

Individualism vs Collectivism

Social Studies 30-1

Role of the Individual

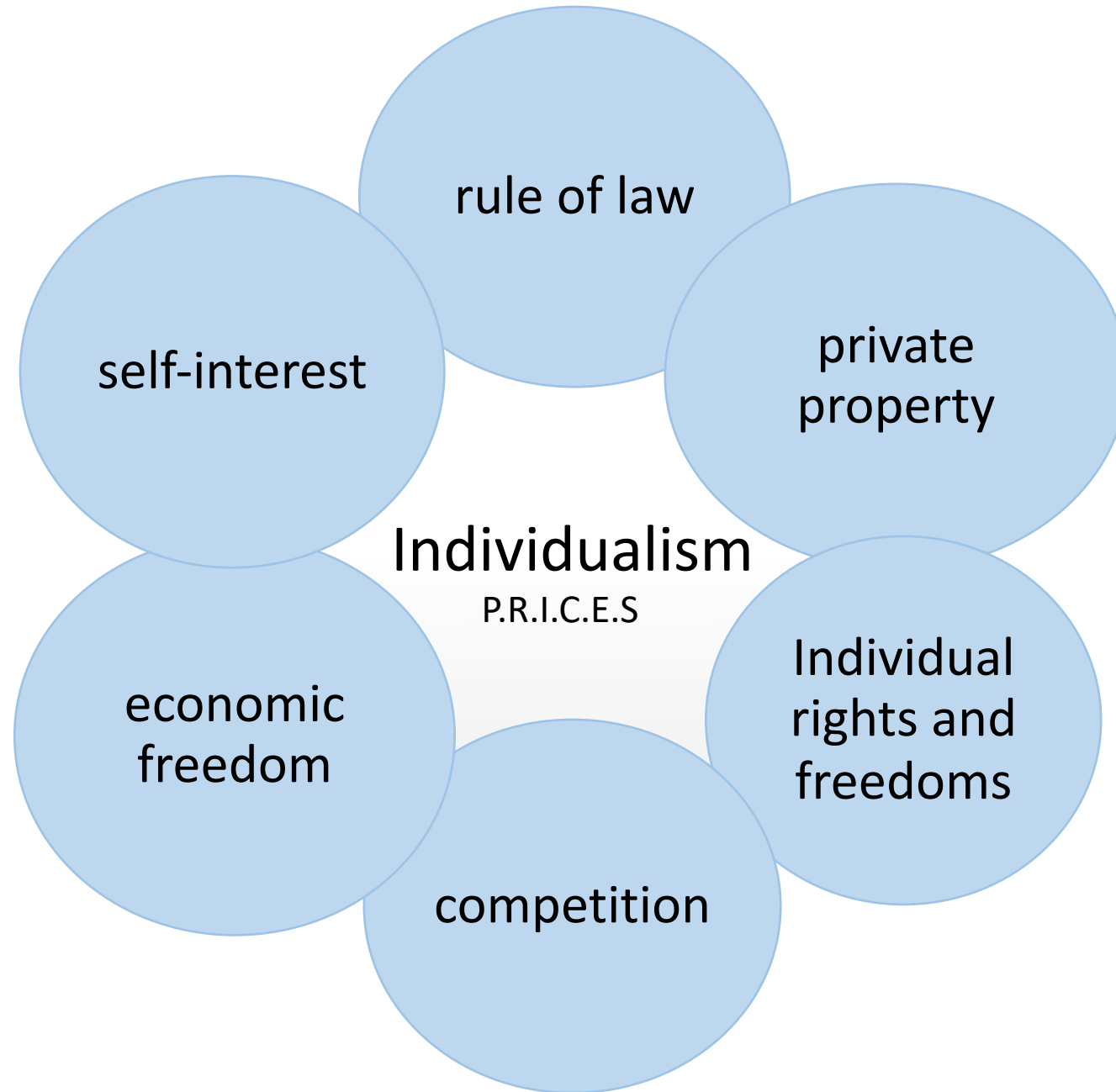
The key issue in determining the degree to which an ideology is individualist or collectivist is the understanding of what the individual's role is in that society.



