

Freedom

Freedom is a difficult term to discuss because it is employed by social scientists and philosophers as commonly as by political theorists. In each case the concern with freedom is rather different. In philosophy, freedom is usually examined as a property of the will. Do individuals possess 'free will' or are their actions entirely determined? Clearly, the answer to this question depends upon one's conception of human nature and, more importantly, the human mind. In economics and sociology, freedom is invariably thought of as a social relationship. To what extent are individuals 'free agents' in social life, able to exercise choice and enjoy privileges in relation to others? By contrast, political theorists often treat freedom as an ethical ideal or normative principle, perhaps as the most vital such principle. In many cases, however, they separate the definition of what freedom is from questions about its value, allowing them to employ an essentially social-scientific definition of the term. Nevertheless, as a popular political slogan 'freedom' undoubtedly functions as an ideal – but it is one which cries out for analytical attention and clarity.

Perhaps the best way of giving shape to freedom is by distinguishing it from 'unfreedom'. Most people are willing, for instance, to accept a difference between 'liberty' and what is called 'licence'. However, where that distinction should be drawn is the source of considerable controversy. Furthermore, it is by no means clear what we mean by the term 'freedom'. For example, by highlighting the various forms which freedom can take, political thinkers have long treated freedom as an 'essentially contested' concept. In the early nineteenth century, the French liberal Benjamin Constant distinguished between what he called 'the liberty of the ancients', by which he meant direct and collective participation in political life, and 'the liberty of the moderns', which referred to independence from government and from the encroachment of others. The most influential attempt to do this in the twentieth century was undertaken by Isaiah Berlin in his essay 'Two Concepts of Liberty' ([1958] 1969). Berlin (see p. 206) claimed to identify a 'positive' concept of freedom and a 'negative' concept of freedom. In everyday language, this has sometimes been understood as a distinction between being 'free to' do something, and being 'free from' something.

Such a distinction has, however, been widely criticized. For instance, the difference between freedom *to* and freedom *from* is merely a confusion of language: each example of freedom can be described in both ways. Being 'free to' gain an education is equivalent to being 'free from' ignorance; being 'free from' excessive taxation simply means being 'free to' spend one's money as one wishes. In 'Negative and Positive Freedom' (1972) G.C. MacCallum went further and proposed a single, value-free concept of

freedom in the form: 'X is free from Y to do or be Z'. MacCallum's formula helps to clarify thought about freedom in a number of ways. In the first place, it suggests that the apparently deep question 'Are we free?' is meaningless, and should be replaced by a more complete and specific statement about what we are free from, and what we are free to do. For instance, it brings out the fact that while we may be free from one obstacle, like physical assault, we are not free from others, such as laws which prevent us assaulting fellow citizens. Similarly, we can be free from the same obstacle, Y, in this case the law, to do one thing – smoke tobacco – but not another, like smoking marijuana. Finally, it helps to explain how people disagree about freedom. Most commonly, this occurs over what can count as an obstacle to freedom, what can count as Y. For example, while some argue that freedom can be restricted only by physical or legal obstacles, others insist that a lack of material resources, social deprivation and inadequate education may be a cause of unfreedom.

Liberty and licence

The term freedom crops up more frequently in the writings and speeches of politicians than perhaps any other political principle. Indeed, it is almost universally accepted as being morally 'good', and its opposites – oppression, imprisonment, slavery or unfreedom – are regarded as undesirable, if not as morally 'bad'. In its simplest sense, freedom means to do as one wishes or act as one chooses. In everyday language, for example, being 'free' suggests the absence of constraints or restrictions, as in freedom of speech: an unchecked ability to say whatever one pleases. However, few people are prepared to support the removal of all restrictions or constraints upon the individual. As R.H. Tawney (see p. 309) pointed out, 'The freedom of the pike is death to the minnows.' Only anarchists, who reject all forms of political authority as unnecessary and undesirable, are prepared to endorse unlimited freedom. Others insist upon a distinction between two kinds of self-willed action, between 'liberty' and 'licence'. This distinction can nevertheless create confusion. For example, it implies that only morally correct conduct can be dignified with the title 'freedom' or 'liberty'. However, as many political theorists employ a value-free or social-scientific understanding of such terms, they are quite prepared to accept that certain freedoms – such as the freedom to murder – should be constrained. In that sense, the liberty/licence distinction merely begs the question: which freedoms are we willing to approve, and which ones are we justified in curtailing?

