Chapter 9

Freedom, Toleration and Liberation

Introduction

The principle of freedom has customarily been treated by political thinkers with a degree of reverence that borders on religious devotion. Political literature is littered with proclamations that humankind should break free from some form of enslavement. Yet the popularity of freedom is often matched by confusion about what the term actually means, and why it is so widely respected. Is freedom, for instance, an unconditional good, or does it have costs or drawbacks? How much freedom should individuals and groups enjoy? At the heart of such questions, however, lies a debate about precisely what it means to be 'free'. Does freedom mean being left alone to act as one chooses, or does it imply some kind of fulfilment, self-realization or personal development?

Confusion is also caused by the fact that freedom is often associated with a range of other terms, notably liberty, toleration and liberation. Most people treat 'freedom' and 'liberty' as interchangeable terms and they will be regarded as synonymous in what follows. 'Toleration', however, is different from freedom but there is a sense in which it can also be thought of as a manifestation of freedom. As the willingness to put up with actions or opinions with which we may disagree, toleration affords individuals a broader opportunity to act as they please or choose. In the eyes of many, toleration is an essential precondition for harmony and social stability, guaranteeing that we can live together without encroaching upon one another's rights and liberties. Others, nevertheless, warn that toleration can also go too far, encouraging people to tolerate the intolerable and threatening the very basis of social existence. In the twentieth century, moreover, a new language of freedom emerged in the growth of so-called 'liberation' movements, proclaiming the need for national liberation, women's liberation, sexual liberation and so forth. The idea of liberation seems to promise a more complete and 'inner' fulfilment than more conventional terms like liberty and emancipation imply. However, why have oppressed groups been drawn to the idea of liberation, and does the idea of liberation in any sense represent a distinctive and coherent form of freedom?

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

point of view, toleration suggests inaction, a refusal to interfere or willingness to 'put up with' something. Toleration, however, refers to a particular form of inaction, based upon moral reasoning and a specific set of circumstances. In particular, toleration must be distinguished from permissiveness, blind indifference and willing indulgence. For example, a parent who simply ignores the unruly behaviour of his or her children, or a passer-by who chooses not to interfere to apprehend a mugger, cannot be said to be exhibiting 'tolerance'.

Toleration has been closely associated with the liberal tradition, though it finds support among socialists and some conservatives. Toleration implies a refusal to interfere with, constrain or check the behaviour or beliefs of others. However, this non-interference exists in spite of the fact that the behaviour and beliefs in question are disapproved of, or simply disliked. Toleration, in other words, is not morally neutral. In that sense, toleration is a form of forbearance: it exists when there is a clear capacity to impose one's views on another but a deliberate refusal to do so. Putting up with what cannot be changed is clearly not toleration. It would be absurd, for example, to describe a slave as tolerant of his servitude simply because he chooses not to rebel. Similarly, a battered wife who stays with her abusive husband out of fear can hardly be said to tolerate his behaviour.

Although toleration means forbearance, a refusal to impose one's will on others, it does not simply mean non-interference. The fact that a moral judgement is made leaves the opportunity open for influence to be exerted over others, but only in the form of rational persuasion. There is undoubtedly a difference, for example, between 'permitting' a person to smoke and 'tolerating' their smoking. In the latter case, the fact that smoking is disapproved of, or disliked, may be registered, and an attempt made to persuade the person to stop or even give up smoking. However, toleration demands that forms of persuasion be restricted to rational argument and debate, because once some form of cost or punishment is imposed, even in the form of social ostracism, the behaviour in question is being constrained. It is difficult, for instance, to argue that smoking is being tolerated if it could lead to the loss of friendship or to damage to career prospects, or if it can only take place in a restricted area. In fact, these are better examples of intolerant behaviour.

Intolerance refers, quite obviously, to a refusal to accept the actions, views or beliefs of others. Not only is there moral disapproval or simple dislike, but there is also some kind of attempt to impose constraints upon others. However, the term intolerance undoubtedly has pejorative connotations. Whereas 'tolerance' (the quality of being tolerant) is usually thought to be laudable and even enlightened – a tolerant person is patient, forgiving and philosophical – 'intolerance' suggests an unreasoned and

unjustified objection to the views or actions of another, bringing it close to bigotry or naked prejudice. Intolerance suggests an objection to that which should have been tolerated. Thus laws which discriminate against people on grounds of race, colour, religion, gender or sexual preference, are often described as intolerant. The apartheid system which developed in South Africa is clearly therefore an example of racial intolerance; while the imposition of dress codes upon women and their exclusion from professional and public life in fundamentalist Islamic states can be described as sexual intolerance. On the other hand, there is also a sense in which tolerance can imply weakness or simply a lack of moral courage. If something is 'wrong', surely it should be stopped. This aspect of tolerance is conveyed by the term 'intolerable', meaning that something should no longer be accepted and, indeed, *can* no longer be accepted. There are, quite simply, no grounds for tolerating the intolerable. In certain circumstances, therefore, intolerance may not only be defensible – it may even be a moral duty.