Individualism

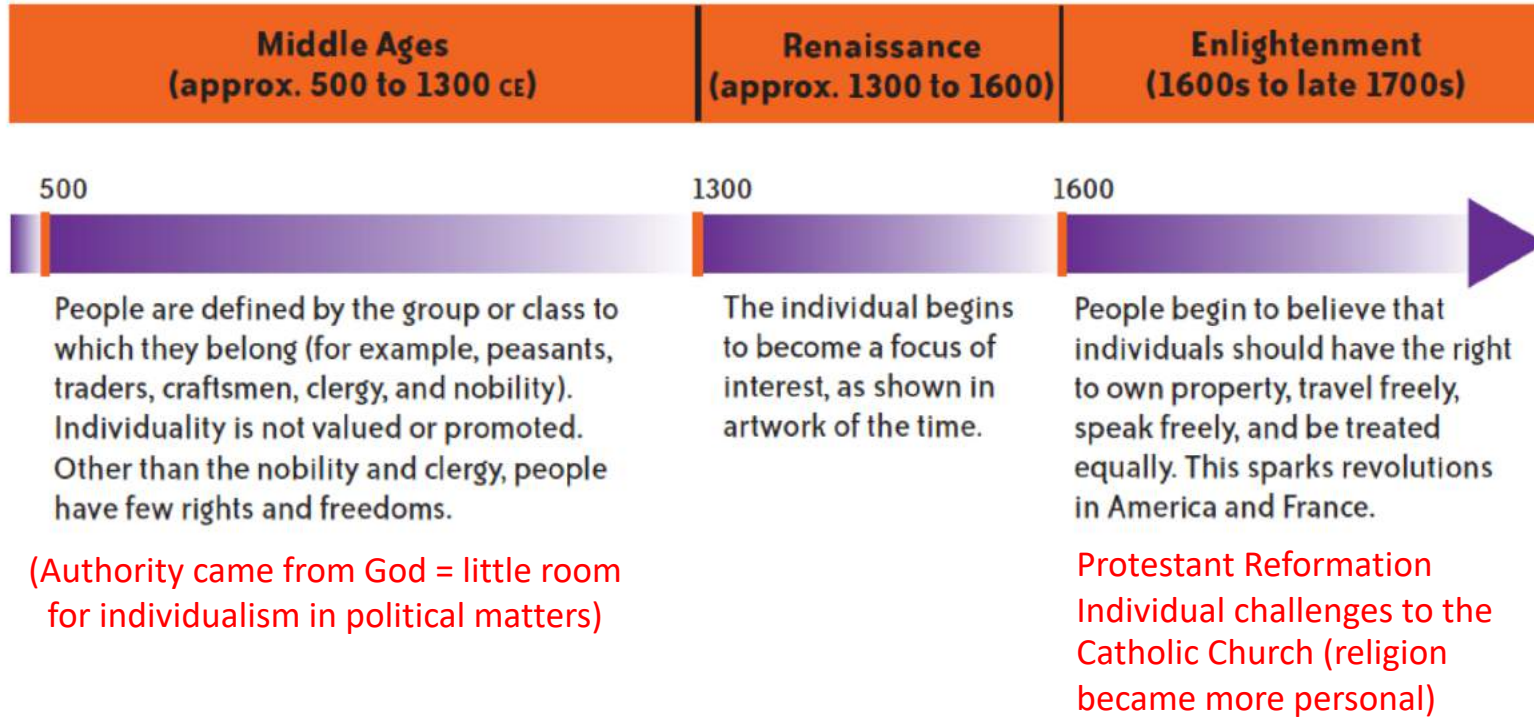
- **Individualism focuses on the role of the individual in relation to society.**
- This ideology emphasizes individual values, such as independence, self-reliance, individual achievement, competition, and freedom.
- The belief that the government, for the most part, is not to interfere in the way individuals chose to live their lives. Concepts like rule of law ensure everyone is treated equally (unlike the divine right of kings) and there is an emphasis on the importance of private property.
- Key themes:
 - Private Property
 - Rule of law
 - Individual Rights and Freedoms
 - Competition
 - Economic Freedom
 - Self Interest





The Emergence of Individualism in Europe

Increasing Focus on Individualism



Philosophers began writing about the importance of the individual, and society began to change. People began to believe that each individual person mattered, that reason (not religion) should be the source of knowledge, and that each individual (if the individual was a landowning man) was reasonable and capable of governing himself. At this time, Europe also experienced a Scientific Revolution, which produced many scientists and mathematicians who dared to challenge what was considered common knowledge. For example, scientists such as Isaac Newton were known as radicals for forwarding the belief of astronomer Nicholaus Copernicus regarding the movement of the earth and the sun.