'Licence' means the abuse of freedom; it is the point at which freedom becomes 'excessive'. Whereas liberty is usually thought to be wholesome, desirable and morally enlightening, licence is oppressive, objectionable and

morally corrupt. There is, however, deep ideological controversy about the point at which liberty starts to become licence. Libertarians, for instance, seek to maximize the realm of individual freedom and so reduce to a minimum those actions which are regarded as licence. Although both socialists and liberals have at times been attracted to libertarianism (see p. 337), in the late twentieth century it has increasingly been linked to the defence of private property and the cause of free market capitalism. Right-wing libertarians such as Robert Nozick (see p. 318) and Milton Friedman see freedom in essentially economic terms and advocate the greatest possible freedom of choice in the marketplace. An employer's ability to set wage levels, alter conditions of work, and to decide who to employ or not employ, can therefore be seen as manifestations of liberty. On the other hand, socialists have often regarded such behaviour as licence, on the grounds that the freedom of the employer may mean nothing more than misery and oppression for his or her workers. Fundamentalist socialists may go so far as to portray all forms of private property as licence since they inevitably lead to the exploitation of the poor or propertyless. Clear ethical grounds must therefore be established in order to distinguish between what can be commended as liberty and what should be condemned as licence.

The problem with establishing the desirable realm of liberty is that there are a bewildering number of grounds upon which freedom can be upheld. In much liberal political thought (see p. 29), freedom is closely related to the notion of rights. As pointed out earlier, this occurs because the tendency is to treat freedom as a right or entitlement. Indeed, the two concepts become almost fused, as when 'rights' are described as 'liberties'. One of the attractions of a rights-based theory of freedom, whether these are thought to be 'natural', 'human' or 'civil' rights, is that it enables a clear distinction to be made between liberty and licence. In short, liberty means acting according to or within one's rights, whereas licence means to act beyond one's rights or, more particularly, to abuse the rights of others. For example, employers are exercising liberty when they are acting on the basis of their rights, derived perhaps from the ownership of property or from a contract of employment, but are straying into the realm of licence when they start to infringe upon the rights of their employees.

However, this distinction becomes more complex when it is examined closely. In the first place, rights are always balanced against one another, in the sense that most actions can have adverse consequences for other people. In this sense, freedom is a zero-sum game: when one person, an employer, gains more freedom, someone else, an employee, loses it. It is impossible, therefore, to ensure that the rights of all are respected. More serious, however, is the problem of defining who has rights and why. As emphasized in Chapter 7, individual rights are the subject of deep political

and ideological controversy. For example, whereas most liberals and conservatives insist that the right to property is a fundamental human right, many socialists and certainly communists would disagree. In the same way, socialists and modern liberals uphold the importance of social rights, like the right to health care and education, while supporters of the New Right have argued that individuals alone are responsible for such matters.

An alternative means of distinguishing between liberty and licence was proposed by J.S. Mill. As a libertarian who believed that individual freedom was the basis for moral self-development, Mill proposed that individuals should enjoy the greatest possible realm of liberty. However, as discussed in Chapter 6, Mill also recognized that unrestrained liberty could become oppressive, even tyrannical. In *On Liberty* ([1859] 1972), Mill proposed a clear distinction between 'self-regarding' actions and 'other-regarding' actions, suggesting that each individual should exercise sovereign control over his or her own body or life. The only justification for constraining the individual, Mill argued, was in the event of 'harm' being

John Stuart Mill (1806–73)

British philosopher, economist and politician. Mill was subjected to an intense and austere regime of education by his father, the utilitarian theorist James Mill, graphically described in his *Autobiography* (1873). This resulted in a mental collapse at the age of 20, after which he developed a more human philosophy influenced by Coleridge and the German Idealists. He founded and edited the *London Review* and was MP for Westminster, 1865–8.