Since the late twentieth century, however, some political thinkers have gone beyond liberal toleration and endorsed the more radical idea of difference. Difference goes further than toleration in endorsing forms of diversity, in that it is based upon the idea of moral neutrality. Whereas liberals have traditionally sought to uncover a set of fundamental values that allow personal autonomy to coexist with political order, modern pluralist thinkers have been more concerned to create conditions in which people with different moral and material priorities can live together peacefully and profitably. Such a view is based upon the belief, expressed most forcibly in the writings of Isaiah Berlin, that conflicts of value are intrinsic to human life. People, in short, are bound to disagree about the ultimate ends of life. The pluralist stance has been upheld in one of two ways. The first of these accepts moral relativism, the idea that there are no absolute values or standards, implying that ethics is a matter of personal judgement for each human being. From this point of view, for example, homosexuality, smoking, abortion or female dress codes can be regarded as morally correct in that the freely chosen behaviour of the people concerned makes it so. The alternative position regards large areas of life as being morally indifferent. In this case, the acceptance of homosexuality, smoking, abortion or female dress codes may simply reflect the belief that there is nothing morally wrong with these practices; they are not matters about which moral judgements should be made. The politics of difference thus implies what John Gray (1996) termed a 'post-liberal' position in which liberal values, institutions and regimes no longer enjoy a monopoly of legitimacy. This, in turn, undermines any attempt to discourage or forbid beliefs or practices on the grounds that they are intolerant or illiberal.

The case for toleration

Toleration is one of the core values of Western culture and may even be its defining one. Indeed, it is commonly believed that human and social progress is tied up with the advance of toleration and that intolerance is somehow 'backward'. For example, it is widely argued that as Western societies have abandoned restrictions upon religious worship, ceased to confine women to subordinate social roles, and tried to counter racial discrimination and prejudice, they have thereby become more 'socially enlightened'. As the climate of toleration has spread from religious to moral and political life, it has enlarged the realm of what is usually taken to be individual liberty. The cherished civil liberties which underpin liberal-democratic political systems – freedom of speech, association, religious worship and so forth – are all, in effect, guarantees of toleration. Moreover, although it may be impossible to legislate bigotry and prejudice out of existence, the law has increasingly been used to extend toleration rather than constrain it, as in the case of legislation prohibiting discrimination on grounds of race, religion, gender and sexual preference. What this does not demonstrate, however, is why toleration has been so highly regarded in the first place.

The case for toleration first emerged during the Reformation of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, a time when the rising Protestant sects challenged the authority of the Pope and the established Catholic church. Preaching the new and radical doctrine of 'individual salvation', Protestantism generated a strong tradition of religious dissent, reflected in the work of writers such as John Milton (1608–74) and John Locke. In *A Letter Concerning Toleration* ([1689] 1963), Locke advanced a number of arguments in favour of toleration. He suggested, for instance, that as the proper function of the state is to protect life, liberty and property, it has no right to meddle in 'the care of men's souls'. However, Locke's central argument was based upon a belief in human rationality. 'Truth' will only emerge out of free competition among ideas and beliefs and must therefore be left to 'shift for herself'. Religious truth can only be established by the individual for himself or herself; it cannot be taught, and should not be imposed by government. Indeed, Locke pointed out that even if religious truths could be known, they should not be imposed upon dissenters because religious belief is ultimately a matter of personal faith.

Locke's argument amounts to a restatement of the case for privacy, and has been widely accepted in liberal democracies within which the distinction between public and private life is regarded as vital. Toleration should be extended to all matters regarded as 'private' on the grounds that, like religion, they fall within a realm of personal faith rather than revealed truth. Many would argue, therefore, that moral questions should be left to

John Locke (1632–1704)

English philosopher and politician. Born in Somerset, Locke studied medicine at Oxford before becoming secretary to Anthony Ashley Cooper, first Earl of Shaftesbury. His political views were developed against the background of, and were shaped by, the English Revolution.

Locke was a consistent opponent of absolutism (see p. 164) and is often portrayed as the philosopher of the 'Glorious Revolution' of 1688, which established a constitutional monarchy in England. He is usually seen as a key thinker of early liberalism. His *Two Treatises of Civil Government* ([1690] 1965) used social contract theory to emphasise the importance of natural rights, identified as the right to 'life, liberty and estate (property)'. As the purpose of government is to protect such rights, government should be limited and representative; however, the priority he accorded property rights prevented him from endorsing political equality or democracy in the modern sense. His *A Letter Concerning Toleration* ([1689] 1963) defends freedom of religious conscience on the grounds that rulers are always uncertain about the meaning of true religion; but he allowed that religion could be constrained if it threatened order, which meant, Locke argued, not extending toleration to atheists or Roman Catholics.

the individual to decide simply because no government is in a position to define 'truth', and even if it were it would have no right to impose it upon its citizens. In 'public' affairs, however, where the interests of society are at stake, there is a clearer case for limiting toleration. Locke, for example, was not prepared to extend the principle of toleration to Roman Catholics, who, in his view, were a threat to national sovereignty since they gave allegiance to a foreign Pope.