The Rise of Liberalism

- The growing popularity of individualism gave rise to a new political ideology called **liberalism**. The central idea of liberalism is the importance of individual liberty.
- During the 1900s, liberal democracies began to develop in many countries around the world. A **liberal democracy** is a form of government in which the rights and freedoms of the individual are guaranteed. In a liberal democracy, individuals are allowed to vote for the leaders of their country. Today, the values of individualism still influence many liberal democratic governments.
 - For example, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms protects the individual rights and freedoms of Canadian citizens
 - In the United States, citizens are guaranteed individual rights in the US Constitution, such as the right to bear arms and the right to freedom of speech.

The term liberalism can, therefore, be used to describe a variety of different ideas about how we should live together as individuals.

Political Aspects of Liberalism	Focuses on the idea that all members of society have the same legal rights and freedoms, regardless of their gender, race, or economic status
Economic Aspects of Liberalism	Focuses on the individual's right to property and the removal of government control in economic markets, so that the value of goods and services is decided by individuals (or individual companies), not the government
Social Aspects of Liberalism	Focuses on the idea that individuals are the basis of society, and, as such, all individuals in society should be treated as equals and have access to the rights, the freedoms, and a quality of life

Political Roots of Liberalism

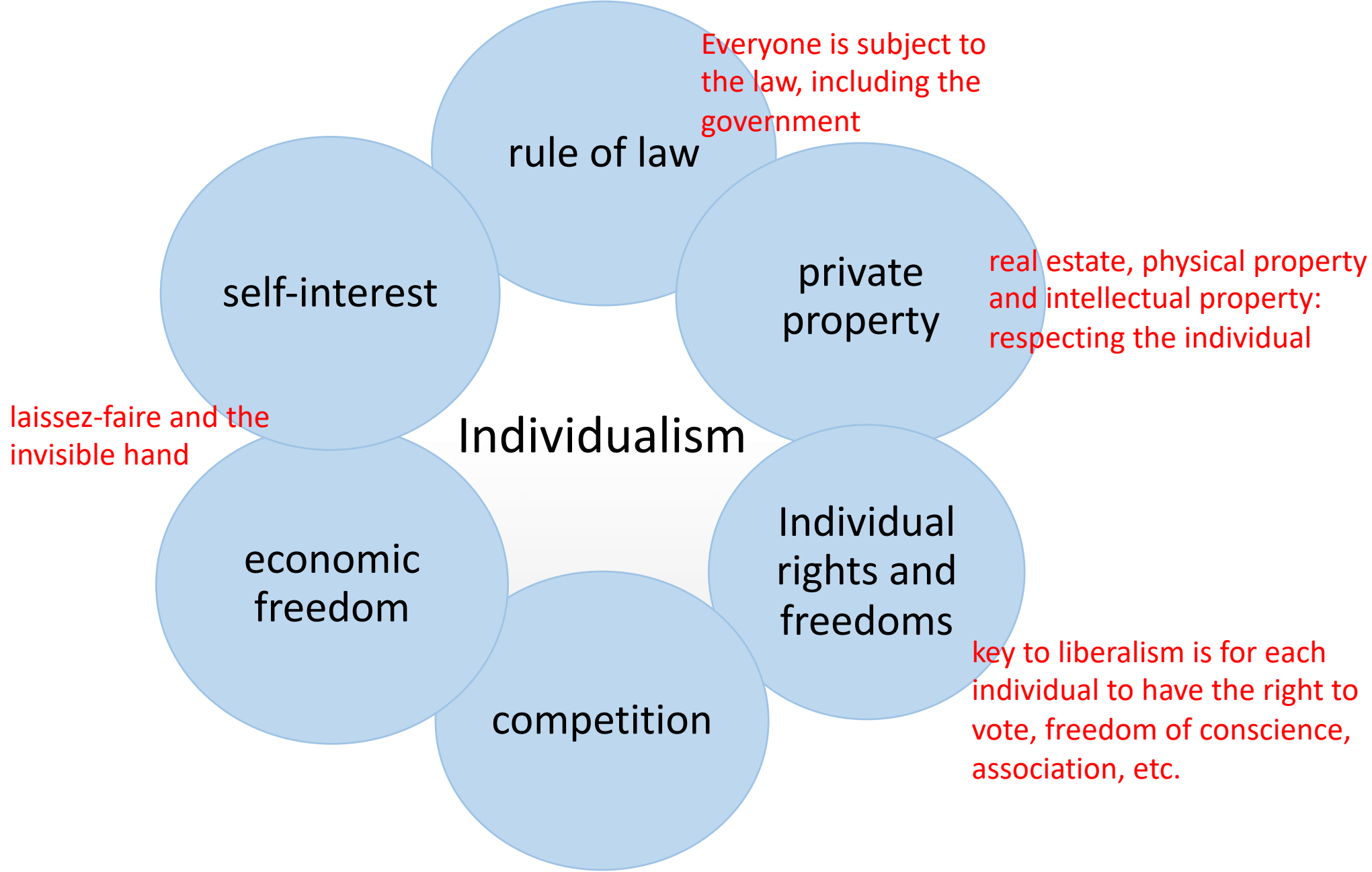
- The **rule of law** is the idea that the law itself, and not an individual, has the greatest power and that all individuals are subject to the law.
 - Early Example of the Rule of Law: **The Magna Carta** (or Great Charter) of 1215 is an early example of the rule of law. The Magna Carta is a document that was created to limit the powers of the ruler of England, who was at that time King John. He agreed that he was subject to the law. In addition to respecting the laws of England, the king had to give up some of his powers.
- In a **social contract**, each individual of a society agrees to be governed so that he or she may gain the benefits of living in that society.
- Legal documents such as charters and declarations have been written to protect individual rights and freedoms. *What examples can you think of?*

