Freedom, Autonomy and Well-being: Beyond Desire-satisfaction

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1. Freedom: One Concept or Two?

1.1 Negative and Positive Freedom

If not the earliest, certainly one of the clearest statements to the effect that there are two distinct concepts of freedom, is to be found in a lecture by the nineteenth century Hegelian T.H. Green entitled 'On the Different Senses of "Freedom" as Applied to Will, and the Moral Progress of Man.'[1] In this lecture, he makes a distinction between what he calls 'negative' and 'positive' freedom, believing the latter to encapsulate something more noble and elevating than mere absence of constraint or compulsion. What he means by positive freedom is more clearly stated in another lecture entitled 'Liberal Legislation and Freedom of Contract'.

> We do not mean merely freedom from restraint and compulsion. We do not mean freedom to do what we like, irrespectively of what it is that we like …. When we speak of freedom of as something to be so highly praised we mean a positive power or capacity of doing or enjoying something worth doing or enjoying … there can be no freedom among men who act not willingly but under compulsion, yet on the other hand the mere removal of compulsion, the mere enabling a man to do what he likes, is in itself no contribution to true freedom … the ideal of true freedom is the maximum of power for all members of society alike to make the best of themselves.[2]

Needless to say there is much more to Green's account than this short extract will indicate but my reason for quoting from this part of his lecture, is because the spirit of what he has to say is something which I believe to be substantially correct and which I try to substantiate in this essay. I refer to the spirit of what is being claimed on freedom's behalf because there are a number of points which, if taken literally, are not strictly true. It is not quite true to say that enabling someone to do as she wishes is to contribute nothing towards her freedom. Whether it does or not, depends on a number of factors relating to the circumstances in which the desire was formulated, and the alternatives available from which a course of action was selected. And of course, unless constraints of a relevant kind are removed, one's freedom to do one thing rather than another is necessarily restricted. But the point that Green is really making is that the removal of constraints is, in itself, insufficient as an entitlement to freedom. I may be completely unconstrained, in so far as nobody is preventing me from doing as I wish, and yet in crucial respects I may well be un-free. While the absence of constraint is a condition of freedom (something that might be said to be a 'negative' requirement), it is far from being a sufficient condition. The very least additional requirement is, as Green says 'a positive power or capacity' to exercise the freedom which I have hitherto been prevented from enjoying.[3]

Any attempt to say what freedom is, without at the same time providing some insight as to why we should care about it, is futile. Without an appreciation of what it is for a person to flourish, there will be no point being concerned with any

[1] Green, T.H., (1891) *Works* Vol. II ed. Nettleship, R. L, Londan, Longmans, Green and Co.
[2] Green, T.H., (1893) *Works* Vol. III pp. 370-371ed. Nettleship, R. London, Longmans, Green and Co.
[3] This is a controversial claim but its justification will, I hope, become apparent.

such principle. Indeed without a concept of personhood as well as recognition of what respect for such beings entails, it is difficult to see how any limitation could be imposed on the sort of thing that may legitimately be considered either a constraint, power, or capacity. In delimiting the nature of constraints and opportunities we are, unavoidably invoking a moral standpoint. One thing of which Green was acutely aware is the fact that we are, in a very deep sense, social beings and the fact that it is futile to restrict the notion of freedom to a species of desire-satisfaction. Why this is inadequate as an account of either freedom or well-being will become evident as this essay proceeds. Suffice it to say that Green conceived of freedom in non individualistic terms by acknowledging that it cannot be secured by the mere removal of constraints, but depends on the existence of a society committed to empowering people. Before addressing this further, we need to examine more recent claims that there are indeed two concepts of freedom.

The most celebrated and spirited recent defence of the view that there are two concepts of freedom is to be found in the work of Sir Isaiah Berlin who argued in his 'Inaugural Lecture' that the two concepts arose out of an attempt to answer different questions. Negative freedom is supposed to be concerned with an answer to the question 'What is the area within which the subject...is, or should be left to do, or be, without interference from other persons?' Whereas positive freedom is construed as an attempt 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?'[4]

Berlin is at one with negative libertarianism in (a) seeing freedom as an absence or lack (of obstacles to choice) in which nothing obstructs one,[5] (b) in his individual bias by reference to which freedom is seen as being primarily concerned with the removal of obstructions to individual choice,[6] (c) in assuming that rational deliberation is of means rather than ends and (d) that ultimate values or ends are self chosen.[7] He is also sceptical about there being any necessary connection between the degree of freedom enjoyed and the extent to which people are empowered – although he is hardly the model of consistency.[8] The central idea of negative freedom is encapsulated in Berlin's claim that: 'I am normally said to be free to the degree to which no man or body of men interfere with my activity. Political liberty in this sense is simply the area within which a man can act unobstructed by others.'[9]