Perhaps the most famous defence of toleration was made in the nineteenth century in J.S. Mill's *On Liberty* ([1859] 1972). For Mill, toleration was of fundamental importance to both the individual and society. Whereas Locke outlined a distinctive case for toleration in itself, Mill saw toleration as little more than one face of individual liberty. At the heart of Mill's case for toleration lies a belief in individuals as autonomous agents, free to exercise sovereign control over their own lives and circumstances. Autonomy, in his view, is an essential condition for any form of personal or moral development; it therefore follows that intolerance, restricting the range of individual choice, can only debase and corrupt the individual. Mill was, for this reason, particularly fearful of the threat to autonomy posed by the spread of democracy and what he called 'the despotism of custom'. The greatest threat to individual freedom lay not in restrictions imposed by formal laws but in the influence of public

opinion in a majoritarian age. Mill feared that the spread of 'conventional wisdom' would promote dull conformity and encourage individuals to submit their rational faculties to the popular prejudices of the age. As a result, he extolled the virtues of individuality and even eccentricity.

In Mill's view, toleration is not only vital for the individual but it is also an essential condition for social harmony and progress. Toleration provides the necessary underpinning for any balanced and healthy society. As with other liberals, Mill subscribed to an empiricist theory of knowledge, which suggests that 'truth' will only emerge out of constant argument, discussion and debate. If society is to progress, good ideas have to displace bad ones, truth has to conquer falsehood. This is the virtue of cultural and political diversity: it ensures that all theories will be 'tested' in free competition against rival ideas and doctrines. Moreover, this process has to be intense and continuous because no final or absolute truth can ever be established. Even democratic elections provide no reliable means of establishing truth because, as Mill argued, the majority may be wrong. The intellectual development and moral health of society therefore demand the scrupulous maintenance of toleration. Mill expressed this most starkly by insisting that if the whole of society apart from a single individual held the same opinion, they would have no more right to impose their views upon the individual than the individual would have to impose his or her views upon society.

Limits of toleration

Although widely regarded in Western societies as an enlightened quality, toleration is rarely regarded as an absolute virtue. Toleration should be limited simply because it can become 'excessive'. This is particularly clear in relation to actions that are abusive or damaging. No one would advocate, for instance, that toleration should be extended to actions which, in Mill's words, do 'harm to others'. However, what people believe, what they say or may write about, raises much more difficult questions. One line of argument, usually associated with the liberal tradition, suggests that what people think and the words they use are entirely their own business. Words, after all, do no harm. To interfere with freedom of conscience, or freedom of expression, is simply to violate personal autonomy. On the other hand, it is possible to argue that both the individual and society may be endangered by the failure to set limits to what people can say or believe. For example, toleration itself may need to be protected from intolerant ideas and opinions. In addition, it is possible that words themselves may be harmful, either in the sense that they can cause anxiety, alarm or offence, or in that they may foster aggressive or damaging forms of behaviour.

Political toleration is usually regarded as an essential condition for both liberty and democracy. Political pluralism, the unrestricted expression of all political philosophies, ideologies and values, ensures that individuals are able to develop their own views within an entirely free market of ideas, and that political parties compete for power on a level playing field. However, should toleration be extended to the intolerant? Should parties which reject political pluralism and which, if elected to power, would ban other parties and suppress open debate, be allowed to operate legally? The basis for banning such parties is surely that toleration is not granted automatically, it has to be earned. In that sense, all moral values are reciprocal: only the tolerant deserve to be tolerated, only political parties which accept the rules of the democratic game have a right to participate in it. The danger of failing to appreciate this point was dramatically underlined by the example of Hitler and the German Nazis. The Weimar Republic, created in 1918, remodelled Germany on liberal-democratic lines; it introduced a highly proportional electoral system and permitted unrestricted political competition. Despite the failed Munich *putsch* of 1923, which demonstrated the anti-constitutional character of the Nazis, Hitler was soon able to portray himself once again as a respectable and democratic politician. This charade was, however, exposed within weeks of Hitler coming to power in 1933, as he set about banning other parties, manipulating elections and eventually constructing a one-party Nazi dictatorship. By contrast, the Federal Republic of Germany, born after the war, took steps to protect itself from excessive toleration, taking upon itself the power to ban anti-constitutional parties and by depriving parties with less than 5 per cent support of representation in the Bundestag.

On the other hand, to ban political parties or suppress the expression of political views, even in defence of toleration, may simply contribute to the disease itself. Intolerance in the name of toleration is certainly ambiguous and may be impossible. In the first place, political intolerance of any kind can lead to witch-hunts and stimulate a climate of suspicion and paranoia. In the USA in the 1950s, for instance, Senator Joseph McCarthy's House Un-American Activities Committee aimed to root out card-carrying communists, whose political allegiances were to Moscow rather than Washington, and whose Marxist-Leninist principles made them sympathetic towards Soviet-style single party rule. However, the definition of what was 'un-American' expanded to encompass democratic socialists, left liberals and progressives of all kinds, and McCarthyism came to resemble the kind of political intolerance it was designed to fight. In practice, to define terms such as 'extremist', 'undemocratic', 'anti-constitutional' and so forth, is notoriously difficult. Moreover, it is often argued that to ban parties for the expression of bigoted, insulting or offensive views does little to combat them, but, by driving them underground, may actually help

them to grow stronger. Intolerance cannot be combated by intolerance; the best way of tackling it is to expose it to criticism and defeat it in argument. At the heart of such an argument lies faith in the power of human reason: if the competition is fair, good ideas will push out bad ones. The problem is, however, as demonstrated by the history of Weimar Germany, that at times of economic crisis and political instability 'bad' ideas can possess a remarkable potency.