Consider this...

When it comes to the topic of individual rights and freedoms, does there need to be a reasonable limit as to how far these freedoms extended? For example, freedom of expression.

Freedom of expression is considered a fundamental right in Canada; however, there are times when this freedom might justifiably be limited. For example, freedom of speech promotes the “free flow of ideas essential to political democracy and democratic institutions,” but what if a person says or writes something that is untrue, unfair, and harmful?

In Canada, as in all liberal democracies, the right of one individual to free speech has to be balanced against the rights of other individuals, the rights of groups, and the needs and goals of the society.



Collectivism

- **Collectivism emphasizes the role of human interdependence in society: the idea that individuals do not live their lives in isolation, but rather depend on one another in many ways.**
- Collectivism sees human beings as social creatures and emphasizes the idea that companionship and the support and approval of others contribute to our personal happiness and fulfillment.
- This allows governments to restrict the freedom of individuals when necessary for the good of society and the main focus on working together to achieve a common goal.
- Key themes:
 - Collective Interest
 - Public Property
 - Adherence to Collective Norms
 - Cooperation
 - Economic Equality
 - Collective Responsibility





Early Collectivist Ideas

Anthropological studies tell us that most if not all of the earliest human societies were collectivist because they could survive only by working and hunting as part of a group. Examples include:



Cave Men
Survived working with
the group; identity
based on group
membership



Aboriginal Peoples
These values are reflected in a concern for
the common good when dealing with
issues such as land management,
community decision making, and
educating and raising children. The
individual is seen as part of a collective
and the strength of a community comes
from the relationships among these
individuals.



Example - Potlatch

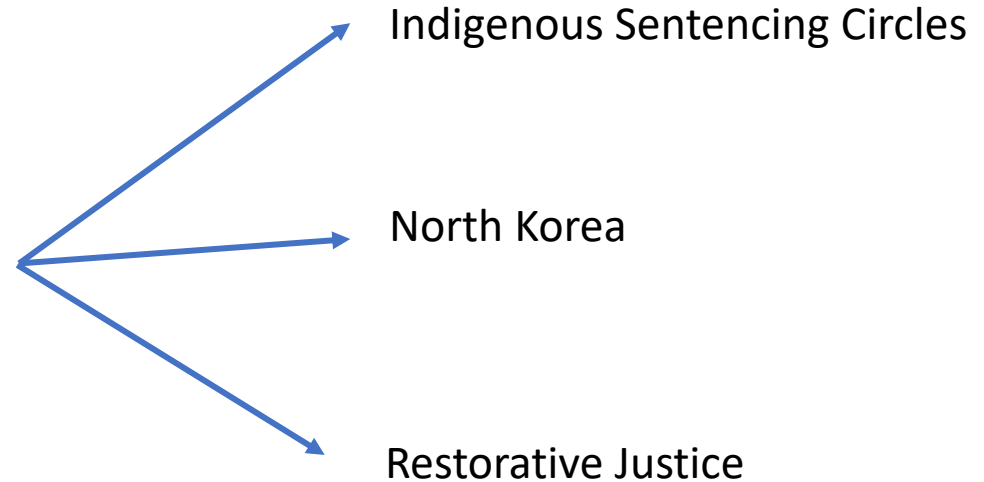
The word "potlatch" is the English version of the Nootkan word "p'alshit" which means "to give." The potlatch functioned as a means for passing around among the members the surplus wealth of the society.

