and intellectual traditions) which the word has conflated—unit-ideas whose logical and conceptual relations to one another are by no means clear.³

Like "socialism" and "communism," "individualism" is a nineteenth-century expression. In seeking to identify its various distinct traditions of use, I shall concentrate on its nineteenth-century history, for this is what chiefly determined its twentieth-century meanings. My main purpose is to indicate both the variety and the directions of the main paths traced during the term's rich semantic history. The interest of such an account is, however, neither merely semantic nor merely historical. The meanings of words generally incapsulate ideas, even theories. Accordingly, where semantic divergences systematically tend to follow social and cultural (in this case national) lines, to explain those divergences becomes a challenging problem in the sociology of knowledge.

(i) *France*. The first uses of the term, in its French form "*individualisme*," grew out of the general European reaction to the French Revolution and to its alleged source, the thought of the Enlightenment.⁴ Conservative thought in the early nineteenth century was virtually unanimous in condemning the appeal to the reason,

¹K. Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia* (London, 1960), 245. In what follows I am particularly indebted to the studies by Koebner, Swart, and Arieli, cited *infra*.

²M. Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, (1904-5), tr. T. Parsons (London, 1930), 222 (amended translation: S. L.).

³Cf. my article on "Individualism" in *Dictionary of the History of Ideas* (New York, 1972)

⁴H. Peyre, "The Influence of Eighteenth Century Ideas on the French Revolution," *JHI*, X (1949), 63-87; W. F. Church (ed.), *The Influence of the Enlightenment on the French Revolution* (Boston, 1964).

interests, and rights of the individual; as Burke had said: "Individuals pass like shadows; but the commonwealth is fixed and stable."⁵ The Revolution was proof that ideas exalting the individual imperilled the stability of the commonwealth, dissolving it into "an unsocial, uncivil, unconnected chaos of elementary principles."⁶ Conservative thinkers, above all in France and Germany, shared Burke's scorn for the individual's "private stock of reason" and his fear lest "the commonwealth itself would, in a few generations, crumble away, be disconnected into the dust and powder of individuality, and at length dispersed to all the winds of heaven," as well as his certainty that "Society requires" that "the inclinations of men should frequently be thwarted, their will controlled, and their passions brought into subjection."⁷

These sentiments were found at their most extreme among the theocratic Catholic reactionaries in France. According to Joseph de Maistre, the social order had been "shattered to its foundations because there was too much liberty in Europe and not enough Religion"; everywhere authority was weakening and there was a frightening growth of "individual opinion [*l'esprit particulier*]."⁸ The individual's reason was "of its nature the mortal enemy of all association": its exercise spelt spiritual and civil anarchy. Infallibility was an essential condition of the maintenance of society, and indeed government was "a true religion," with "its dogmas, its mysteries, its priests; to submit it to individual discussion is to destroy it."⁹ In the earliest known use of the word, de Maistre spoke in 1820 of "this deep and frightening division of minds, this infinite fragmentation of all doctrines, political protestantism carried to the most absolute individualism."¹⁰

The theocrats agreed in giving to "society" the same exclusive emphasis that they accused the eighteenth-century *philosophes* of giving to "the individual." Society for de Maistre was God-given and natural, and he wished the individual's mind to lose itself in that of the nation "as a river which flows into the ocean still exists in the mass of the water, but without name and distinct reality"¹¹; while for

⁵"Speech on the Economic Reform" (1780), *Works* (London, 1906), II, 357.

⁶*Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790) (London, 1910), 94.

⁷*Ibid.*, 84, 93, 57. Cf. D. Bagge, *Les Idées Politiques en France sous la Restauration* (Paris, 1952); K. Mannheim, "Conservative Thought," *Essays in Sociology and Social Psychology* (London, 1953).

⁸J. de Maistre, *Du Pape* (1821), bk. III, ch. II, *Oeuvres Complètes* (Lyon, 1884-7), II, 342, 346.

⁹J. de Maistre, *Etude sur la Souveraineté* (1884), bk. I, ch. X, *Oeuvres Complètes*, I, 375-6.

¹⁰"Extrait d'une Conversation," *Oeuvres Complètes*, XIV, 286.

¹¹*Etude sur la Souveraineté* (1884) bk. I, ch. X, *Oeuvres Complètes*, I, 326.

de Bonald "man only exists for society and society only educates him for itself."¹² The ideas of the *philosophes* were, they thought, not merely false; they were wicked and dangerous. According to Lamennais, they proclaimed the individual as sovereign over himself in the most absolute sense:

His reason—that is his law, his truth, his justice. To seek to impose on him an obligation he has not previously imposed on himself by his own thought and will is to violate the most sacred of his rights Hence, no legislation, no power is possible, and the same doctrine which produces anarchy in men's minds further produces an irremediable political anarchy, and overturns the very bases of human society.

Were such principles to prevail, "what could one foresee but troubles, disorders, calamities without end, and universal dissolution?" Man, Lamennais argued, "lives only in society" and "institutions, laws, governments draw all their strength from a certain concourse of thoughts and wills." "What," he asked, "is power without obedience? What is law without duty?" and he answered:

Individualism which destroys the very idea of obedience and of duty, thereby destroying both power and law; and what then remains but a terrifying confusion of interests, passions, and diverse opinions?¹³

It was the disciple of Claude Henri de Saint-Simon,¹⁴ who were the first to use "*individualisme*" systematically, in the mid-1820's.¹⁵ Saint-Simonism shared the ideas of the counter-revolutionary reactionaries—their critique of the Enlightenment's glorification of the individual, their horror of social atomization and anarchy, as well as their desire for an organic, stable, hierarchically organized, harmonious social order. But it applied these ideas in a historically progressive direction: that social order was not to be the ecclesiastical and feudal order of the past, but the industrial order of the future. Indeed, the proselytizing Saint-Simonians systematized their master's ideas into an activist and extremely influential secular religion, an ideological force serving as a kind of Protestant ethic for the expanding capitalism of the Catholic countries in nineteenth-century Europe.

History for the Saint-Simonians was a cycle of "critical" and "organic" periods. The former were "filled with disorder; they destroy former social relations, and everywhere tend towards egoism"; the latter were unified, organized, and stable (the previous instances in

¹²L. de Bonald, *Théorie du Pouvoir* (1796), Preface, *Oeuvres* (Paris, 1854), I, 103.

¹³F. de Lamennais, *Des Progrès de la Révolution et de la Guerre contre l'Eglise* (1829), ch. I, *Oeuvres Complètes* (Paris, 1836–7), IX, 17–18.