The issue of censorship raises similar questions about the limits of toleration. The traditional liberal position is that what a person reads or watches, and how a person conducts his or her personal life and sexual relationships, is entirely a matter of individual choice. No 'harm' is done to anyone – so long as only 'consenting adults' are involved – or to society. Others argue, however, that tolerance amounts to nothing more than the right to allow that which is 'wrong'. Mere disapproval of immorality is no way of fighting evil. Such a view has been, for example, advanced in the USA since the 1980s by groups such as Moral Majority and by a growing number of neo-conservative critics, who warned that a society that is not bound together by a common culture and shared beliefs faces the likely prospect of decay and disintegration. This position, however, is based upon the assumption that there exists an authoritative moral system – in this case, usually fundamentalist Christianity – which is capable of distinguishing between 'right' and 'wrong'. In the absence of an objective definition of 'evil', society is in no position to save the individual from moral corruption. In modern multicultural and multi-faith societies it has to be doubted that any set of values can be regarded as authoritative. To define certain values as 'established', 'traditional' or 'majority' values may simply be an attempt to impose a particular moral system upon the rest of society.

A specific ground for censorship is sometimes suggested in the notion of offence. For example, the portrayal of sex and violence in literature, television and the cinema is sometimes regarded as an 'obscenity' in the sense that it provokes disgust and outrages accepted standards of moral decency. The 'Rushdie affair', however, has highlighted the particular importance of religious offence, and raised questions which strain the conventional understanding of toleration. In 1989 the Iranian religious leader Ayatollah Khomeini (see p. 103) issued a *fatwa* or religious order sentencing to death the UK author Salman Rushdie for the publication of his book *The Satanic Verses*. The basis for the *fatwa* was that the book offends against the most cherished of Islamic principles, the sacred image of the Prophet Mohammed. From the traditional liberal viewpoint, this action amounts to a gross violation of both Rushdie's rights as a human individual and the principle of tolerance. It is no more defensible to forbid the criticism of religious ideas than it is to enforce religious views upon others.

However, although liberals firmly believe that to prohibit a book, speech or idea on the grounds that it is 'wrong' is unacceptable, they may nevertheless not be insensitive to the offence which has been caused. There is little doubt in this case, for instance, that, regardless of its contents, the book is regarded by Muslims in many parts of the world as a threat to the very foundation of Islamic culture and self-respect. Some have suggested, as a result, that when offence goes to the core of a community's identity it may provide grounds for limiting toleration. At the same time, of course, what Islamic fundamentalists have called for offends against the most fundamental principles of Western culture. What this conflict perhaps highlights, therefore, is the incompatibility of the liberal-democratic principle of tolerance and any form of religious fundamentalism.

A final argument in favour of censorship is based upon the belief that what people read, hear or think is likely to shape their social behaviour. In the case of pornography, for example, an unlikely alliance has been forged between feminist groups concerned about violence against women, and neo-conservatives who support what has been called the 'New Puritanism'. Both groups believe that the debased and demeaning portrayal of women in newspapers, on television and in the cinema has contributed to a rise in the number of rapes and other crimes against women. Such a link between the expression of views and social behaviour has long been accepted in the case of racism. The incitement of racial hatred has been made illegal in Britain and many other liberal democracies on the grounds that it encourages, or at least legitimizes, racist attacks and creates a climate of genuine apprehension within minority communities. However, unlike racist literature which may openly call for attacks upon minority groups, the link between the portrayal of women in the media, in advertising and throughout popular culture, and the abusive or criminal behaviour of men, may be more difficult to establish. The processes at work in the latter case are largely insidious and unconscious, not easily susceptible to empirical investigation.

Liberation

Since the 1960s, the term 'liberation' has increasingly been used to describe both political movements and the goal they strive for. The fight against colonialism in the developing world was often portrayed as a struggle for 'national liberation'. The feminist movement was reborn as the women's liberation movement, and came to embrace the goal of 'sexual liberation'. Radical priests in Latin America who denounced social inequality and political oppression embraced what they called Liberation Theology. At

first sight, liberation merely seems to be a synonym for freedom; after all, to 'liberate' means to free or to escape. However, the term is more than just a fashionable slogan. It denotes a particular form of political liberty and a distinctive style of political movement. Liberation implies not merely the removal of constraints upon the individual or even the promotion of individual self-development, but rather the overthrow of what is seen as an all-encompassing system of subjugation and oppression. Liberation marks nothing less than a historic break with the past: the past represents oppression and unfreedom, while the future offers the prospect of complete human satisfaction. The term liberation therefore tends to possess a quasi-religious character in that, whether it refers to an oppressed nation, ethnic group, gender or an entire society, it offers a vision of human life as entirely satisfying and completely fulfilling.

Although liberation movements, which proclaim the possibility of complete emancipation from a pervasive 'system of exploitation', are usually regarded as a modern development, the roots of the idea lie in a much older tradition of political millenarianism. Literally, this means a belief in the 'millennium', the establishment on earth of a thousand-year 'Kingdom of God'. Millenarian sects and movements, such as the Diggers of the English Civil War and the Shakers and Mormons of nineteenth-century USA, often espoused political beliefs and values as well as religious doctrines. They sought, in other words, to establish an entirely new system of living. For instance, under the leadership of Gerrard Winstanley the Diggers argued not only for the overthrow of clerical privilege but also for a crude type of communism. Although modern liberation movements may not embrace millenial beliefs, or, with the exception of Liberation Theology, openly endorse religious doctrines, they nevertheless practise a highly moralistic style of politics. Existing society is rejected as fundamentally corrupt, and a utopian future is eagerly anticipated. This is why many conservatives and some liberals see liberation politics as positively dangerous, believing that it turns the rationalist principle of individual freedom into a quasi-mystical doctrine.