Mill's work was crucial to the development of liberalism because it straddled the divide between classical and modern theories. In *On Liberty* ([1859] 1972) he advanced an eloquent defence of freedom based upon the principle that the only justification for restricting individual freedom is to prevent 'harm to others'. His opposition to collectivist tendencies and traditions, including those embodied in majoritarian democracy, was rooted in a commitment to 'individuality'. His essay, *Utilitarianism* ([1861] 1972), was designed to outline the basic themes of the utilitarian tradition (see p. 358), but departed from them in emphasising the difference between 'higher' and 'lower' pleasures. In *Considerations on Representative Government* ([1861] 1972), Mill discussed the representative and electoral mechanisms he believed would balance broader participation against the need for an intellectual and moral elite. *The Subjection of Women* (1869), written in collaboration with his wife Harriet Taylor, proposed that women should enjoy the same rights and liberties as men, including the right to vote.

done to others. In effect, the 'harm principle' indicates the point at which freedom becomes 'excessive', the point at which liberty becomes licence.

Although this distinction may appear to be clear and reliable, the notion of 'harm' being more concrete than the idea of 'rights', it nevertheless provokes controversy. This largely centres upon what is meant by 'harm'. If the principle is understood, as Mill intended it to be, to refer merely to physical harm, it allows a very broad range of actions to be regarded as liberty. Mill was clearly prepared to allow individuals absolute freedom to think, write and say whatever they wish, and also to allow them to undertake harmful actions, so long as they are self-regarding. Mill would not, therefore, have tolerated any form of censorship or restrictions upon the use of dangerous drugs. However, if the notion of 'harm' is broadened to include psychological, moral and even spiritual harm, it can be used to classify a far more extensive range of actions as licence. For example, the portrayal of violence, pornography or blasphemy on television may be regarded as morally harmful in the sense that it is corrupting and offensive. The same confusion occurs when 'harm' is taken to include economic or social disadvantage. For instance, the imposition of a pay freeze by an employer may not harm his or her employees in a physical sense but undoubtedly harms their interests.

Most attempts to distinguish between liberty and licence refer in some way to the principle of equality. If liberty is thought to be a fundamental value, surely it is one to which all human beings are entitled. Thus, those who employ a rights-based theory of freedom invariably acknowledge the importance of 'equal rights'; and Mill insisted that the 'harm principle' applied equally to all citizens. This implies that another way of distinguishing between liberty and licence is through the application of the principle of equal liberty. In other words, liberty becomes licence not when the rights of another are violated, or when harm is done to others, but when liberty is unequally shared out. John Rawls (see p. 298) expressed this in the principle that each person is entitled to the greatest possible liberty compatible with a like liberty for all. On the face of it, most liberal democracies respect the principle of equal liberty, reflected in the fact that, at least in theory, political, legal and social rights are available to all citizens. However, the doctrine of equal liberty is bedevilled by problems about how freedom is defined. If freedom consists of exercising a set of formal rights, the task of measuring freedom and ensuring that it is equally distributed is easy: it is necessary simply to ensure that no individual or group enjoys special privileges or suffers from particular disadvantages. This can be achieved by the establishment of formal equality, equality before the law. The matter becomes more complicated, however, if freedom is understood not as the possession of formal rights but as the opportunity to take advantage of these rights. Modern liberals and social

democrats (see p. 308), for example, argue that the principle of equal liberty points to the need to redistribute wealth and resources in society. Such disagreements go to the very heart of the debate about the nature of freedom and, in particular, to the difference between negative and positive conceptions of freedom.