¹⁴Cf. my chapter on Saint-Simon in T. Raison (ed.), *Founding Fathers of Social Science* (London, 1969).

¹⁵Cf. *Le Producteur*, Vols. I–IV, *passim*.

Europe being the ancient polytheistic preclassical society and the Christian Middle Ages). The modern critical period, originating with the Reformation was, the Saint-Simonians believed, the penultimate stage of human progress, heralding a future organic era of “universal association” in which “the organization of the future will be final because only then will society be formed directly for progress.” They used “*individualisme*” to refer to the pernicious and “negative” ideas underlying the evils of the modern critical epoch, whose “disorder, atheism, individualism, and egoism” they contrasted with the prospect of “order, religion, association, and devotion.” The “philosophers of the eighteenth century”—men such as Helvetius, with his doctrine of “enlightened self-interest,” Locke, Reid, Condillac, Kant, and the “atheist d’Holbach, the deist Voltaire, and Rousseau”—all these “defenders of individualism” refused to “go back to a source higher than individual conscience.” They “considered the individual as the center” and “preached egoism,” providing an ideological justification for the prevailing anarchy, especially in the economic and political spheres. The “doctrine of individualism” with its two “sad deities . . . two creatures of reason—conscience and public opinion” led to “one political result: opposition to any attempt at organization from a center of direction for the moral interests of mankind, to hatred of power.”¹⁶

Partly perhaps because of the extraordinarily pervasive influence of Saint-Simonian ideas, “*individualisme*” came to be very widely used in the nineteenth century. In France, it usually carried, and indeed still carries, a pejorative connotation, a strong suggestion that to concentrate on the individual is to harm the superior interests of society. The latest edition of the Dictionary of the *Académie Française*¹⁷ defines it simply as “subordination of the general interest to the individual’s interest,” and one recent writer, noting its naturally pejorative sense, has remarked on its “tinge of ‘ubris,’ of ‘démésuré’” which “does not exist in English,”¹⁸ while another observes that in France “until the present day the term individualism has retained much of its former, unfavorable connotations.”¹⁹ It is true that there was a group of French revolutionary republican *Carbonari* in the 1820’s who proudly called themselves the “Société d’Individualistes,” and that various individual thinkers adopted the label, among them Proudhon—though

¹⁶*The Doctrine of Saint-Simon: An Exposition, First Year 1828-9* (1830) tr. G. Iggers (Boston, 1958), 28, 70, 247, 178-80, 182.

¹⁷Paris, 1932-5.

¹⁸L. Moulin, “On the Evolution of the Meaning of the Word ‘Individualism,’” *International Social Science Bulletin*, VII (1955), 185.

¹⁹K. W. Swart, “‘Individualism’ in the Mid-Nineteenth Century (1826-60),” *JHI*, XXIII (1962), 84.

even Proudhon saw society as "a *sui generis* being" and argued that "outside the group there are only abstractions and phantoms."²⁰ From the mid-nineteenth century, liberal Protestants and eventually a few *laissez-faire* liberals started to call themselves individualists and one wrote a comprehensive history of "economic and social individualism," incorporating a variety of French thinkers²¹—yet the tone was always one of defensive paradox. Few have welcomed the epithet, and many, from Balzac onwards,²² stressed the opposition between "*individualisme*," implying anarchy and social atomization, and "*individualité*," implying personal independence and self-realization. For the Swiss theologian Alexandre Vinet, these were "two sworn enemies; the first an obstacle and negation of any society; the latter a principle to which society owes all its savor, life and reality." The "progress of individualism" meant "the relaxation of social unity because of the increasingly pronounced predominance of egoism," while the "gradual extinction of individuality" meant "the increasingly strong inclination for minds . . . to surrender themselves to what is known as public opinion or the spirit of the age."²³ In general, "*individualisme*" in French thought points to the sources of social dissolution, though there have been wide divergences concerning the nature of those sources and of the social order they are held to threaten, as well as in the historical frameworks within which they are conceptualized.

For some, individualism resides in dangerous ideas, for others it is social or economic anarchy, a lack of the requisite institutions and norms, for yet others it is the prevalence of self-interested attitudes among individuals. For men of the right, from de Maistre to Charles Maurras, it is all that undermines a traditional, hierarchical social order. Thus Louis Veillot, the militant Catholic propagandist, wrote in 1843 that "France has need of religion" which would bring "harmony, union, patriotism, confidence, morality . . .":

The evil which plagues France is not unknown; everyone agrees in giving it the same name: *individualism*.

It is not difficult to see that a country where individualism reigns is no longer in the normal conditions of society, since society is the union of minds and interests, and individualism is division carried to the infinite degree.

²⁰P. J. Proudhon, *Lettres sur la Philosophie du Progrès* (1853), Letter I, pts V and IV, *Oeuvres Complètes*, new ed. (Paris, 1868–76), XX, 39–40, 36.

²¹A. Schatz, *L'Individualisme Economique et Sociale* (Paris, 1907). Cf. H.-L. Follin, "Quelle est la Véritable Définition de L'Individualisme," *Journal des Economistes* (April 15, 1899).

²²Swart, *art cit.*, 84.

²³Quoted *ibid.*, 84–5. Cf. Arieli, *Individualism and Nationalism in American Ideology* (Cambridge, Mass., 1964), ch. X.

All for each, each for all, that is society; each for himself, and thus each against all, that is individualism.²⁴

Similarly, during the Dreyfus Affair, Ferdinand Brunetière, the strongly *anti-Dreyfusard* literary historian, defended the army and the social order, which he saw as threatened by “individualism” and “anarchy,” and poured scorn on those intellectuals who had presumed to doubt the justice of Dreyfus’s trial. Individualism, he wrote, was

the great sickness of the present time. . . . Each of us has confidence only in himself, sets himself up as the sovereign judge of everything . . . when intellectualism and individualism reach this degree of self-infatuation, one must expect them to be or become nothing other than *anarchy*. . . .²⁵

Among socialists, individualism has typically been contrasted with an ideal, cooperative social order, variously described as “association,” “harmony,” “socialism,” and “communism”; the term here refers to the economic doctrine of *laissez-faire* and to the anarchy, social atomization, and exploitation produced by industrial capitalism. Pierre Leroux, aiming at a new humanitarian and libertarian socialism, used it to mean the principle, proclaimed by political economy, of “everyone for himself, and . . . all for riches, nothing for the poor,” which atomized society and made men into “rapacious wolves”²⁶; “society,” he maintained, “is entering a new era in which the general tendency of the laws will no longer have individualism as its end, but association.”²⁷ For Constantin Pecqueur, “the remedy lies in association precisely because the abuse springs from individualism”²⁸ and the utopian Etienne Cabet wrote that

Two great systems have divided and polarized Humanity ever since the beginning of the world: that of Individualism (or egoism, or personal interest), and that of Communism (or association, or the general interest, or the public interest).²⁹

Likewise, the conspiratorial revolutionary Auguste Blanqui asserted that “Communism is the protector of the individual, individualism his extermination.”³⁰

Other socialists used the term in more complex ways. Louis Blanc saw individualism as a major cultural principle, encompassing Protes-

²⁴L. Veuillot, “Lettre à M. Villemain” (August, 1843), *Mélanges Religieux, Historiques, Politiques et Littéraires* (1842–56) (Paris, 1856–60), 1ère série, I, 132–3.