National liberation

Nationalist movements have been in existence since the early nineteenth century. Traditionally, the goal of nationalism has been the establishment of national self-determination, brought about either through unification or by the overthrow of foreign rule. The goal of 'national liberation', however, is of more modern origin and reflects the emergence of the new and more radical style of nationalist politics embraced by self-styled 'liberation fronts' and linked to the ideas of anticolonialism (see p. 102). For example, in 1954, under the leadership of Ahmed Ben Bella, an

Algerian National Liberation Front was founded to fight the French; a Vietnamese National Liberation Front was formed in 1960 by groups opposed, first, to the South Vietnamese Ngo Dinh Diem regime and, subsequently, to US involvement; and 1964 saw the formation of the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO), an umbrella organization which campaigned against Israel for the formation of a secular Palestinian state. By adopting the goal of national liberation such groups were setting themselves apart from more traditional forms of nationalism, both conservative nationalism, which tended to be insular and backward-looking, and liberal nationalism, which campaigned for the limited goals of independence and national unification. National liberation, by contrast, fused nationalist and socialist goals: 'liberation' stood not just for independence but also for full economic and social emancipation. Indeed, the goal of national liberation moved nationalism beyond its traditional political objective – the formation of a nation-state – by holding out the prospect of social revolution, cultural renewal and even psychological regeneration.

National liberation movements typically embraced some form of revolutionary socialism, usually Marxism. On the surface, nationalism and Marxism share little in common except mutual antipathy. Marxism, for instance, espouses a form of internationalism, and has usually regarded nationalism as, at best, a deviation from the class struggle, if not as a form of 'bourgeois ideology'. Nevertheless, Marxism exerted a powerful appeal in the developing world, both because it offered an analysis of oppression and exploitation that helped to make sense of the colonial experience, and because it held out the prospect of fundamental social change. The form of Marxism adopted was usually Marxism-Leninism, Lenin's (see p. 83) unbending commitment to a revolutionary road to socialism coincided with the belief of many Third-World nationalists that colonialism could be overthrown only by a violent uprising, an 'armed struggle'. Moreover, Lenin had been the first Marxist thinker to draw attention to the economic roots of colonialism. In *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism* ([1916] 1970) he portrayed imperialism as a form of economic exploitation through which capitalist countries maintained profit levels by exporting capital to the developing world and by gaining the benefits of cheap labour and raw materials. National liberation thus came to mean much more than simply the overthrow of colonial rule: it promised an end to all forms of oppression, colonial, social and economic, and so held out the prospect of full economic and political emancipation.

The idea of national liberation also has an important cultural dimension. Colonial oppression is often thought to operate as much through cultural stereotypes and values as through political control, military power and economic manipulation. Colonialism is so difficult to root out

because, in a sense, it has been 'internalized'; colonized peoples find it difficult to challenge or throw off colonial rule because they have been indoctrinated by a culture of inferiority, passivity and subordination. Such an analysis has been particularly evident within the black liberation movement in the USA and elsewhere. Stokely Carmichael (1968), for example, one of the Black Power leaders of the 1960s, proclaimed that he was fighting in the USA and throughout the Third World a 'system of international white supremacy coupled with international capitalism'. The root of this system, however, was what Carmichael called 'cultural imposition', a process through which the oppressed are encouraged to regard their oppression as natural, inevitable and unchallengeable. The first step to rebelling against this all-pervasive oppression is therefore an 'inner' refusal, a form of cultural renewal. As a result, the black nationalist movement has often stressed the need for 'consciousness raising' and a rediscovery of pride in its black or Afro-American and Afro-Caribbean roots. Such ideas led the Jamaican political thinker and activist, Marcus Garvey (see p. 103), to found the African Orthodox Church in an effort to inculcate a distinctive black consciousness, and in the 1960s led to the growth of the Black Muslim movement under the leadership of Malcolm X.

The 'inner' or psychological dimension of national liberation was emphasized by the Algerian revolutionary and psychiatrist, Franz Fanon (see p. 103). In *The Wretched of the Earth* (1962), written in the light of the Algerian liberation struggle, Fanon developed a powerful critique of the psychological impact of colonialism. In Fanon's view, colonialism has created a culture of subordination which renders colonial peoples politically impotent and incapable of rebellion. He argued that the only way to break through this impotence and passivity was through the regenerative experience of violence: only by killing or attacking the colonial master can the slave regain a sense of pride, power and purpose. In this way, therefore, 'national liberation' ultimately proclaims the need for a revolution of the human psyche.

