Chapter 2: **Ideologies of Individualism and Collectivism**

**Key Terms:**

- Adherence to collective norms
- Collective interest
- Collective responsibility
- Collectivism
- Common good
- Competition
- Co-operation
- Individual Rights and Freedoms
- Autonomy
- Renaissance
- Labour movement
- Social capital
- Economic freedom
- Individualism
- Individual rights
- Liberalism
- Private property
- Public property
- Rule of law
- Self-interest
- Self-reliance
- Free markets
- Democratic socialism

**Understanding Individualism and Collectivism**

* There are many different ideologies based on some degree of individualism, and they do not all agree on the best means of organizing society. Nonetheless, most individualistic ideologies have a similar understanding of the individual’s place in society and stress the importance of ideas such as personal autonomy and self-reliance.
The focus of collectivists is the community and society, although families can also exemplify collectivist principles by encouraging members to be responsible for one another rather than simply looking out for themselves.

Early Understandings of Individualism and Collectivism

Some of the principles of individualism have roots in ancient history. Principles of individualism, such as individual rights and freedoms, have become widely accepted only more recently in history.

Example of collectivism can also be found in ancient cultures. (2000 years ago by early Christians)

Today, some religious communities embrace collectivist values such as the collective ownership of property (the Hutterites)

Indigenous peoples such as the Aboriginal peoples in Canada describe their traditional cultures as having a strong sense of the collective. In matters such as land-holding, decision making, and educating and raising children, many Aboriginal cultures emphasize thinking and acting collectively to achieve what is best for the common good.
The Medieval Period (circa 476 to the Renaissance)

* *Pax Romana*, the “Peace of Rome”, which had provided structure and security throughout the empire, was replaced by lawlessness and unpredictability. With the collapse of the Roman Empire in 497 CE, Europe was thrown into chaos. Over time, order was restored in small areas under the guidance of local warlords. Small pockets of structure eventually grew into larger and larger areas as warlords joined together and an aristocracy was established. Common people were provided structure and physical security in exchange for loyalty and service to their lords. But the individual life had very little worth.

* By 800 CE, most of Europe had converted to Christianity under the Roman Catholic Church. The people of the various European kingdoms became subjects of two kingdoms – the worldly kingdom and the spiritual kingdom. Security and order were provided by the earthly rulers. More important, however, was the security and promise provided by the spiritual rulers. If life here on earth was miserable, then at least life after death promised to be glorious.
The Renaissance (circa 1450 - 1600)

* In contrast to the medieval period, the Renaissance in Europe brought a renewed interest in classical Greek and Roman culture and a greater interest in the individual. European scholars revived classical ideas about the central importance of life in this world, man’s central role in the world, and the appreciation of the worth of the individual.

* In 1452, Constantinople, capital of the Byzantine Empire, fell to the Ottoman Empire. Many scholars from such cities such as Constantinople fled west, taking with them many Greek manuscripts.

* Ancient Greek culture had been very humanistic and very individualistic. According to Greek mythology, the gods on Mount Olympus were anthropomorphic, behaving like people and sometimes interacting with them. In these myths, humans occasionally challenged the gods, and sometimes are depicted as being on equal terms with them. This notion of human potential led the ancient Greeks to focus on the capabilities, strength, beauty, and reason of individual humans.
* These ideas took hold in the city-states of Italy and quickly changed the thinking and the focus of influential people in Europe.

The Protestant Reformation (circa 1500 – 1650)

* The **Protestant Reformation**, partially a product of the growing influence of the Renaissance focus on the potential of the individual in this world, also contributed to the growth of individualism by challenging the authority of the dominant Roman Catholic Church.

* After the printing press was assembled by Johannes Gutenberg around 1439, the Bible could be translated into many languages and distributed to many more people. In this way, people who could read began to explore, consider, and interpret their faith on a more personal level.

* The emergence of individualism in European societies was a process that took several centuries. And while individualism eventually came to predominate in many societies, it has never supplanted collectivism entirely. The two tendencies have existed side by side in a sometimes uneasy relationship that has helped societies in the past and continues to shape societies today.
Principles of Individualism

- rule of law
- individual rights and freedoms
- private property
- economic freedom
- self-interest
- competition

Rule of Law

* A key principle in Canadian life – and in liberal democracies around the world – is the **rule of law**. Every individual is equal before the law. Citizens are subject to clearly defined rules, rather than the arbitrary power of an individual or group in a position of authority.

Individual Rights and Freedoms

* Examples of some rights and freedoms include freedom of religion, freedom of association, and the right to life, liberty, and the security of the person.

* One important individual right in liberal democracies is the right to vote. Most early liberal democracies did not extend this right to all citizens.
* Guaranteeing individual rights and freedoms can have negative consequences in certain circumstances, and liberal democracies attempt to balance the rights of one individual against the rights of other individuals, the rights of groups, and the needs and goals of the society.

* From the creation of Canada as a democracy, individual rights and freedoms have been expanded. In the 1960s, social mores were loosening, and this brought about many changes to laws and society in general.

**Private Property**

* Modern understandings of property law developed during the Enlightenment period in England. At first, property law was understood to only apply to land, but it eventually came to apply to three types of property: real estate, other forms of physical possessions, and intellectual property (art, inventions).