In suggesting that freedom is no more than absence of obstacles to desire-satisfaction, negative freedom certainly possesses the virtue of simplicity. Much has been written on the limitations of Berlin's insistence that there are two distinct concepts of freedom, much of which are beyond the confines of this paper but in the decade between the 'Inaugural Lecture' and the publication of '*Four Essays on Liberty*' Berlin's hostility to positive liberty went unmodified. He condemns those who take freedom to have anything to do with self-mastery. But without some such reference we would be left with a merely negative conception in which there is no room for what Charles Taylor calls 'qualitative discrimination as to motive', without which talk of a person exercising his freedom would be

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[4] Berlin, I., (1969) *Four Essays on Liberty* pp.121-122. Oxford: Oxford University Press.(The book contains a collection of papers and contains Berlin's Inaugural Lecture 'Two Concepts of Liberty').
[5] *Four Essays*, p. 144 and p. xxxix.
[6] *Ibid.* p. 124.
[7] *Ibid.* pp. 171ff..
[8] Cf. *Ibid.* p. 122 and p. liii.
[9] *Ibid.* p.122.

empty. Taylor concludes: 'Even where we think of freedom as the absence of external obstacles, it is not the absence of obstacles *simpliciter,* for we make discriminations between obstacles in representing more or less serious infringements of freedom. And we do this because we deploy the concept against a background understanding that certain goals or actions are more significant than others'.[10] This is enough to show that degrees of freedom are to be determined not by reference to the *quantity* of restrictions removed; some reference to the *qualitative* significance attached to various options is unavoidable. Furthermore, the attempt to drive a wedge between two distinct concepts does nothing more than obscure the proper nature of the dispute about freedom.

Rather than try and specify what freedom is, it is more profitable and more important to concentrate attention on the range and limits of what free people are free from and what they are free to do or become. In a well known paper, Gerald MacCallun makes the following claim:

> Whenever the freedom of some agent or agents is in question, it is freedom from some constraint or restriction from, interference with, or barrier to doing, not doing, becoming or not becoming something. Such freedom is thus always of something (an agent or agents) *from* something to *do*, not do, become or not become something; it is a triadic relation. Taking the format "*X* is (is not) free from *y* to do (not do, become, not become) *z*." *X* ranges over agents, *y* ranges over such "preventing conditions" as constraints, restrictions, interferences and barriers, and *z* ranges over actions or conditions of character or circumstance.[11]

Such a scheme at least provides us with a fruitful way in which to proceed. While the second of the term variables is probably more straight forward than the final one in the triadic schema, in that in many ways it is easier to specify the sorts of things *from* which people are free than their more positive requirements, it is far from a straightforwardly descriptive exercise.

1.2 What is wrong with Negative Freedom?

The view of freedom as the mere absence of obstacles has at least the virtue of simplicity. But the price of simplicity is an account which not only fails to recognise manifest instances of un-freedom but is willing to include amongst such instances constraints on actions which no sane person would wish to perform. Even a negative conception of freedom cannot dispense with some sort of qualitative distinction between options which casts serious doubts on any attempt to portray freedom in entirely value-neutral terms.[12] Talk of freedom to do *z* only makes sense if *z* is a possible object of reasonable choice.

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[10] Taylor, C., (1979) 'What's Wrong with Negative Liberty?' in Ryan, A., (ed.) *The Idea of Freedom* Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 82.

[11] MacCallum, G.C., (1967) 'Negative and Positive Freedom' *Philosophical Review* 76:313. A very similar formulation is provided by Joel Feinberg as follows: '--- is free from --- to do (or omit, or be, or have) --- ' Feinberg, J., (1973) *Social Philosophy* New Jersey: Englewood cliffs, p. 11. The respective blanks being filled in by naming the subject, specifying the constraint or compulsion as well as the action, omission or state of being actually or hypothetically desired.