Sexual liberation

As with nationalist movements, the feminist or women's movement (see p. 62) first emerged in the nineteenth century. During that period and for the early part of the twentieth century it was principally concerned with liberal values such as equal rights and with the goal of political emancipation, in particular, the quest for female suffrage. This is usually referred to as 'first-wave' feminism. During the 1960s, however, a more radical and militant wing of the feminist movement emerged, styling itself the women's liberation movement. In one sense, the idea of 'women's liberation' came to stand broadly for any action that would improve the

social role of women. However, at the same time the use of the term 'liberation' indicated a more radical, even revolutionary, analysis of female oppression, and the development of a new style of politics. It is these radical theories that have given modern or 'second-wave' feminism its distinctive character.

Radical feminists differ from their predecessors in believing that women are not merely disadvantaged by a lack of rights or opportunities, or by economic inequality, but are confronted by a system of sexist oppression which pervades every aspect of life, political, economic, social, personal and sexual. This system of oppression is often described as 'patriarchy', literally the 'rule of the father' but is usually taken to describe the dominance of men and subordination of women in society at large. For radical feminists such as Kate Millett (see p. 63), patriarchy has been a social constant; it is found in all societies, contemporary and historical. Moreover, patriarchy is the most pervasive and fundamental form of political oppression, gender inequality running deeper than class exploitation, racial discrimination and so forth. To call for 'women's liberation' is therefore to demand not just political reform but a social, cultural and personal revolution: the overthrow of patriarchy.

Radical feminists have emphasized the degree to which patriarchy is rooted in a process of cultural domination. In *Patriarchal Attitudes* ([1970] 1987), Eva Figes drew attention to the prevalence of patriarchal values and beliefs in modern culture, philosophy, morality and religion. Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics* ([1970] 1990) highlights the sexist character, even misogyny, of much modern literature, and analyses the process of 'conditioning' through which from a very early age boys and girls are encouraged to conform to very specific gender identities. In Millett's view, male domination is reproduced in each generation by the family, 'patriarchy's chief institution', which systematically prepares boys for the role of domination and accustoms girls to accepting subordination. This is why modern feminists insist that 'the personal is the political'. At the very least, the goal of liberation means a re-examination of traditional family roles and a redistribution of domestic and child-rearing responsibilities. For some radical feminists, it may require the outright abolition of the family and a wholesale social revolution. This revolution, however, seeks to address not merely economic, social and political issues but also opens up the prospect of personal development and, above all, sexual fulfilment.

The idea of 'sexual liberation' has developed out of the writings of the Austrian psychiatrist and founder of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud (1856–1939). Freud's writings were noted amongst other things for the stress he placed upon the role of sexuality or what he came to call the 'pleasure principle'. In his view, the desire for sexual gratification was the most powerful of all human drives, other activities like work, sport and

intellectual enquiry being the result of sublimated sexual energy. For Freud himself, sublimation was the very foundation of an ordered and civilised society: without it human beings would simply embark upon unrestrained sexual fulfilment, leaving all other considerations to one side. Later thinkers, however, drew more radical conclusions from Freud's work.

One of Freud's pupils, Wilhelm Reich (1897–1957), invented the term 'sexual politics' to describe what he believed to be a struggle within society between freedom and authority. Reich argued that by misdirecting sexual energy, in his view the life-force itself, the authoritarian structures that pervade modern society had created psychic damage and personal unhappiness. In *The Function of the Orgasm* ([1948] 1973), Reich went on to advocate unrestricted sexual freedom, and towards the end of his life he claimed to have invented a device that could capture and accumulate the sexual life-force, called 'orgone', from the environment. The idea of sexual liberation was further advanced by Herbert Marcuse (see p. 280). Marcuse's *Eros and Civilisation* ([1955] 1969) developed a scathing attack on contemporary society by, in effect, turning Freudianism on its head. In Marcuse's view, modern industrial society is characterised by 'sexual repression', brought about not by the need for social order but by capitalism's desire for a disciplined and obedient workforce. Marcuse argued that there was a biological basis for socialism in the form of the need to liberate the sexual or libidinal instinct from repressive capitalism. Ultimately, sexual liberation would involve the re-sexualization of the whole body and the rediscovery of what Freud had called 'polymorphous perversity'.

Such ideas have had considerable impact upon those sections of the women's movement that see patriarchy as an all-encompassing system of female subordination. Patriarchy, in other words, is reflected not merely in the social and political subjection of women but also in their sexual repression. In *The Female Eunuch* ([1970] 1985), Germaine Greer suggested that male domination had had a devastating effect upon the personal quality of women's lives. Women had effectively been 'castrated' by the cultural myth of the 'eternal feminine', which demanded that they be passive, submissive and asexual creatures. As a result, women's liberation would be marked by personal and sexual emancipation in that they would for the first time be able to seek gratification as active and autonomous human beings. Similar ideas have also been developed by the gay and lesbian movement. Radical lesbians, for instance, have sometimes pointed out what in their view are the inadequacies of heterosexual relationships. They argue that heterosexual sex is implicitly oppressive because penetration is a symbol of male domination. The nature of women's sexuality has also been the subject of analysis and debate. For example, in her essay 'The Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm' (1973), Anne

Koedt took issue with Freud's notion that only through intercourse could women experience a 'mature' orgasm, highlighting instead the importance of the clitoris in the achievement of female sexual fulfilment.