Negative freedom

Freedom has been described as 'negative' in two different senses. In the first, law is seen as the main obstacle to freedom. Such a view is negative in the sense that freedom is limited only by what others deliberately prevent us from doing. Thomas Hobbes (see p. 123), for instance, described freedom as the 'silence of the laws'. This contrasts with 'positive' freedom, as modern liberals and socialists use the term, which focuses upon the *ability* to act, and so, for instance, sees a lack of material resources as a source of unfreedom. Isaiah Berlin (see p. 261), on the other hand, used the term in a different way. He defined negative freedom as 'an area within which a man can act unobstructed by others'; freedom therefore consists of a realm of unimpeded action. To so define negative freedom is, however, to include within its bounds the socialist view outlined above. What is in question is not the nature of freedom so much as the obstacles which impede that freedom – laws or social circumstances. As a result, Berlin used the term positive freedom to refer to autonomy or self-mastery, an idea that will be discussed more fully in the next section.

Although some have portrayed negative conceptions of freedom as value-free, it is difficult to deny that they have clear moral and ideological implications. If freedom refers, in some way, to the absence of external constraints upon the individual, a commitment to liberty implies that definite limits be placed upon both law and government. Law, by definition, constrains individuals and groups because, through the threat of punishment, it forces them to obey and to conform. To advocate that freedom should be maximized does not, however, mean that law should be abolished, but only that it should be restricted to the protection of one person's liberty from the encroachments of others. This is what John Locke (see p. 268) meant when he suggested that law does not restrict liberty so much as defend or enlarge it. Government should similarly be restricted to a 'minimal' role, amounting in practice to little more than the maintenance of domestic order and personal security. For this reason, advocates of negative freedom have usually supported the minimal state and sympathised with *laissez-faire* capitalism. This is not to say, however, that state intervention in the form of economic management or social welfare can never be justified, but only that it cannot be justified in terms of freedom. In other words, theorists who conceive of freedom in negative

terms always recognize a trade-off between equality and social justice on the one hand, and individual liberty on the other.

The notion of negative freedom has often been portrayed in the form of 'freedom of choice'. For example, in *Capitalism and Freedom* (1962) by Milton Friedman, 'economic freedom' consists of freedom of choice in the marketplace – the freedom of the consumer to choose what to buy, the freedom of the worker to choose a job or profession, the freedom of a producer to choose what to make and who to employ. According to Friedman, this vital freedom is found only in free market capitalist economies, in which 'freedom' in effect means the absence of government interference. The attraction of 'choice' to theorists of freedom is that it highlights an important aspect of individual liberty. To choose implies that the individual makes a voluntary or unhindered selection from among a range of alternatives or options. Consequently, it is reasonable to assume that a choice reflects a person's preferences, wants or needs. Quite simply, they are in a position to act otherwise if they so wish. When workers, for instance, select one job rather than another this surely indicates that that job is the one which best satisfies the inclinations and interests of the worker concerned. However, if freedom is reflected in the exercise of choice, the options available to the individual must be reasonable ones. What might be considered a 'reasonable' option may in practice be difficult to establish. For example, at times of high unemployment, or when most available jobs are poorly paid, is it possible to regard a worker's choice of a job as a voluntary and self-willed action? Indeed, classical Marxists (see p. 82) argue that since workers have no other means of subsistence they are best thought of as 'wage slaves': the likely alternative to work is poverty and destitution.