[12] As Adam Swift says in his modification of Charles Taylor's example: '…compare Britain and Afghanistan. In Britain, people have freedom of religion but there are lots of traffic lights. In Afghanistan, there are very few traffic lights but people do not have freedom of religion. Suppose we don't know anything else about the two countries. Which gives its members most freedom? Well, in Britain one is

We need look no further than Mill's *On Liberty* to find two possible explanations of why we value liberty so highly, the first, and broadly utilitarian account of freedom, is that it is instrumental in exposing falsehood and enabling us to discover truths which would be denied to us if we were otherwise constrained. But Mill also recognised that there was an intrinsic value in being free because of its connection with individuality or what we would refer to as 'personal autonomy'. For the most part we object to constraints on our chosen course of action because it is an interference with the exercise of autonomy - the importance of which for personal well-being cannot be overestimated. Without freedom and the opportunities upon which its meaningful exercise depends, our autonomy, dignity, and self respect will inevitably be circumscribed.

We may interpret the idea of 'having an opportunity' in purely negative terms such that anyone not subject to constraints of a relevant kind may be said to posses such opportunities. Opportunities on this view are no more than lack of obvious obstacles. But if we are to go along with the view that the reason for valuing freedom so highly is largely concerned with our exercising some control over our lives, then it is an unnecessarily restrictive use of the term. Opportunities do not exist without the relevant capacities, abilities and powers. Freedom is indeed valuable but for reasons related to its *exercise;* options available to me must be those of which I can take advantage. It is to mock the poor, the dispossessed and those who are ignorant of alternative possibilities to insist that opportunities are simply there for the taking. As such there are good reasons for doubting the plausibility of restricting what are to count as constraints on freedom to intentional, as apposed to unintended and impersonal social factors preventing people from pursuing certain options. The distinctions between constraint and failure to enable is not as sharp as some would have us believe, but providing that we have criteria for identifying who may legitimately be responsible for failure to enable, we are not forced to include almost everybody as constraining agents. People may not only be deprived of opportunities because they are denied the requisite facilities - money, education or whatever - they may also find that constraints are such that they are denied the opportunity of even conceiving of alternatives from which to choose. The greater the opportunity for acquiring an understanding of those factors which contribute to seeing the world in one way rather than another, the better one is placed to do something about it and, accordingly, enjoy greater freedom.

Since qualitative distinctions between available options are unavoidable, freedom cannot be understood in purely descriptive terms. For this reason the simplistic view of equating freedom with absence of constraints to doing what one wants is equally unacceptable. And yet this view in one way or another continues to find a measure of support. Both freedom and well-being have been interpreted in terms of desire-satisfaction in one or more of its formulations and in what follows I hope that the attraction of such a view will be progressively undermined. The advantage of the triadic schema proposed by MacCallum is that it emphasises the need for a positive aspect to any plausible account of freedom, which means that

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constantly having one's freedom restricted by traffic lights. But in Afghanistan there is only one thing one cannot do; practise the religion one believes in. So in purely quantitative terms Britain looks as if it restricts the freedom of its citizens more than does Afghanistan. Taylor thinks that this conclusion is absurd. He thinks it is obvious that Britain gives its citizens more freedom than does Afghanistan … (and) believes that this shows that, when we make comparisons of freedom, we cannot avoid making judgements about the value of what it is people are and are not free to do.' Swift, A., (2006) *Political Philosophy*, Cambridge: Polity Press.

we need to render the third variable in the schema intelligible as well as to identify alternatives by reference to something other than mere objects of desire.

Unfortunately it is far from easy to decide how to set about individuating alternatives in a given choice situation, but more is required than the mere willingness with which someone chooses it. I may willingly choose to do that which failure so to do would result in such severe punishment that the possibility of doing otherwise with impunity is not a genuine alternative. Any alternative worthy of the name must be seen under the heading of 'possible object of rational choice', which means that rationality is an indispensable notion in characterising the third variable in the triadic schema. To dispense with it – to argue that *X* is free from constraint *y* to choose to *z* in spite of such threats – would be to side with those who refuse to acknowledge that threats or sanctions are constraints and this would be wilfully perverse. If the alternatives open to one are all much of a muchness, it is true to say that one is not as free as one would be if the range and variety were greater; this is why schools, for example, have a duty to introduce pupils to as wide a range of disciplines and ways of life as is compatible with the aim of producing educated people with some insight into human flourishing. A school which simply introduced pupils to a wide variety of things just for the sake of it would be counterproductive in terms of contributing to its pupils' overall freedom. Education is not just a matter of increasing the number and variety of alternatives, but of equipping pupils with whatever is necessary to take advantage of alternatives, the significance and value of which are recognised and appreciated. The very least that is involved here is equipping them to become rational choosers. Criteria of significance when it comes to choices of options are not reducible to what a person happens to want. Not only do we experience certain desires as intrinsically more significant than others, but we are all too painfully aware of the fact that many of our most strongly felt desires are incompatible with what we really want.