²⁵F. Brunetière, “Après le Procès,” *Revue des Deux Mondes*, LXVII (15 March 1898), 445. Cf. my article: “Durkheim’s ‘Individualism and the Intellectuals,’” *Political Studies*, XVII (1969), 14–19. ²⁶(1832 and 1833), quoted in Arieli, *op. cit.*, 233.

²⁷(1841), quoted in J. Dubois, *Le Vocabulaire Politique et Sociale en France de 1869 à 1872* (Paris, 1962), 220.

²⁸(1840) quoted *ibid.*, 322.

²⁹(1845) quoted *ibid.*

³⁰(1869) quoted *ibid.*, 267.

tantism, the Bourgeoisie, and the Enlightenment, bringing a historically necessary, though false and incomplete, freedom. Its progressive aspect was a new self-assertion, a new independence of traditional structures and rejection of Authority in the religious, economic, and intellectual spheres; but it needed to be transcended and completed, pointing towards a future age of socialist Fraternity. In Blanc's own words:

Three great principles divide the world and history: Authority, Individualism, and Fraternity.

The principle of individualism is that which, taking man out of society, makes him sole judge of what surrounds him and of himself, gives him a heightened sense of his rights without showing him his duties, abandons him to his own powers, and, for the whole of government, proclaims *laissez-faire*.

Individualism, inaugurated by Luther, has developed with an irresistible force, and, dissociated from the religious factor . . . it governs the present; it is the spiritual principle of things.

. . . individualism is important in having achieved a vast progress. To provide breathing-space and scope to human thought repressed for so long, to intoxicate it with pride and audacity; to submit to the judgment of every mind the totality of traditions, centuries, their achievements, their beliefs; to place man in an isolation full of anxieties, full of perils, but sometimes also full of majesty, and to enable him to resolve personally, in the midst of an immense struggle, in the uproar of a universal debate, the problem of his happiness and his destiny . . .—this is by no means an achievement without grandeur, and it is the achievement of individualism. One must therefore speak of it with respect and as a necessary transition.³¹

Again, the disciples of Charles Fourier denied any basic opposition between individualism and socialism,³² while at the end of the century, Jean Jaurès argued that "socialism is the logical completion of individualism,"³³ a formula echoed by Emile Durkheim, who saw a kind of centralized guild socialism as a means of "completing, extending, and organizing individualism."³⁴ For all these socialist thinkers, individualism signified the autonomy, freedom, and sacredness of the individual—values which had hitherto taken a negative, oppressive, and anarchic form but could henceforth only be preserved within a cooperative and rationally-organized social order.

³¹From his *Histoire de la Révolution Française* (1846), quoted in R. Koebner, "Zur Begriffsbildung der Kulturgeschichte: II: Zur Geschichte des Begriffs 'Individualismus' (Jacob Burckhardt, Wilhelm von Humboldt und die französische Soziologie)," *Historische Zeitschrift*, CXLIX (1934), 269. ³²Swart, *art. cit.*, 85.

³³J. Jaurès, "Socialisme et Liberté," *Revue de Paris*, XXIII (Dec. 1898), 499.

³⁴E. Durkheim, "Individualism and the Intellectuals" (1898), tr. S. and J. Lukes, *Political Studies*, XVII (1969), 29. Cf. Lukes, "Durkheim's 'Individualism and the Intellectuals,'" *loc. cit.*

French liberals also spoke of individualism, but they characteristically saw it as a threat to a pluralist social order, with minimum state intervention and maximum political liberty. Benjamin Constant, perhaps the most eloquent exponent of classical liberalism, was clearly groping for the word when he observed that “when all are isolated by egoism, there is nothing but dust, and at the advent of a storm, nothing but mire.”³⁵ It was, however, that aristocratic observer of early nineteenth-century America, Alexis de Tocqueville, who developed its most distinctive and influential liberal meaning in France. For Tocqueville, individualism was the natural product of democracy (“Individualism is of democratic origin and threatens to develop insofar as conditions are equalized”), involving the apathetic withdrawal of individuals from public life into a private sphere and their isolation from one another, with a consequent weakening of social bonds. Such a development, Tocqueville thought, offered dangerous scope for the unchecked growth of the political power of the state.

More specifically, “individualism”—a “recent expression to which a new idea has given birth”—was “a deliberate and peaceful sentiment which disposes each citizen to isolate himself from the mass of his fellows and to draw apart with his family and friends,” abandoning “the wider society to itself.” At first, it “saps only the virtues of public life; but, in the long run, it attacks and destroys all others and is eventually absorbed into pure egoism.” In contrast to aristocratic society, in which men were “linked closely to something beyond them and are often disposed to forget themselves” and which “formed of all the citizens a long chain reaching from the peasant to the king,” democracy “breaks the chain and sets each link apart,” and “the bond of human affections extends and relaxes.” With increasing social mobility, the continuity of the generations is destroyed; as classes become fused, “their members become indifferent and as if strangers to one another”; and as individuals become increasingly self-sufficient, “they become accustomed to considering themselves always in isolation, they freely imagine that their destiny is entirely in their own hands.” Democracy, Tocqueville concluded, “not only makes each man forget his forefathers, but it conceals from him his descendants and separates him from his contemporaries; it ceaselessly throws him back on himself alone and threatens finally to confine him entirely in the solitude of his own heart.”³⁶

Individualism for Tocqueville thus sprang from the lack of intermediary groups to provide a framework for the individual and protec-

³⁵Quoted in H. Marion, “Individualisme,” *La Grande Encyclopédie* (Paris, n.d.), Vol. XX.