To conceive of freedom in negative terms, as the absence of external interference, links freedom very closely to the idea of privacy. Privacy is a deeply respected principle in Western societies, and is regarded by many as a core liberal-democratic value. Privacy suggests a distinction between a 'private' or personal realm of existence, and some kind of 'public' world. Advocates of negative freedom often regard this private sphere of life, consisting very largely of family and personal relationships, as a realm within which people can 'be themselves'. It is an arena in which individuals should therefore be left alone to do, say and think whatever they please. Any intrusion into the privacy of a person is, in this sense, an infringement of their liberty. To prize negative freedom is clearly to prefer the 'private' to the 'public', and to wish to enlarge the scope of the former at the expense of the latter. For example, a commitment to negative freedom could provide the basis for arguing that education, the arts, social welfare and economic life should be entirely 'private' and so be left to individuals to determine as they see fit. A very different tradition of political thought,

however, sees public life not as a realm of duty and unfreedom, but as an arena within which cooperation, altruism and social solidarity are promoted. From this point of view, the demand for privacy may simply reflect a flight from social responsibility into isolation, insularity and selfishness.

The case for negative freedom is based very firmly upon faith in the human individual and, in particular, in human rationality. Free from interference, coercion and even guidance, individuals are able to make their own decisions and fashion their own lives. The result of this will be, as Bentham (see p. 359) put it, the greatest happiness for the greatest number, simply because individuals are the only people who can be trusted to identify their own interests. Any form of paternalism, however well intentioned, robs the individual of responsibility for his or her own life, and so infringes upon liberty. This is not, of course, to argue that left to their own devices individuals will not make mistakes, both intellectual and moral, but simply to say that if they are in a position to learn from their mistakes they have a better opportunity to develop and grow as human beings. In short, morality can never be taught or imposed; it can only arise through voluntary action. In sharp contrast, however, opponents of negative freedom have suggested that it amounts to 'freedom to starve'. When individuals are simply 'left alone' they may be prey to economic misfortune or the arbitrary justice of the market; they may be in no position to make rational or informed choices. Such a line of thought has led to the emergence of a rival, 'positive' conception of freedom.

Positive freedom

As indicated earlier, positive freedom, no less than negative freedom, can be understood in two ways. For Berlin, positive freedom consists of 'being one's own master'. It is therefore equivalent to democracy – a people is said to be free if it is self-governing, and unfree if it is not. Thus freedom is concerned with the question 'By whom am I governed?' rather than 'How much am I governed?'. Indeed, a *demos* that imposes many restrictive laws on itself may be positively free but negatively quite unfree. In its other sense, however, positive freedom relates to the ideas of self-realization and personal development. Being likened to the capacity of human beings to act and fulfil themselves, this conception of freedom is more concerned with the distribution of material or economic resources. It is often seen as the antithesis of negative freedom in that, instead of justifying the contraction of state power, it is more commonly linked to welfarism and state intervention. The notion of positive freedom therefore encompasses a broad range of theories and principles, whose political implications are diverse and sometimes contradictory. In effect, freedom may be positive in

Isaiah Berlin (1909–97)

UK historian of ideas and philosopher. Born in Riga, Latvia, and brought up in St Petersburg, Berlin came to the UK in 1921. In the 1930s he became a member of a group of Oxford philosophers, which included A.J. Ayer, Stuart Hampshire and John Austin, who were distinguished by their staunch support for empiricism.

Berlin developed a form of liberal pluralism that was influenced by counter-Enlightenment thinkers such as Vico (1668–1744), Herder (1744–1803) and Herzen (1812–70). The central flaw of Enlightenment thought, for Berlin, was its monism, a defect that he traced back to Plato (see p. 21). In Berlin's view, since moral beliefs are not susceptible to rational analysis, the world must contain an indeterminate number of values, and these values are often incommensurate and irreconcilable. People, in short, will always disagree about the ultimate ends of life. This encouraged him to warn against the dangers of 'positive liberty' understood as self-mastery or self-realization. Whereas positive liberty can be used to map out the potentially totalitarian idea of a rationally ordained human future, 'negative liberty', understood as non-interference, is the best guarantee of freedom of choice and personal independence. Berlin's best known works include *Karl Marx* (1939), *Four Essays on Freedom* (1969) and *Against the Current* (1979).

that it stands for effective power, self-realisation, self-mastery or autonomy, or moral or 'inner' freedom.