* However, the notion of **private property** is only one way of looking at land and property; there are many different perspectives regarding the significance of people’s relationships with land (Aboriginals).
* Some people also believe that land cannot actually be owned – cannot be private property – but is rather shared. Some communities also have had a tradition of common property – shared by, worked by, and enjoyed by all.

**Economic Freedom**

* On a personal level, **economic freedom** is the freedom to buy what you want and to sell your labour, idea, or product to whomever you wish. Markets in which consumers and businesses have free choice to buy, sell, or trade, without gov’t interference in those transactions, are called free markets. Economic freedom for free-market entrepreneurs would mean that there were no barriers to trade for products they might want to export, and that their customers would not have to pay taxes on their purchases.
The Economic Freedom Index rates the economic freedom of 157 countries according to the following 10 factors:

- business freedom
- trade freedom
- fiscal (tax) freedom
- degree of gov’t regulation
- monetary freedom
- investment freedom
- financial freedom
- property rights
- freedom from corruption
- labour freedom

Self-interest and Competition

Two concepts of individualism closely related to the principle of economic freedom are self-interest and competition. These ideas were first promoted by 18\textsuperscript{th}-century Scottish philosopher and economist Adam Smith, who saw individual self-interest as an “invisible hand” that guides individuals to contribute for the common good of everyone.
* The forces of supply and demand in the marketplace work to the benefit of the majority. When there is too much supply of a product, the price drops and, eventually, so does the supply. When demand is greater than supply, the price of the product rises, and more entrepreneurs enter the marketplace to profit, eventually causing supply to meet demand once again.

Principles of Collectivism

* The principles of **collectivism** are the foundations of ideologies such as communism and socialism. When the principles of individualism formed the basis of the classical liberal ideology that originally guided modern democracies, over time most liberal democracies have evolved and incorporated aspects of collectivism into their political, economic, and social systems.

* The principles of collectivism are:
  • economic equality
  • co-operation
  • public property
  • collective interest
  • collective responsibility
  • adherence to collective norms
Economic Equality

* Economic equality can mean any of the following, depending on the person or the ideology:
  - people with larger incomes should pay more taxes
  - all people should earn equal wages for work of similar value
  - there should be a guaranteed annual income
  - all people should share in the wealth of the country or the world
  - people should own the means of production collectively
  - everything should be free; there should be no private property

* Many countries have tried to reform their economic systems to introduce more economic equality. In Canada, for example, the policy of progressive taxation could be seen as an attempt to redistribute wealth. Progressive taxation means that people who earn more money are taxed at a higher rate.
Co-operation

* All collectivist ideologies emphasize co-operation. **Co-operation** can be beneficial to individuals and groups precisely because individuals are unique and have different ideas about how to do things. Co-operation is the means through which members of a group or a collective achieve their common goals.

* The principle of co-operation can also influence how members of a society govern themselves.

Public Property

* Is anything – land, buildings, vehicles – not privately owned by individuals. Generally speaking, **public property** is owned by the state or the community, and managed according to the best interests of the community.

* Different ideologies support the idea of public property to varying degrees. In a Communist state, all industries could be public property – controlled by the state for the common good of the collective.
* Karl Marx (*The Communist Manifesto*) and thinkers like him argued that only workers should profit from their labour, not employers or the owners of the companies.

* The concept of public property is also present to a lesser extent in liberal democracies such as Canada. (Parks, schools, roads, Crown land, Crown corporations are all examples of property that the gov’t manages in the interest of all of society).

**Collective Interest**

* Collective interest is the basis for the organized labour movement, which began during the Industrial Revolution. As a member of organized trade unions, workers were able to fight successfully for better working conditions and higher rates of pay – successes that individuals could not have realized alone.

* Collective interest is also the foundation for social movements and lobby groups, such as human rights groups, or the Assembly of First Nations.
Collective Responsibility

* Means holding the whole group responsible for the actions of individuals within the group.

* Acknowledgment of collective responsibility is often made in response to deep-rooted social problems that cannot be addressed by targeting individuals or a single group.

Adherence to Collective Norms

* Groups usually impose norms, or standards, on the members as a condition of membership in the group. These norms can relate to conduct, values, or appearance. Living up to these standards may be considered a daily responsibility.

* Censorship is an example of the imposition of a collective norm. Many media censor themselves informally; however, some gov’ts impose censorship on media.
Entrepreneurialism

* The benefits of entrepreneurship are not necessarily limited to one individual’s achievement. Businesspeople also provide economic benefits for others by creating employment, and sometimes even attempt to influence others in a positive way.

Social Programs and Public Services

* While Canadian society is characterized by many of the values of individualism such as individual rights and freedoms, the rule of law, and economic freedom, we also benefit from a variety of social programs and public services provided by our gov’t, such as health care, employment insurance, welfare, and public education.

* These programs can be considered collectivist, because all Canadian citizens pay for them through taxation, but not everyone uses them or needs them. Our willingness to pay these taxes, even though we may not use the services provided, demonstrates a commitment to the well-being of the group or collective.