Berlin's claim that freedom depends on the ease or difficulty with which alternatives can be actualised is a salutary reminder of the connection between freedom and power. The availability of an alternative is largely theoretical if I am either denied the requisite means or have to make superhuman efforts to take advantage of them. Brenkert is persuasive in linking freedom with what he calls 'effective self-determination'[13] – something which presupposes having the abilities and powers whereby one may take advantage of certain opportunities or alternatives. He as at one with Richard Norman[14] in his conviction that real alternatives presuppose being in possession of the means by reference to which alternatives become genuine or real. The means identified as crucial in this respect. and the possession of which enhances one's power and thereby ones freedom, are both material (Brenkert and Norman) and cognitive (Brenkert) or cultural (Norman). Material means include things like healthcare, adequate housing and resources for participating in the political process, all of which require wealth of various kinds. Poverty is not a natural phenomenon; it is because we do not protest more vehemently against it that we share the collective responsibility for its existence and continuation. For this reason I believe that Brenkert is quite correct in alerting us to the ideological function of negative freedom's emphasis on the mere absence of physical coercion. If this was all there was to being free, those suffering from poverty would be free and whatever else they may complain about they could not justifiably complain about lack of freedom.

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[13] Brenkert, G., (1991) *Political Freedom*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, pp. 181-182.

[14] Norman, R, (1979) 'Self and Others: the inadequacy of Utilitarianism' *Canadian Journal of Philosophy Supplementary Volume* 5, p. 191.

1.3 Beyond Desire-Satisfaction

The simple version of freedom as desire-satisfaction can be stated thus: 'A person is free to the extent that she is able to do what she wants to do', while a more refined version would go something like this: 'a person is free to the extent that she is able to do what she *really* wants to do'. The simple version was held by Mill, Russell, and at one time, Berlin, while the more refined version has more recently been defended by Harry Frankfurt and Charles Taylor. Both versions need to be discredited.

Frankfurt's thesis rests on a distinction between what he calls 'first order desires' and 'second order desires'. The former are desires to do, or not to do, one thing or another while the latter are desires that the agent wants to motivate her in what she actually does: 'someone has a desire of the second order either when he wants simply to have a desire or when he wants a certain desire to be his will'.[15] It is in this sense that the agent can be said to *really* desire something or other as opposed to *simply* desiring it. Taylor's position is sophisticated and he makes a number of illuminating and valuable distinctions between different kinds of desire which are relevant to the enhancement or diminution of freedom and there is much in his notion of 'strong evaluation' which I find appealing and useful, but what is unacceptable without modification are statements to the effect that: '(Freedom is) ...being able to act on one's important purposes.'[16] The point I wish to dispute is that there is no more to being free than simply being able to do that which one most desires. What is crucial, are questions relating to the authenticity of desires. Are they irrational in that they occur in spite of the fact that the consequences of satisfying them are either unknown or harmful? Are they transitory and fleeting, or more deeply held and altogether more essential to one's whole conception of oneself? All these questions have an important bearing on a person's freedom and a satisfactory construal of the third variable in our triadic schema requires a different conceptual framework to that of desire-satisfaction.

Frankfurt's reason for introducing the idea of orders of desire is to provide some means of distinguishing desires that are truly my own from those that are not. But there are problems relating to what is involved in identifying with a particular desire. How are we to ensure the autonomy of acts of identification? Various attempts to solve this seemingly intractable problem have been provided but whatever the correct position on this may be, it seems to me that Frankfurt's account of identifying with and committing oneself to one's desire (of whatever order) is a misrepresentation of what actually happens in a case of conflict between one course of action and another. A course of action does not (usually) present itself to consciousness in a neutral or value-free way; in so far as we identify something *as* a course of action (among many) we attach some value or other to it as a possible means to *self*-satisfaction (as opposed to *desire*-satisfaction). As Watson puts it: 'In general, evaluations are prior and of the first-order. The first order desires that result from practical judgements generate second order volitions because they have this specific status; they do not have the special status that Frankfurt wants them to have because there is a higher-order desire concerning them'.[17]

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[15] Frankfurt, H.G., (1971) 'Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person' *Journal of Philosophy* LXVIII, p. 10.
[16] Taylor, C., *Op Cit.*, p. 192.
[17] Watson, G., (1975) 'Free Agency' *Journal of Philosophy* LXXII: 8, p. 219.