One of the earliest critiques of negative freedom was developed by modern liberals in the late nineteenth century who found the stark injustices of industrial capitalism increasingly difficult to justify. Capitalism had swept away feudal obligations and legal restrictions but still left the mass of working people subject to poverty, unemployment, sickness and disease. Surely such social circumstances constrained freedom every bit as much as laws and other forms of social control. Behind such an argument, however, lies a very different conception of freedom, often traced back to the ideas of J.S. Mill. Although Mill appeared to endorse a negative conception of freedom, the individual's sovereign control over his or her own body and mind, he nevertheless asserted that the purpose of freedom was to encourage the attainment of individuality. 'Individuality' refers to the distinctive and unique character of each human individual, meaning that freedom comes to stand for personal growth or self-development. One of the first modern liberals openly to embrace a 'positive' conception of freedom was the UK philosopher T.H. Green (see p. 30), who defined freedom as the ability of people 'to make the most

and best of themselves'. This freedom consists not merely in being left alone but in having the effective power to act, shifting attention towards the opportunities available to each human individual. It is a form of freedom that has been eagerly adopted by modern social democrats, including Bryan Gould (1985) and Roy Hattersley (1985).

In the hands of modern liberals and social democrats, this conception of freedom has provided a justification for social welfare. The welfare state, in other words, enlarges freedom by 'empowering' individuals and freeing them from the social evils that blight their lives – unemployment, homelessness, poverty, ignorance, disease and so forth. However, to define freedom as effective power is not to abandon negative freedom altogether. All liberals, even modern ones, prefer individuals to make their own decisions and to expand the realm of personal responsibility. The state, therefore, only acts to enlarge liberty when it 'helps individuals to help themselves'. Once social disadvantage and hardship are abolished, citizens should be left alone to take responsibility for their own lives. Nevertheless, this doctrine of positive freedom has also been roundly criticized. Some commentators, for example, see it simply as a confusion in the use of language. Individuality, personal growth and self-development may be *consequences* of freedom, but they are not freedom itself. In other words, freedom is here being mistaken for 'power' or 'opportunity'. Moreover, other critics, particularly among the New Right, have argued that this doctrine has given rise to new forms of servitude since, by justifying broader state powers, it has robbed individuals of control over their own economic and social circumstances. This critique is discussed at greater length in Chapter 10, in relation to welfare.

Freedom has also been portrayed in the form of self-realization or self-fulfilment. Freedom in this sense is positive because it is based upon want-satisfaction or need-fulfilment. Socialists, for example, have traditionally portrayed freedom in this way, seeing it as the realization of one's own 'true' nature. Karl Marx (see p. 371), for instance, described the true realm of freedom as the 'development of human potential for its own sake'. This potential could be realized, Marx believed, only by the experience of creative labour, working together with others to satisfy our needs. From this point of view, Robinson Crusoe, who enjoyed the greatest possible measure of negative freedom since no one else on his island could check or constrain him, was a stunted and unfree individual, deprived of the social relationships through which human beings achieve fulfilment. This notion of freedom is clearly reflected in Marx's concept of 'alienation'. Under capitalism, labour is reduced to being a mere commodity, controlled and shaped by de-personalized market forces. In Marx's view, capitalist workers suffer from alienation in that they are separated from their own genuine or essential natures: they are alienated from the product of their

labour; alienated from the process of labour itself; alienated from their fellow human beings; and, finally, alienated from their 'true' selves. Freedom is therefore linked to the personal fulfilment which only unalienated labour can bring about.

