The three men: Immanuel Kant, Mohandas Gandhi, and Martin Luther King, Jr. all emphasized respect for the individual. Kant through his thought of categorical imperative, Gandhi through his belief of Satyagraha, and MLK in his philosophy of a non-violent resistance. Of the three men, two of them—Gandhi and MLK fought rights of specific individuals. Gandhi opposed the apartheid in South Africa, and MLK disagreed with the discrimination against African-Americans.

Immanuel Kant was a German thinker from Konigsberg, Prussia. One of his beliefs was that it was possible for human beings to rise above their self-interest, like Jean-Jacques Rousseau. In this respect, he believed positively of the individual, and was optimistic of mankind.

Kant believed that human beings are capable of making decisions based on reason rather than emotion; not concerning the concept of the general will though. He said we are willing to put our personal feelings aside and contemplate our intended actions from a rational and objective point of view.

Although, this action of regarding reason over emotion, is very difficult and not easy at all. He said man must engage in a thought experiment when facing a problem relating to this. He called this categorical imperative: a way of searching for a solution of a moral problem through use of reason rather than emotion. Kant said when we are unsure about whether doing something is good or bad, we should ask ourselves whether or not that action could be considered a law binding all humans.

Immanuel said if a law is conceivable for that particular action, then the action is permissible. If there isn’t a law, or one can’t be made, then it is our duty not to perform that
action. Kant believed that morality didn’t necessarily come naturally to one’s mind—they would have to work at it; think out our actions through before committing them.

This is one way Kant emphasized respect for individuals: by showing that people can rise above their emotions and make decisions rationally. Another way he emphasized respect is by saying that we should always treat other rational beings (i.e. humans) with respect for the ideals, values, and beliefs they have.

With respect for the individual in terms of the political system, Immanuel Kant said that people have three roles that each of us have: as human beings, subjects, and citizens. Our freedom as human beings: each of us should be granted maximum freedom to live our lives as we see fit for ourselves. He said that no one else should dictate it. In this aspect, Kant placed emphasis of freedom for individuals.

Although, Immanuel said the path we choose to have shouldn’t inflict harm upon others. If that isn’t so, we should be able to choose our own paths in life and activities, because each of us are different. With equality as subjects, Kant said that subjects should be treated as equals under law. Every person should begin their career with equal opportunities. Kant emphasized equality in the workplace, how a person wants to live his life, but did not show any equality for people as citizens.

Kant said that with respect to independence as citizens: only active members of society should be treated as citizens. What he meant by that was only a person who is self-employed should be treated as a citizen. Women are also not included as an active member of society, so they are not treated equally also.
Now the second man: Mohandas Gandhi, who was an Indian born in the year 1869. He emphasized peaceful resistance his whole life, and spoke out against the independence of Pakistan, instead emphasizing the unity of Muslims and Hindus in one country of India.

Gandhi emphasized respect for the individual by telling us how to react to enemies; loving them. He believed Satyagraha was the best way to attack them. Satyagraha’s purpose, according to Gandhi was to improve one’s enemy by setting a good example. It shows the enemy that the person who is doing Satyagraha possesses soul-force to stand up to evil without resorting to it. It also sets a good example. Satyagraha was the best way against an enemy because violent ones result in karma.

Mohandas also spoke of not resorting to deception or lies to attain his or her goals. Always respect truth. Gandhi also emphasized respect for the individual by saying that he loved everyone, including his enemy. He believed this because he said all human beings are spiritually connected to ‘Brahman’ (unlike Judeo-Christian-Islamic beliefs). This is why Gandhi says every person should be respected and loved, regardless of their flaws of shortcomings. He also said if we truly love our enemy, then we shouldn’t be so much concerned with defeating them, but rather be more concerned with showing them the error of their ways. Mohandas said this could only be done through Satyagraha.

Gandhi opposed the apartheid in South Africa, and put his belief of Satyagraha to use by showing the South African government that they were wrong for discriminating. Gandhi believed that all people are equal and should be treated the same way, like MLK after him and many others.

Our last man, Martin Luther King, Jr., was an African-American who led the American civil rights movement in the 1950s and 1960s. He received the Nobel Peace Prize and
posthumous awards for his effort. MLK held Gandhi in high esteem, and his philosophy was based off of him.

He emphasized respect for the individual also by showing how we should react to enemies. His philosophy was non-violent resistance. He put it into practice also along with many other African-Americans who resisted the discrimination that white people had on them. In his “Letter from a Birmingham Jail” he spoke of how his peaceful resistance made him end up in jail.

MLK believed that is an obligation for individuals to obey just laws, and a moral responsibility to disobey unjust laws. This is where MLK led his movement: he correctly believed that it was an unjust law for Southern states to discriminate against African-Americans by not allowing them in certain restaurants, segregating, putting them in the back of the bus, etc.

He, like Gandhi, disagreed with violent opposition to repression. He said, “Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly.” Meaning, a decision someone makes affects everyone, and violence would affect everyone, even if indirectly. If someone has done wrong, in MLK’s case, the South, a person should create a sort of tension so people are aware of the wrong they committed. The people would to have direct action necessary to see results.

Another saying of MLK was, “freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed.” Is directly related to what made MLK begin his movement: the South was not going to give freedom to blacks unless they demanded it. MLK said it was the responsibility of a person to be willing to go to prison for what they believe in: “I submit that an individual who breaks a law that conscience tells him is unjust, and who willingly accepts the penalty of imprisonment in order to arouse the conscience of the community over its injustice, is in reality expressing the highest respect for the law.”
MLK Jr. talked about equality, saying the U.S. constitution’s 13th-15th amendments said all citizens were to be equal and had the right to vote. MLK spoke of a middle-way between violence and apathy, advocating a thoughtful, non-violent response that proclaims the humanity and worth of every individual. This is how he emphasized respect for the individual: by saying that all men were equal and should be treated that way.

The thinker I agree with most is MLK Jr., because he emphasized non-violence, and I think violence is not something we should resort to, unless there are certain circumstances. Peaceful opposition is always a good way to tell people you don’t feel they’re doing the right thing, without causing havoc. I liked also MLK said you believe in doing something so greatly, we should be willing to go to prison for it. Although MLK and Gandhi have very similar beliefs, I agree more with MLK because he emphasized equality for everyone and his belief seemed somewhat more applicable. Gandhi placed too much emphasis on loving someone, in my opinion.

I agree the least with Immanuel Kant, not because of his emphasis of rising above self-interest, or his emphasis of freedom for individuals, but because he didn’t see women as active members of society or anyone who works for someone else. I feel like this is absurd, and misogynistic. Kant, like Aristotle and Rousseau before him, showed prejudice against women by saying directly or indirectly that they are not equal to men, and lower than them.

All of these three thinkers--Immanuel Kant, Mohandas Gandhi, and Martin Luther King, Jr. emphasized respect for the individual. Kant did it through saying that people can rise above their self-interests, placing emphasis on freedom of individuals, and saying that all citizens should be treated equally and treated equally in their jobs. Gandhi emphasized love for everyone,
and that we are all spiritually connected. MLK Jr. said that everybody is equal and should be treated equally.