³⁶A. de Tocqueville, *De la Démocratie en Amérique* (1835) bk. II, pt. II, ch. II, *Oeuvres Complètes*, ed. J. P. Mayer (Paris, 1951-), I, II, 104-6.

tion against the State. (As for the Americans, they only avoided its destructive consequences because of their free institutions and active citizenship: they conquered individualism with liberty.) It was, moreover, a peculiarly modern evil: "Our fathers," Tocqueville wrote, "did not have the word 'individualism,' which we have coined for our own use, because in their time there was indeed no individual who did not belong to a group and who could be considered as absolutely alone."³⁷

No less diverse than these conceptions of the sources and the dangers of individualism have been the historical frameworks within which French thinkers have placed it. It is variously traced to the Reformation, the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, the Revolution, to the decline of the aristocracy or the Church or traditional religion, to the Industrial Revolution, to the growth of capitalism or democracy, but, as we have seen, there is wide agreement in seeing it as an evil and a threat to social cohesion. Perhaps the role of "*individualisme*" in French thought is partly due to the very success of "individualist" legislation at the time of the Revolution,³⁸ the elimination of intermediary groups and bodies in the society, and the ensuing political and administrative centralization of the country. The basis for this had been laid, as Tocqueville observed, in the municipal and fiscal policies of the French Kings in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, which had systematically prevented the growth of spontaneous, organized activities and informal groupings.³⁹ One can even reasonably postulate that the lack of such activities and groupings is a basic and distinctive French cultural trait.⁴⁰

However that may be, the mainstream of French thought, above all in the nineteenth century, has expressed by "*individualisme*" what Durkheim identified by the twin concepts of "anomie" and "egoism"⁴¹—the social, moral, and political isolation of individuals, their dissociation from social purposes and social regulation, the breakdown of social solidarity. General de Gaulle was using it in its paradigm French sense when, in his New Year's broadcast to the nation on 31 December 1968, recalling the *Evènements* of May, he observed:

At the same time, it is necessary that we surmount the moral malaise which—above all among us by reason of our individualism—is inherent in modern mechanical and materialist civilization. Otherwise, the fanatics of destruction, the doctrinaires of negation, the specialists in demagoguery, will once more have a good opportunity to exploit bitterness in order to provoke agita-

³⁷*L' Ancien Régime et la Révolution* (1856), bk. II, ch. IX, *ibid.*, II, 1, p. 158.

³⁸R. R. Palmer, "Man and Citizen: Applications of Individualism in the French Revolution," *Essays in Political Theory* (Ithaca, N. Y., 1948).

³⁹*L' Ancien Régime et la Révolution*, bk. II, chs. 3, 6, 9, 12.

⁴⁰M. Crozier, *The Bureaucratic Phenomenon* (London, 1964), esp. ch. 8.

⁴¹*Suicide* (1897), trans. J. A. Spaulding and G. Simpson (Glencoe, Ill., 1951).

tion, while their sterility, which they have the derisory insolence to call revolution, can lead to nothing else than the dissolution of everything into nothingness, or else to the loss of everything under the grinding oppression of totalitarianism.⁴²

Despite wide divergences in views about the causes of social dissolution and the nature of an acceptable or desirable social order, the underlying perspective conveyed by the term is unmistakable.

(ii) *Germany*. This characteristically French meaning was certainly subject to cultural diffusion beyond the borders of France. It was, for instance, adopted by Friedrich List, precursor of the German Historical School of economics and advocate of economic nationalism, who used it in the sense developed by the Saint-Simonians and the socialists. List's major work, *The National System of Political Economy*,⁴³ written in Paris, stressed the organic nature of society and the economy, and the historical and national framework of economic activity; and it attacked the classical economists for abstracting economic life from its social context. Thus List accused classical economics, which supported free trade and *laissez-faire*, of "*Kosmopolitismus*," "*Materialismus*," "*Partikularismus*," and, above all, of "*Individualismus*"—sacrificing the welfare of the national community to the individual acquisition of wealth.

There is, however, quite distinct from this French use of the term, another use whose characteristic reference is German. This is the Romantic idea of "individuality" (*Individualität*), the notion of individual uniqueness, originality, self-realization—what the Romantics called "*Eigentümlichkeit*"—in contrast to the rational, universal, and uniform standards of the Enlightenment, which they saw as "quantitative," "abstract," and therefore sterile. The Romantics themselves did not use the term "*Individualismus*," but it came to be used in this sense from the 1840's when a German liberal, Karl Brüggenmann, contrasted with its negative French meaning, as found in List, that of a desirable and characteristically German "infinite" and "whole-souled" individualism, signifying "the infinite self-confidence of the individual aiming to be personally free in morals and in truth."⁴⁴

Thereafter, the term soon became, in this, chiefly German, use, virtually synonymous with the idea of individuality, which had originated in the writings of Wilhelm von Humboldt, Novalis, Friedrich Schlegel, and Friedrich Schleiermacher. Thus Georg Simmel wrote of the "new individualism" which he opposed to "eighteenth-century individualism" with its "notion of atomized and basically undif-

⁴²*Le Monde*, 2 Jan. 1969.

⁴³(1841) tr. (London, 1928).

⁴⁴K. H. Brüggenmann, *Dr. Lists nationales System der politischen Ökonomie* (Berlin, 1842) quoted in Koebner, *art. cit.*, 282.

ferentiated individuals"; the new, German, individualism was "the individualism of difference, with the deepening of individuality to the point of the individual's incomparability, to which he is 'called' both in his nature and in his achievement." The individual became "this specific, irreplaceable, given individual" and was "called or destined to realize his own incomparable image." The "new individualism," Simmel wrote, "might be called qualitative, in contrast with the quantitative individualism of the eighteenth century. Or it might be labeled the individualism of uniqueness (*Einzigkeit*) as against that of singleness (*Einzelheit*). At any rate, Romanticism was perhaps the broadest channel through which it reached the consciousness of the nineteenth century. Goethe had created its artistic, and Schleiermacher its metaphysical basis: Romanticism supplied its sentimental experiential foundation."⁴⁵

The German idea of individuality has had a remarkable history. Having begun as a cult of individual genius and originality, especially as applied to the artist, stressing the conflict between individual and society and the supreme value of subjectivity, solitude, and introspection, it developed along various lines. In one direction, it led to an uninhibited quest for eccentricity and to the purest egoism and social nihilism. This development found perhaps its most extreme expression in the thought of Max Stirner, whose "individualism" amounted to an amoral and anti-intellectualistic vision of freely cooperating and self-assertive egoists. For Stirner,

I, the egoist, have not at heart the welfare of this "human society." I sacrifice nothing to it. I only utilize it: but to be able to utilize it completely I must transform it rather into my property and my creature—i.e., I must annihilate it and form in its place the Union of Egoists.⁴⁶

The main development, however, of the idea of individuality was in the direction of a characteristically German *Weltanschauung*, or cosmology, a total view of the (natural and social) world, fundamentally in conflict with the essentially humanist and rationalist thought typical of the rest of Western civilization. In a justly famous essay, Ernst Troeltsch contrasted the two systems of thought, the "west-European" and the German: on the one side, "an eternal, rational, and

⁴⁵G. Simmel, "Individual and Society in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Views of Life: an Example of Philosophical Sociology" (1917) tr. in *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*, tr. and ed. K. H. Wolff (Glencoe, Ill., 1950), 78-83. Cf. L. Furst, *Romanticism in Perspective* (London, 1969), pt. I: "Individualism."