Politics of liberation

In the 1960s, 'liberation' was a demand made not only on behalf of specific groups – colonial peoples, women, gays and lesbians – but also in relation to the entire society. The quest for liberation was the rallying cry of a broad collection of groups broadly classified as the New Left. Although the New Left lacked theoretical and organisational coherence, embracing movements as diverse as feminism, environmentalism, student activism and anti-Vietnam War protest, it was distinguished by its rejection of both 'old left' alternatives on offer. Soviet-style state socialism in Eastern Europe was regarded as authoritarian and oppressive; Western social democracy was thought to be hopelessly compromised, lacking both vision and principles. By contrast, the New Left adopted a radical style of political activism which extolled the virtues of popular participation and direct action. The revolutionary character of this new political style was clearly revealed by the events of May 1968 in France, the month-long rebellion by students and young workers.

Many in the New Left were attracted by the revolutionary character of Marxist thought, but strove to remodel and revise it to make it applicable to advanced industrial societies that had achieved a high level of material affluence. Whereas orthodox Marxists had developed an economic critique of capitalism, emphasising the importance of exploitation, economic inequality and class war, the New Left, influenced by critical theory and anarchist ideas, underlined the way in which capitalism had produced a system of ideological and cultural domination. The enemy was therefore no longer simply the class system or a repressive state but rather 'the system', an all-encompassing process of repression that operated through the family, the educational system, conventional culture, work, politics and so on. In this context, 'political liberation' came to mean nothing less than a negation of the existing society, a radical break or, as Marcuse described it, a 'leap into the realm of freedom – a total rupture'. Once again, 'liberation' held out the prospect of cultural, personal and psychological revolution and not merely political change; at the same time it created the image of a fully satisfying and personally fulfilling society of the future.

Herbert Marcuse was probably the most influential thinker within the New Left. Not only did Marcuse develop a biological critique of capitalism in terms of sexual repression, but he also tried to explain how

Critical theory

Critical theory refers to the work of the so-called Frankfurt School, the Institute of Social Research, which was established in Frankfurt in 1923, relocated in the USA in the 1930s, and was re-established in Frankfurt in the early 1950s. The Institute was dissolved in 1969. Two phases in the development of critical theory can be identified. The first was associated with the theorists who dominated the institute's work in the pre-war and early post-war period, notably Horkheimer, Adorno and Marcuse. The second phase stems from the work of the major post-war exponent of critical theory, Habermas.

Critical theory does not and has never constituted a unified body of work. However, certain general themes tend to distinguish Frankfurt thinkers as a school. The original intellectual and political inspiration for critical theory was Marxism (see p. 82). However, critical theorists were repelled by Stalinism, criticized the determinist and scientistic tendencies in orthodox Marxism, and were disillusioned by the failure of Marx's predictions about the inevitable collapse of capitalism. Frankfurt thinkers therefore developed a form of neo-Marxism that focused more heavily upon the analysis of ideology than upon economics and no longer treated the proletariat as the revolutionary agent. They also blended Marxist insights with the ideas of thinkers such as Kant (see p. 117), Hegel (see p. 59), Weber and Freud. Critical theory is characterized by the attempt to extend the notion of critique to all social practices by linking substantive social research to philosophy. In so doing, it not merely looks beyond the classical principles and methodology of Marxism but also cuts across a range of traditionally discrete disciplines, including economics, sociology, philosophy, psychology and literary criticism.

Critical theory has itself attracted criticism, however. First-generation Frankfurt thinkers in particular were criticized for advancing a theory of social transformation that was often disengaged from the ongoing social struggle. Moreover, they were accused of over-emphasizing the capacity of capitalism to absorb oppositional forces, and thus of underestimating the crisis tendencies within capitalist society. On the other hand, critical theory has brought about important political and social insights through the cross-fertilization of academic disciplines and by straddling the divide between Marxism and conventional social theory. It has also provided a continuingly fertile and imaginative perspective from which the problems and contradictions of existing society can be explored.

Key figures

Max Horkheimer (1895–1973) A German philosopher and social psychologist, Horkheimer pioneered the interdisciplinary approach that was to become characteristic of critical theory. His principal concern was to analyse the psychic and ideological mechanisms through which class societies contain conflict. He explained totalitarianism in terms of the psychological, racial and political tendencies of liberal capitalism, and argued that the advent of

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'mass society' and the dominance of the 'culture industry' had made old ideological divisions irrelevant and threatened permanently to subordinate individual freedom. Horkheimer's major works include *Studies on Authority and the Family* (with Erich Fromm) (1936), *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (with Theodor Adorno) (1944) and *The Eclipse of Reason* (1974).

Herbert Marcuse (1898–1979) A German political philosopher and social theorist, Marcuse portrayed advanced industrial society as an all-encompassing system of repression, which subdues argument and debate and absorbs all forms of opposition. Against this 'one-dimensional society', he held up the unashamedly utopian prospect of personal and sexual liberation, looking not to the conventional working class as a revolutionary force but to groups such as students, ethnic minorities, women and workers in the developing world. Marcuse had a major influence on the New Left of the 1960s. His most important works include *Reason and Revolution* (1941), *Eros and Civilization* ([1955] 1969) and *One-Dimensional Man* (1964).