Collectivism

- **Economic Equality** – may not mean same amount of money, but access to goods and services
 - Progressive taxation
- **Public Property** (owned by the state) – in the interest of the collective society
- **Collective Interest** – unions
- **Collective responsibility** – holding the whole group responsible for the actions of individuals within the group (connections)
- **Adherence to Collective norms** – often voluntary, but the ideological pressure encourages people to follow. Can be one specific manner in which a society or group influences the actions of its members. This can mean a devotion, support, or attachment to certain rules and traditions in society, which can be

Collective Responsibility

Collective responsibility, another important aspect of collectivism, refers to the rules and conduct that members of a group must follow. It involves the idea that the group is responsible for the actions of all its individual members and that individuals have a responsibility to the group.



Collectivism

Individualism



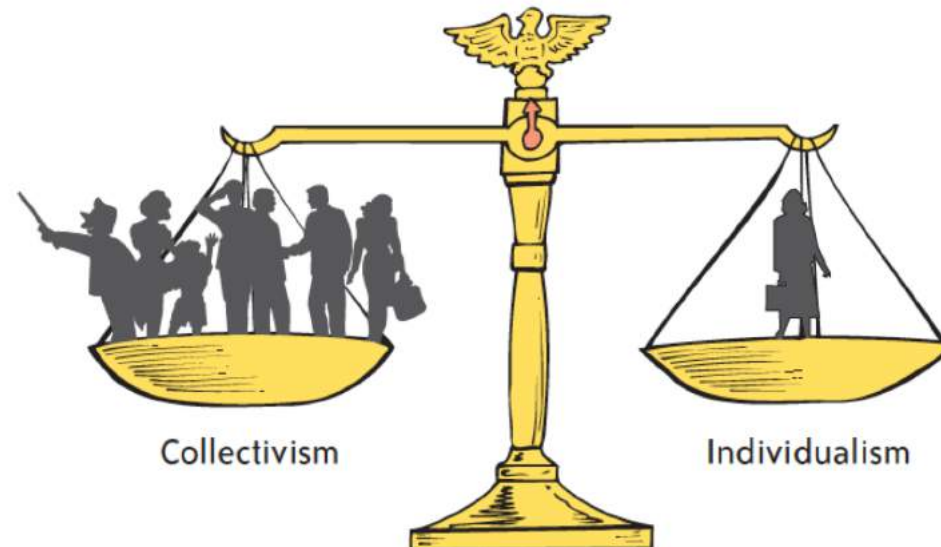
Collectivism	Individualism
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The group, or collective, is important and more valuable than a single individual.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Individuals are important, and entitled to make decisions.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• It is important to contribute to the group and to be like the group.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Individuals are unique.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The strength of the group relies on the contributions of everyone, and the individual may need to sacrifice.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Individual effort is valued and each individual should be allowed to develop his or her potential.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The group is stronger if it knows what its members think, and privacy is not a priority.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Individuals have the right to privacy and to think freely.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The entire group is responsible for its members' actions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The individual is responsible for his or her own actions.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The efforts of the group are most important, and individual efforts may not always be celebrated.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The individual should take initiative and value personal achievements.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Co-operation is the best way to succeed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Competition promotes excellence.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The group is responsible for its members' welfare.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The individual is responsible for his or her own welfare.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Wealth is shared.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Private property and individual wealth are valued.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The well-being of the group is more important than individual rights.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Laws should protect individual rights.

In exploring the ideas of collectivism and individualism, you may feel that the two viewpoints are incompatible and one must choose between them. While it is true that the values of collectivism and individualism can be at odds, there are aspects of these two sets of ideas that complement one another. In effect, individualism and collectivism can work together in different ways for the common good of society.

Interdependence

Importance of the group
over the individual

Collective responsibility



self-reliance

freedom from authority