⁴⁶M. Stirner, *The Ego and its Own: The Case of the Individual against Authority* (1844) tr. S. T. Byington (London and New York, 1907), quoted in G. Woodcock, *Anarchism* (London, 1963), 93. Cf. V. Basch, *L'Individualisme Anarchiste: Max Stirner* (Paris, 1904).

divinely ordained system of Order, embracing both morality and law”; on the other, “individual, living, and perpetually new incarnations of an historically creative Mind.” Thus,

Those who believe in an eternal and divine Law of Nature, the Equality of man, and a sense of Unity pervading mankind, and who find the essence of Humanity in these things, cannot but regard the German doctrine as a curious mixture of mysticism and brutality. Those who take an opposite view—who see in history an ever-moving stream, which throws up unique individualities as it moves, and is always shaping individual structures on the basis of a law which is always new—are bound to consider the west-European world of ideas as a world of cold rationalism and equalitarian atomism, a world of superficiality and Pharisaism.⁴⁷

Friedrich Meinecke summed up the revolution in thought which he saw Romanticism as bringing to Western civilization in the following way:

Out of this deepening individualism of uniqueness, there henceforth arose everywhere in Germany, in various different forms, a new and more living image of the State, and also a new picture of the world. The whole world now appeared to be filled with individuality, each individuality, whether personal or supra-personal, governed by its own characteristic principle of life, and both Nature and History constituting what Friedrich Schlegel called an “abyss of individuality”. . . . Individuality everywhere, the identity of mind and nature, and through this identity an invisible but strong bond unifying the otherwise boundless diversity and abundance of individual phenomena—these were the new and powerful ideas which now burst forth in Germany in so many different ways.⁴⁸

In particular, the personal “individualism” of the early Romantics very soon became transformed into an organic and nationalistic theory of community, each unique and self-sufficient, according to which, as one recent scholar has said, the individual was “fated to merge with and become rooted in nature and the Volk” and would thus be “able to find his self-expression and his individuality.”⁴⁹ Moreover, individuality was ascribed no longer merely to persons, but to supra-personal forces, especially the nation or the state. Meinecke paints a vivid picture of this transformation:

This new sense for what was individual resembled a fire which was capable of consuming, not all at once, but gradually, every sphere of life. At first, it seized

⁴⁷E. Troeltsch, “The Ideas of Natural Law and Humanity in World Politics” (1922), O. Gierke, *Natural Law and the Theory of Society, 1500-1800*, tr. E. Barker (Boston, 1957), 204.

⁴⁸F. Meinecke, *Die Idee der Staatsräson* (1924), *Werke* (Munich, 1957-62), I, 425.

⁴⁹G. L. Mosse, *The Crisis of German Ideology* (London, 1966), 15. Cf. Mannheim’s attempt to explain the conservative direction taken by Romanticism in Mannheim, “Conservative Thought,” *loc. cit.*

only the flimsiest and most inflammable materials—the subjective life of the individual, the world of art and poetry; but then it went on to consume heavier substances, above all the state.⁵⁰

The same progression from the individuality of the person to that of the nation or state occurred in countless German thinkers of the early nineteenth century—notably, in Fichte, Schelling, Schleiermacher, and even, in a sense, Hegel. The state and society were no longer regarded as rational constructions, the result of contractual arrangements between individuals in the manner of the Enlightenment; they were “super-personal creative forces, which build from time to time out of the material of particular individuals, a spiritual Whole, and on the basis of that Whole proceed from time to time to create the particular political and social institutions which embody and incarnate its significance.”⁵¹ As Simmel wrote, the “total organism” of society “shifts, so to speak into a location high above [individuals]” and, accordingly, “this individualism, which restricts freedom to a purely inward sense of the term, easily acquires an antiliberal tendency”; it is “the complete antithesis of eighteenth-century individualism which . . . could not even conceive the idea of a collective as an organism that unifies heterogeneous elements.”⁵²

While the characteristically French sense of “individualism” is negative, signifying individual isolation and social dissolution, the characteristically German sense is thus positive, signifying individual self-fulfillment and (except among the earliest Romantics) the organic unity of individual and society. The distinction was drawn with particular force by Thomas Mann, in a passage written at the close of the First World War, which argues that German life reconciles the individual and society, freedom and obligation:

It remains the uniqueness of German individualism that it is entirely compatible with ethical socialism, which is called “state socialism” but which is quite distinct from the philosophy of the rights of man and Marxism. For it is only the individualism of the Enlightenment, the liberal individualism of the West, which is incompatible with the social principle.

The German variety, Mann thought, “includes the freedom of the individual.” To “reject the individualistic Enlightenment does not amount to a demand for the submergence of the individual in society and the state”: the German theory of organic community protected freedom, whereas ideas deriving from the Enlightenment (among which Mann included Marxism) led to Jacobinism, state absolutism, political tyranny. “Organism” was a word that is “true to life,” for “an organism is more than the sum of its parts, and that more is its spirit,

⁵⁰*Op. cit.* 426.

⁵¹Troeltsch, *loc. cit.*, 210–11.

⁵²*Loc. cit.*, 82.

its life.”⁵³ Here one can see that individualism does not, as with the French, endanger social solidarity; it is its supreme realization.