Theodor Adorno (1903–69) A German philosopher, sociologist and musicologist, Adorno made important contributions to the critique of mass culture. With Horkheimer, he developed a new socio–cultural theory that centred on the advance of 'instrumental reason' rather than the Marxist idea of class struggle. Adorno interpreted culture and mass communication as political instruments through which dominant ideologies are imposed upon society, producing conformism and paralysing individual thought and behaviour. He also helped to provide the theoretical basis for a psychological theory of authoritarianism. Adorno's best-known writings include *The Authoritarian Personality* (1950), *Minima Moralia* (1951) and *Negative Dialectics* (1966).

Jürgen Habermas (1929–) A German philosopher and social theorist, Habermas is the leading exponent of the 'second generation' of the Frankfurt School. Habermas' work ranges over epistemology, the dynamics of advanced capitalism, the nature of rationality, and the relationship between social science and philosophy. He has highlighted the 'crisis tendencies' in capitalist society that result from tensions between capital accumulation and democracy. His analysis of rationality has developed critical theory into what has become a theory of 'communicative action'. Habermas's main works include *Towards Rational Society* (1970), *Legitimation Crisis* (1975) and *The Theory of Communicative Competence* (1984).

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conventional society had effectively contained criticism and questioning. In *One-Dimensional Man* (1964) he argued that, far from being tolerant and democratic, advanced industrial civilization had a totalitarian character. The capacity of advanced capitalism to 'deliver the goods' through relentless technological progress had turned human beings into unquestioning and unthinking consumers, creating a 'society without opposition'. For Marcuse, 'liberation' meant liberation from the 'comfortable servitude' of affluent society, not through a retreat into a kind of inner-worldly aestheticism but through the rediscovery of 'genuine' human needs and satisfactions. Marcuse was also scathing about the liberal-democratic freedoms enjoyed in Western societies. In his view, the battery of individual rights and liberties of which liberal societies are so proud amount to nothing more than 'repressive tolerance'. By giving the impression of choice and individual freedom without offering human beings the prospect of genuine fulfilment, Western societies merely create a seductive and compelling form of oppression.

If conventional society is regarded as a repressive 'system', liberation from it requires the creation of an entirely new culture and an alternative lifestyle, a 'counter culture'. One of the distinctive features of the New Left was a willingness to endorse and support cultural and social movements which fundamentally rejected 'repressive technocratic society'. This was evident in the emergence of radical feminism and in the growth of ecologism (see p. 193). In the same way, there was greater interest in non-Western societies and values. In some cases this was linked to support for national liberation struggles in the developing world; in other cases it led to interest in Eastern mysticism in the form of Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism and Zen. Similarly, a more sympathetic attitude was adopted to the use of so-called 'consciousness-expanding' drugs, endorsed by writers such as Aldous Huxley (1894–1963) and Timothy Leary. Within the counter-culture of the 1960s an openly permissive ethic reigned, distinguishing it from the liberal tolerance that prevailed in conventional society. Although such movements were primarily social, cultural or even religious in character, many in the New Left nevertheless regarded them as intensely 'political' in that they constituted a form of resistance to an essentially repressive civilization. In that way, counter-cultural views and movements provided the basis for the liberated society of the future.

As with other forms of liberation, political liberation had an important psychological dimension. This was most clearly addressed in the work of psychiatrists such as R.D. Laing (1927–89) and David Cooper, who styled their work 'anti-psychiatry'. Particularly influential in the 1960s and early 1970s, they were interested in challenging the conventional understanding of mental illness. In their view, it was society rather than the individual that was 'insane', in that social, personal and sexual repression had come

to be regarded as 'normal'. People who were classified as 'mentally ill' were not, they argued, insane, but were rather simply people who still struggled to hang on to their sanity in an insane world. In that light, conventional psychiatry, concerned as it is with 'curing' mental illness and preparing the sick for a return to conventional society, can be seen as being positively oppressive. In the view of anti-psychiatrists such as David Cooper (1967), the family lay at the heart of this system of repression in that it enforces conformity and obedience on children, thus preparing them for the demands of an insane world. From the perspective of anti-psychiatry, 'liberation' means the establishment of personal autonomy, a goal that can only be achieved when the family, together with the other institutions of conventional society, are finally abolished.

Summary

1 In its simplest sense, freedom means the absence of constraints or restrictions. Few, however, believe that freedom should be absolute; they recognise the distinction between liberty and licence. Nevertheless, it is unclear whether liberty becomes licence when rights are abused, when harm is done to others or when freedom is unequally shared out.

2 Although a formal or neutral definition of freedom is possible, negative and positive conceptions of freedom have commonly been advanced. Negative freedom means non-interference, the absence of external constraints, usually understood to mean law or some kind of physical constraint. Positive freedom is conceived variously as autonomy or self-mastery, as personal self-development and as some form of moral or 'inner' freedom.

3 Toleration refers to forbearance, the willingness to put up with actions or opinions with which we disagree. It can be defended on grounds of privacy, personal development and in the belief that it will promote progress and social harmony. Limits may, however, be placed on tolerance when it threatens social cohesion, the security of particular groups or provides a platform for political extremism.

4 Liberation constitutes a radical notion of freedom: the overthrow of an all-encompassing system of oppression, offering the prospect of complete human satisfaction. In the twentieth century, liberation movements have fought against colonial rule, against sexual and racial oppression, and against the pervasive manipulation that supposedly exists in advanced industrial societies.

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