

3.3 Positive freedom

Positive freedom is a more difficult notion to grasp than negative. Put simply it is **freedom to** do something rather than **freedom from** interference. Negative freedom is simply a matter of the number and kind of options that lie open for you and their relevance for your life; it is a matter of what you aren't prevented from doing; the doors that lie unlocked.

Positive freedom, in contrast, is a matter of what you can actually do. All sorts of doors may be open, giving you a large amount of negative freedom, and yet you might find that there are still obstacles to taking full advantage of your opportunities. Berlin sometimes talks of positive liberty in terms of the question 'Who is master?' I want to be in control of my life, but there may, for example, be internal obstacles to my living the way I really want to. Here we might talk of my increasing my freedom (in the positive sense) by overcoming my less rational desires.

This is easier to understand if you consider some examples. I might recognise the value of study for making my life go well, but keep getting sidetracked by less important, immediately gratifying activities, such as going out for a drink, or staying in and spending the

This is easier to understand if you consider some examples. I might recognise the value of study for making my life go well, but keep getting sidetracked by less important, immediately gratifying activities, such as going out for a drink, or staying in and spending the whole evening watching 'soaps' on television. I know that studying is important to me, and will increase my control over my life. But I really enjoy going out for a drink and I really enjoy watching television 'soaps'. So the short-term gratifications tend to seduce me away from activities which are better for me in the long term. My positive freedom would be increased if my 'higher' rational side could overcome my 'lower' tendency to be sidetracked. It is not a question of having more, or more significant, opportunities: the **opportunity** for me to study is there now. Rather it is a question of being able to take advantage of the opportunity by being in control of my life. Positive freedom in this example is a matter of my having the **capacity** to take the rational option as well as having the **opportunity**: whereas, according to a concept of negative freedom, the opportunities that I have alone determine the extent of my freedom. I am free to study in the