(iii) *Burckhardt*. A striking and influential synthesis of French and German meanings of “individualism” is to be found (appropriately enough) in the work of the Swiss historian, Jacob Burckhardt. A central theme of Burckhardt’s *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*⁵⁴ was the growth of “individualism.” Summing up the “principal features in the Italian character of that time,” Burckhardt maintained that its “fundamental vice . . . was at the same time a condition of its greatness, namely, excessive individualism.”⁵⁵ The second part of the work is entitled “The Development of the Individual” and, in general, Burckhardt treated the Italians of the Renaissance as a people “who have emerged from the half-conscious life of the race and become themselves individuals.”⁵⁶

Schematically, one can say that Burckhardt’s use of “individualism” combines the notion of the aggressive self-assertion of individuals freed from an externally given framework of authority (as found in Louis Blanc) and that of the individual’s withdrawal from society into a private existence (as in Tocqueville) with the early Romantic idea, most clearly expressed by Humboldt, of the full and harmonious development of the individual personality, seen as representing humanity and pointing towards its highest cultural development. The Italian of the Renaissance was for Burckhardt “the firstborn among the sons of modern Europe”⁵⁷ in virtue of the autonomy of his morality, his cultivation of privacy, and the individuality of his character.

“The individual,” Burckhardt wrote,

first inwardly casts off the authority of a State which, as a fact, is in most cases tyrannical and illegitimate, and what he thinks and does is now, rightly or wrongly, called treason. The sight of victorious egotism in others drives him to defend his own right by his own arm. . . . In face of all objective facts, of laws and restraints of whatever kind, he retains the feeling of his own sovereignty, and in each single instance forms his decision independently, according as honor or interest, passion or calculation, revenge or renunciation, gain the upper hand in his own mind.⁵⁸

As to privacy, Burckhardt wrote of “the different tendencies and manifestations of private life . . . thriving in the fullest vigour and variety” and cited “Agnolo Pandolfini (d. 1446), whose work on domestic economy is the first complete programme of a developed private life.” “The private man,” he argued, “indifferent to politics, and busied partly with serious pursuits, partly with the interests of a *dilettante*,

⁵³T. Mann, *Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen* (Berlin, 1918), 267.

⁵⁴(1860) tr. S.G.C. Middlemore (London, 1955). Cf. Koebner, *art. cit.*

⁵⁵*Ibid.*, 279.

⁵⁶*Ibid.*, 200.

⁵⁷*Ibid.*, 80.

⁵⁸*Ibid.*, 279.

seems to have been first fully formed in these despotisms of the fourteenth century."⁵⁹ Finally, he identified the "impulse to the highest individual development" and saw Italy at the close of the thirteenth century as beginning to "swarm with individuality; the ban upon human personality was dissolved; and a thousand figures meet us each in his own special shape and dress." Dante, "through the wealth of individuality which he set forth," was "the most national herald of his time"; much of Burckhardt's book treats of "this unfolding of the treasures of human nature in literature and art." An acute and practised eye could trace

the increase in the number of complete men during the fifteenth century. Whether they had before them as a conscious object the harmonious development of their spiritual and material existence, is hard to say, but several of them attained it, so far as is consistent with the imperfection of all that is earthly.⁶⁰

It is worth adding that for Burckhardt this growth of individualism was, as for so many philosophers of history, no accident but a "historical necessity." Transmitted by Italian culture, and infusing the other nations of Europe, it

has constituted since then the higher atmosphere which they breathe. In itself it is neither good nor bad, but necessary; within it has grown up a modern standard of good and evil—a sense of moral responsibility—which is essentially different from that which was familiar to the Middle Ages.⁶¹

(iv) *America*. It was in the United States that "individualism" primarily came to celebrate capitalism and liberal democracy. It became a symbolic catchword of immense ideological significance, expressing all that has at various times been implied in the philosophy of natural rights, the belief in free enterprise, and the American Dream. It expressed, in fact, the operative ideals of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century America (and indeed continues to play a major ideological role), advancing a set of universal claims seen as incompatible with the parallel claims of the socialism and communism of the Old World. It referred, not to the sources of social dissolution or the painful transition to a future harmonious social order, nor to the cultivation of uniqueness or the organic community, but rather to the actual or imminent realization of the final stage of human progress in a spontaneously cohesive society of equal individual rights, limited government, *laissez-faire*, natural justice and equal opportunity, and individual freedom, moral development, and dignity. Naturally it carried widely varying connotations in differing contexts and at different times.

⁵⁹*Ibid.*, 82-3.

⁶⁰*Ibid.*, 81-4.

⁶¹*Ibid.*, 279.

It was imported, in the negative French sense, *via* the writings of various Europeans, among them the socialists, as well as Tocqueville, List, and the Saint-Simonian Michel Chevalier, whose *Lettres sur l'Amérique du Nord* (1836) contrasted the anarchic individualism of the Yankees with the more socially inclined and organizable French. Already in 1839, an article in the *United States Magazine and Democratic Review* identified it positively with national values and ideals seen in evolutionary and universal terms. The course of civilization

is the progress of man from a state of savage individualism to that of an individualism more elevated, moral and refined. . . . The last order of civilization, which is democratic, received its first permanent existence in this country. . . . The peculiar duty of this country has been to exemplify and embody a civilization in which the rights, freedom, and mental and moral growth of individual men should be made the highest end of all social restrictions and laws.⁶²

This abrupt change in the evaluative significance of the term is strikingly illustrated in one of the earliest American discussions of Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* by a Transcendentalist writer in the *Boston Quarterly Review*. The writer, inaccurately but significantly, expounded Tocqueville's concept of individualism as expressing "that strong confidence in self, or reliance upon one's own exertion and resources" and as "the strife of all our citizens for wealth and distinction of *their own*, and their contempt of reflected honors." "Individualism," he continued, "has its immutable laws . . . which . . . when allowed to operate without let or hindrance . . . must in the end assimilate the species, and evolve all the glorious phenomena of original and eternal *order*;—that order which exists in man himself, and alone vivifies and sustains him."⁶³

"Individualism" had, by the end of the Civil War, acquired an important place in the vocabulary of American ideology. Indeed, even those who criticized American society, from New England Transcendentalists to the Single Taxers and the Populists, often did so in the name of individualism. The term acquired differing layers of meaning under the successive influences of New England Puritanism, the Jeffersonian tradition, and natural rights philosophy; Unitarianism, Transcendentalism, and evangelicalism; the need of the North to develop an ideological defence against the challenge of the South; the immensely popular evolutionary and *laissez-faire* ideas of Herbert Spencer and the growth of Social Darwinism; and the permanent and

⁶²"The Course of Civilization," *United States Magazine and Democratic Review*, 6 (1839), 208ff, 211, quoted in Arieli, *op. cit.*, 191–2.

