

## **TWO ASPECTS OF LIBERTY: POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE**

We have mentioned earlier that liberty has two aspects namely, positive and negative.

Positive liberty views of being free; it may be understood as self-mastery and self-determination; and includes ones having a role in choosing who governs the society of which one is a part. While negative liberty views of the absence of external limits or absence of obstacles, barriers or constraints. One has negative liberty to the extent that actions are available to one in this negative sense. Negative liberty is usually attributed to individuals while positive liberty is sometimes attributed to collective individuals. For example, suppose person X is driving a car through the city, and X come to a junction in the road. X turns left, but no one was forcing X to go one way or the other. Next X comes to a crossroad. X turns right, but no one was preventing X from going left or straight on. There is no traffic to speak of, and there are no diversions or police roadblocks. So, X seems, as a driver, to be completely free. But this picture of X's situation might change quite dramatically if we consider that the reason X went left and then right is that X is addicted to cigarettes and X is desperate to get to the tobacconists before it closes. Rather than driving, X feels, X is being driven, as X's urge to smoke leads X uncontrollably to turn the wheel first to the left and then to the right. Moreover, X is perfectly aware that X is turning right at the crossroads means X will probably miss a train that was to take X to an appointment X cares about very much. X longs to be free of this irrational desire that is not only threatening X's longevity but is also stopping X right now from doing what he thinks X ought to be doing.

If anyone carefully examines X's driving story, then they will find two contradictory views of liberty. On the one hand, one can think of liberty as the absence of obstacles external to the agent. X is free if no one is stopping X from doing whatever he might want to do. In the above story, X appears to be free in this very sense. On the other hand, one can think of liberty as the presence of control on the part of the agent. To be free, one must be self-determined, which is to say that X must be able to control his own destiny in his own interests. In the above story X appears, in this sense, to be unfree: X is not in control of his own destiny, as X is failing to control a passion that X himself would rather be rid of and which is preventing X from realizing what X recognizes to be his true interests. One might say that while the first view liberty is simply about how many doors are open to the agent, on the second view it is more about going through the right doors for the right reasons.

Although these two conceptions of liberty have been developed by many philosophers and thinkers such as Immanuel Kant, J. S. Mill, Karl Marx, and Isaiah Berlin, but here we would briefly discuss Isaiah Berlin's (1909-1999) views on the two aspects of liberty. The idea of positive liberty appears to have been borrowed by Isaiah Berlin from Aristotle's definition of citizenship which is derived from the social role of the freemen of classical Athens. Berlin, in his essay 'Two Concept of Liberty' (1958), Berlin argued that the liberty is granted to citizens to choose their government. Berlin granted that both concepts of liberty represent valid human ideals and that both forms of liberty are necessary for any free and civilised society. Berlin's conception of negative liberty represents a different, and sometimes contradictory, understanding of the concept of liberty, which needs to be carefully examined. For him, negative liberty constitutes an alternative, and sometimes even opposed, concept to positive liberty, and one often closer to the intuitive, modern usage of the word. According to

Berlin, we use the negative concept of liberty in attempting to answer the question “What is the area within which the subject — a person or group of persons — is or should be left to do or be what he is able to do or be, without interference by other persons?”, whereas we use the positive concept in attempting to answer the question “What, or who, is the source of control or interference that can determine someone to do, or be, this rather than that?” (1958, 121–22). But he did not argue that the concept of positive liberty should be rejected, instead he recognised it as one human value among many, and one which is necessary for any free society. Therefore, Berlin argued that positive liberty was a genuine and valuable version of liberty, so long as it was identified with the autonomy of individuals, and not with the achievement of goals that individuals ‘ought to’ ‘rationally’ desire.