There is no necessary link, however, between this conception of positive freedom and the expanded responsibilities of the state. Indeed, this form of freedom could be perfectly compatible with some form of negative freedom: the absence of external constraints may be a necessary condition for the achievement of self-realisation. In the case of anarchism, for example, the call for the abolition of all forms of political authority casts freedom in starkly negative terms, but the accompanying belief in cooperation and social solidarity gives it also a strongly positive character. For Marx, unalienated labour would be possible only within a classless, communist society in which the state, and with it all forms of political authority, had 'withered away'. Advocates of negative freedom, however, may nevertheless firmly reject this and other conceptions of positive freedom. By imposing a model of human nature upon the individual – assuming, in this case, sociable and cooperative behaviour – such ideas do not allow people simply to seek fulfilment in whatever way they may choose.

A final conception of positive freedom links the idea of liberty to the notions of personal autonomy and democracy. This is clearly reflected in the writings of Rousseau (see p. 242), who in *The Social Contract* ([1762] 1969) described liberty as 'obedience to a law one prescribes to oneself'. In Rousseau's view, freedom means self-determination, the ability to control and fashion one's own destiny. In other words, citizens are only 'free' when they participate directly and continuously in shaping the life of their community. This is the essence of what Berlin called 'positive freedom' and Constant referred to as 'the liberty of the ancients'. Both, however, argued that this conception of freedom is a serious threat to personal independence and civil liberty in the modern, negative sense, even though some republican theorists (see p. 205) have attempted to balance the claims of negative freedom against those of positive freedom. For Rousseau, freedom ultimately meant obedience to the general will, in effect, the common good of the community. In that sense, Rousseau believed the general will to be the 'true' will of each individual citizen, in contrast to their 'private' or selfish will. By obeying the general will, citizens are therefore doing nothing other than obeying their own 'true' natures. It follows, therefore, that those who refuse to obey the general will, so denying their own 'true' wills, should be compelled to do so by the community; they should, in Rousseau's words, be 'forced to be free'. Rousseau thus distinguished between a 'higher' and a 'lower' self, and identified freedom with moral or 'inner' liberty: a freedom from internal constraints like ignorance, selfishness, greed and so forth.

A very similar tradition of freedom can be found in the religious idea that 'perfect freedom' means doing the will of God, submitting to our 'moral' nature, rather than indulging our 'immoral' drives, inclinations and passions. However, such a conception of freedom may also be compatible with gross violations of what is generally taken to be political liberty. If citizens can be 'forced to be free', for instance, they are no longer in a position to determine for themselves what is freedom and what is unfreedom. The danger of any notion of 'inner' or 'higher' freedom is that it places the definition of freedom in the hands of another. The most grotesque manifestation of this conception of freedom is found in fascist theory, where the community is portrayed as an indivisible organic whole, its interests being articulated by a single all-powerful leader. In such circumstances, 'true' freedom comes to mean absolute submission to the will of the leader.

Toleration

Debate about the proper realm of individual freedom often centres upon the idea of toleration. How far should we tolerate the actions of our neighbours, and when, if ever, are we justified in constraining what they might do, think or say? By the same token, what kind of behaviour, opinions and beliefs should society be prepared to put up with? Toleration is both an ethical ideal and a social principle. On the one hand, it represents the goal of personal autonomy, but on the other hand, it establishes a set of rules about how human beings should interact with each another. In neither case, however, does toleration simply mean allowing people to act in whatever way they please. Toleration is a complex principle, whose meaning is often confused with related terms such as 'permissiveness' and 'indifference'. However, like freedom, the value of tolerance is often taken for granted; it is regarded as little more than a 'good thing'. What is the case for toleration, what advantages or benefits does it bring either society or the individual? Nevertheless, toleration is rarely considered to be an absolute ideal: at some point a line must be drawn between actions and views that are acceptable and ones that are simply 'intolerable'. What are the limits of toleration? Where should the line be drawn?

Toleration and difference

In everyday language, tolerance, the quality of being tolerant, is often understood to mean a willingness to 'leave alone' or 'let be', with little reflection upon the motives that lie behind such a stance. Indeed, from this