⁶³"Catholicism," *Boston Quarterly Review* (1841), 320ff, quoted in Arieli, *op. cit.*, 199.

continuing impetus of alternative, European-born ideologies. The course of this development has been admirably traced in Yehoshua Arieli's book, *Individualism and Nationalism in American Ideology*,⁶⁴ which rightly treats the American version of "individualism" as a symbol of national identification. As Arieli concludes,

Individualism supplied the nation with a rationalization of its characteristic attitudes, behaviour patterns and aspirations. It endowed the past, the present and the future with the perspective of unity and progress. It explained the peculiar social and political organization of the nation—unity in spite of heterogeneity—and it pointed towards an ideal of social organization in harmony with American experience. Above all, individualism expressed the universalism and idealism most characteristic of the national consciousness. This concept evolved in contradistinction to socialism, the universal and messianic character of which it shared.⁶⁵

It can, indeed, be argued that the lack of a real socialist tradition in America is in part a function of the very pervasiveness of the ideology of individualism.

Certainly, a perusal of the various American uses of the term reveals a quite distinctive range of connotations. For Emerson, contemplating the failure of Brook Farm, individualism, which he endowed with an exalted moral and religious significance, had "never been tried"⁶⁶; it was the route to perfection—a spontaneous social order of self-determined, self-reliant and fully developed individuals. "The union," he wrote, "is only perfect when all the uniters are isolated. . . . Each man, if he attempts to join himself to others, is on all sides cramped and diminished. . . . The Union must be ideal in actual individualism."⁶⁷ Society was tending towards a morally superior voluntary social order, a "free and just commonwealth" in which "property rushes from the idle and imbecile to the industrious, brave and persevering."⁶⁸ For the historian John William Draper, writing immediately after the Civil War, in celebration of the social system of the North, its

population was in a state of unceasing activity; there was a corporeal and mental restlessness. Magnificent cities in all directions were arising; the country was intersected with canals, railroads . . . companies for banking, manufacturing, commercial purposes, were often concentrating many millions of capital. There were all kinds of associations . . . churches, hospitals, schools abounded. The foreign commerce at length rivaled that of the most powerful nations of Europe. This wonderful spectacle of social de-

⁶⁴See note 23 above.

⁶⁵*Op. cit.*, 345-6.

⁶⁶R. W. Emerson, *Journals* (1846), (Cambridge, Mass., 1909-14), VII, 322-3.

⁶⁷R. W. Emerson, "New England Reformers" (1844), *Complete Writings* (New York, 1929), I, 317-8.

⁶⁸"Wealth" (1860), *ibid.*, 551.

velopment was the result of INDIVIDUALISM; operating in an unbounded theatre of action. Everyone was seeking to do all that he could for himself.⁶⁹

And for Walt Whitman, likewise celebrating the democratic system of the North, it incarnated the progressive force of modern history—"the singleness of man, individualism,"⁷⁰ reconciling liberty and social justice.

In the hands of the Social Darwinists, such as William Graham Sumner, "individualism" acquired a harsher and altogether less idealistic significance. Sumner, who maintained that "liberty, inequality, survival of the fittest . . . carries society forward and favors all its best members,"⁷¹ offered a purportedly scientific rationale for a ruthlessly competitive society where the individual "has all his chances left open that he make out of himself all there is in him. This is individualism and atomism."⁷² In this context, the influence of Herbert Spencer's doctrines as a justification for unrestrained rivalry in business and unscrupulous dealings in politics was immense; he was widely seen as "the shining light of evolution and individualism."⁷³ These ideas entered into an evolving ideology of private enterprise and *laissez-faire*, postulating absolute equality of opportunity and the equivalence of public welfare and private accumulation. The word was used in this sense by Andrew Carnegie, and by Henry Clews, author of *The Wall Street Point of View* (1900), who spoke of "that system of Individualism which guards, protects and encourages competition," whose spirit was "the American Spirit—the love of freedom,—of free industry,—free and unfettered opportunity. . . ."⁷⁴ It was also used favorably by Theodore Roosevelt, Woodrow Wilson, and William J. Bryan. Despite counter trends to the "Gospel of Wealth" and the "Gospel of Success," the term continued to have wide currency until a temporary eclipse during the Depression and the New Deal. It was in 1928 that Herbert Hoover gave his famous campaign speech on the "American system of rugged individualism"; yet the term regained its resonance, as can be seen by the sales of the writings of the contemporary novelist-philosopher, Ayn Rand, in defence of "reason, individualism, and capitalism."

In short, with regard to the American sense of "individualism," James Bryce was right when he observed that, throughout their history, "individualism, the love of enterprise, and pride in personal

⁶⁹J. W. Draper, *History of the American Civil War*, 3 vols. (New York, 1868–70), I, 207–8.

⁷⁰W. Whitman, *Democratic Vistas* (1871), *Complete Prose Works* (Philadelphia, 1891), II, 67.

⁷¹Quoted in R. Hofstadter, *Social Darwinism in American Thought* (New York, 1959), 51, q. v. *passim.*, esp. ch. 3.

⁷²W. G. Sumner, *Earth Hunger and Other Essays* (New Haven, 1913), 127–8.

⁷³J. R. Commons quoted in Hofstadter, *op. cit.*, 34.

⁷⁴H. Clews, *Individualism versus Socialism* (New York) 1907, 1–3.

freedom, have been deemed by Americans not only their choicest, but their peculiar and exclusive possession."⁷⁵

(v) *England*. In England, the term has played a smaller role, as an epithet for nonconformity in religion, for the sterling qualities of self-reliant Englishmen, especially among the nineteenth-century middle-classes, and for features common to the various shades of English liberalism. French and German influences can, of course, also be found. Its first use was in Henry Reeve's translation of Tocqueville's *De la Démocratie en Amérique* in 1840. The word was also used pejoratively in the French sense by a great number of thinkers, but especially socialists, to refer to the evils of capitalist competition. Thus, Robert Owen, in specifying his cooperative socialist ideals, argued that to "effect these changes there must be . . . a new organisation of society, on the principle of *attractive union*, instead of *repulsive individualism* . . .,"⁷⁶ while John Stuart Mill (who was much influenced by the Saint-Simonians) asserted that "the moral objection to competition, as arming one human being against another, making the good of each depend upon evil to others, making all who have anything to gain or lose, live in the midst of enemies, by no means deserves the disdain with which it is treated by some of the adversaries of socialism. . . . Socialism, as long as it attacks the existing individualism, is easily triumphant; its weakness hitherto is in what it proposes to substitute."⁷⁷ Mill, expounding, not unsympathetically, the ideas of "the present Socialists," wrote that, in their eyes,

the very foundation of human life as at present constituted, the very principle on which the production and repartition of all material products is now carried on, is essentially vicious and anti-social. It is the principle of individualism, competition, each one for himself and against all the rest. It is grounded on opposition of interests, not harmony of interests, and under it every one is required to find his place by a struggle, by pushing others back or being pushed back by them. Socialists consider this system of private war (as it may be termed) between every one and every one, especially fatal in an economical point of view and in a moral.⁷⁸

And the socially-conscious Bishop of Durham, Brooke Foss Westcott argued in 1890 that "individualism regards humanity as made up of disconnected or warring atoms: socialism regards it as an organic whole, a vital unity formed by the combination of contributing members mutually interdependent."⁷⁹

⁷⁵J. Bryce, *The American Commonwealth* (London and New York, 1888), II, 404. For a contemporary statement defending nonconformity and privacy against "groupism," v. D. Riesman, *Individualism Reconsidered* (Glencoe, Ill., 1954).

⁷⁶R. Owen, *Moral World* (1845), quoted in Arieli, *op. cit.*, 406.

⁷⁷J. S. Mill, *Newman's Political Economy* (1851) in *Collected Works* (Toronto, London, 1963--), V, 444.

⁷⁸J. S. Mill, *Chapters on Socialism* (1879), *ibid.*, 715.

⁷⁹*The Guardian* (8 Oct. 1890), quoted in O.E.D.

As to the German sense, this can be seen in the writings of the Unitarian minister William McCall, claimed as a precursor in expounding “the doctrine of Individuality” (along with Humboldt, the German Romantics, Goethe, and Josiah Warren) by John Stuart Mill.⁸⁰ McCall, who was influenced by German Romanticism, wrote declamatory books and pamphlets, such as *Elements of Individualism* (1847) and *Outlines of Individualism* (1853), in which he preached the gospel of a new way of life dominated by the “Principle of Individualism,” which he hoped England would be the first country to adopt.

Among indigenous uses, the term’s reference to nonconformity is evident in the condemnation by Gladstone, who for a time advocated a single state religion, of “our individualism in religion”⁸¹ and in Matthew Arnold’s contrast between the Catholics’ ecclesiastical conception of the Eucharist and its origin “as Jesus founded it” where “it is the consecration of absolute individualism.”⁸² The term’s reference to the English character can be seen in Samuel Smiles, that ardent moralist on behalf of the Manchester School of political economy. “The spirit of self-help,” he wrote, “as exhibited in the energetic action of individuals, has in all times been a marked feature of the English character”; even “the humblest person, who sets before his fellows an example of industry, sobriety, and upright honesty of purpose in life, has a present as well as a future influence upon the well-being of his country.” It was this “energetic individualism which produces the most powerful effects upon the life and action of others, and really constitutes the best practical education.”⁸³

It was as a central term in the vocabulary of English liberalism that “individualism” came to be mainly used in the latter half of the nineteenth century, in contrast with “socialism,” “communism,” and, especially, “collectivism.” Thus the *Pall Mall Gazette* in 1888 spoke of holding “the scales between individualists and Socialists”⁸⁴ and the *Times* in 1896 of “the individualists” holding “their own against the encroachments of the State.”⁸⁵ Though scarcely used by the political economists and the Benthamites, and though, as we have seen, Mill used it in a different and negative sense, “individualism” came to be embraced by the whole spectrum of English liberals, from those advocating the most extreme *laissez-faire* to those supporting quite extensive state intervention.

Among the former was Herbert Spencer, concerned to assist the

⁸⁰Mill’s *Autobiography* (1873) (New York, 1960), 179.

⁸¹W. E. Gladstone, *Church Principles Considered in their Results* (London, 1840), 98, quoted in O.E.D.

⁸²M. Arnold, *Literature and Dogma* (1873), (London, 1876), 312, quoted in O.E.D.

⁸³S. Smiles, *Self Help* (1859), (London, 1958), 38, 39.

⁸⁴10 Sept. 1888, quoted in O.E.D.

⁸⁵30 Jan. 1896, quoted in O.E.D.

general course of social evolution by arresting the imminent "drift towards a form of society in which private activities of every kind, guided by individual wills, are to be replaced by public activities guided by governmental will," that "lapse of self-ownership into ownership by the community, which is partially implied by collectivism and completely by communism."⁸⁶ Even more extreme than Spencer was Auberon Herbert, author of *The Voluntaryist Creed* (1906) and editor in the 1890's of *The Free Life*, where he described his creed as "thorough-going individualism," advocating among other things voluntary taxation and education, and "the open market and free trade in everything." At the other end of the scale were liberals, such as T. H. Green and L. T. Hobhouse, who favored positive political action for the promotion of a liberal society. For Green, individualism was "the free competitive action of the individual in relation to the production and distribution of wealth," as opposed to "the collective action of society operating through society or the executive"; he believed individualism in this sense to be "a fundamental principle of human nature and an essential factor of the well-being of society."⁸⁷ Hobhouse put the matter very clearly: "to maintain individual freedom and equality we have to extend the sphere of social control," and thus "individualism, when it grapples with the facts, is driven no small distance along Socialist lines."⁸⁸

Perhaps the most influential use was that typified by Dicey, who equated individualism with Benthamism and utilitarian Liberalism. For Dicey,

Utilitarian individualism, which for many years under the name of liberalism, determined the trend of English legislation, was nothing but Benthamism modified by the experience, the prudence, or the timidity of practical politicians.

The "individualistic reformers," he wrote, "opposed anything which shook the obligations of contracts, or, what is at bottom the same thing, limited the contractual freedom of individuals" and, in general, they "tacitly assumed that each man if left to himself would in the long run be sure to act for his own true interest, and that the general welfare was sufficiently secured if each man were left free to pursue his happiness in his own way, either alone or in combination with his fellows."⁸⁹

⁸⁶H. Spencer, *Principles of Sociology* (London, 1876-96), III, 594. For Spencer's first account of his ideas as the philosophy of individualism v. the introduction to the American edition of his *Social Statics* (New York, 1865), x.

⁸⁷Quoted in M. Richter, *The Politics of Conscience: T. H. Green and his Age* (London, 1964), 343.

⁸⁸L. T. Hobhouse, *Liberalism* (1911), (New York, 1964), 54.

⁸⁹A. V. Dicey, *Law and Public Opinion in England* (1905) (London, 1962), 125, 151, 156.

“Individualism” has, in this sense, been widely used to mean the absence or minimum of state intervention in the economic and other spheres, and has usually been associated, both by its adherents and its opponents, with classical, or negative liberalism.

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