It would seem then, that the idea of something's being 'really wanted' must draw on the language of value as opposed to higher levels of desire and we are still far from getting a purchase on what is involved in the idea of really wanting something, let alone being in the position of arriving at any significant conclusions concerning the relationship between freedom and what one really wants to do. As Taylor has so ably demonstrated, strength of desire is irrelevant as a mark of what one most values; one's strongest desire may well be for something one values least. Anyone so motivated is considerably less free than one whose motivational and evaluational systems are in accord. It is in reflecting on our desires in terms of the kind of being we are, that the idea of 'true self' begins to get a purchase. The self crystallises, as it were, in accordance with one's commitments, convictions, and values. The same goes for obstacles; we identify an obstacle for what it is as a result of being able to make certain qualitative distinctions between our many and varied goals and it is because we are rational beings possessing criteria of significance with respect to goals and purposes that we value freedom so highly.

Unless there is the possibility of choice between alternatives, it is unreasonable to suppose that the conditions of freedom obtain. One is free only if one has the opportunity to do more than whatever it is that one actually does at a particular time. Consider the case of someone who is so conditioned that she accepts with equanimity the servile conditions under which she is forced to live; she is not in the least frustrated and her desires and opportunities coincide perfectly. Such a person is not free. To refuse to concede that freedom is something other than desire-satisfaction is to remain blind to an important distinction, which as well as reducing freedom to a purely mentalistic concept has, if ignored, paradoxical and dangerous consequences. I refer, of course, to the difference between being free and feeling free. If freedom were to collapse into a mere subjective feeling we will be forced to concede that the inhabitants of *Brave New World,* whose desires are manipulated to coincide with whatever is required from them, are as free as anyone else. Berlin recognised this when he wrote: 'If degrees of freedom were a function of the satisfaction of desires, I could increase my freedom as effectively by eliminating desires as by satisfying them.'[18] If, on the other hand one's freedom is a function of the degree to which ones actions are in accordance with ones self-conception by reference to which one's significant purposes gain application, it behoves us to provide a convincing argument to show what is wrong with criteria of significance resting on no more than subjective preference.

It is all too easy to despair of providing an account of human well-being with any claims to objectivity in terms of which charges of indoctrination or perfectionism may plausibly be rebuffed, but it is incumbent on those who are dissatisfied with the subjectivism on which so many accounts of well-being appear to rely, to provide such an alternative. Subjectivism accepts that values are self-chosen and are ultimately a matter of individual preference. Flourishing, on this view, amounts to nothing more than successfully working out some kind of hierarchical structure to one's desires - it being an impertinence to suggest that one could both succeed in this enterprise and fail to achieve personal well-being. What follows is an attempt to go some way towards exposing the shortcomings of subjectivism associated with desire-satisfaction accounts of well-being.

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[18] Berlin, I., *Four Essays* p. xxxviii. John Gray is right to point out that only by invoking some form of human nature that is discriminatory as to wants which are to be counted, and which include evaluations of the agent's state of mind, can the intuition that the utterly contented slave remains unfree, be supported. Gray, J., (1989) *Liberalisms: Essays in Political Philosophy* London: Routledge, p. 60.

Most subjective accounts take it for granted that not only is desire logically prior to value, but that values are chosen rather than discovered. Once it is acknowledged that we are not mere bundles of desires, confronted with the task of getting them into some sort of order of priority, we are forced to acknowledge that desires have a certain rationale; we come to desire *x* rather than *y* for reasons to do with the aspect under which we see them. It is in virtue of so-called desirability-characteristics possessed by *x* and absent in *y* that we acknowledge its value and admit the possibility that my satisfied *desire* may leave *me* thoroughly unsatisfied; I may end up feeling ashamed, guilty or simply indifferent. If this were not so, well-being would be little more than contentment. But there is more to *being* satisfied with something than merely enjoying a state of quiescence whereby one is not dissatisfied; to say as much would beg the question of what it is to be satisfied *with* something. If there were no more to flourishing than merely believing as much, there would be no reason why one should care about being misled over the issues involved. Decisions made by reference to desire-satisfaction alone without reference to more objective criteria of significance militates against an appreciation of the full significance of what one might be doing. For there to be any possibility of practical knowledge, the scope for individual choice must of necessity be restricted.[19] This claim merits rather more careful examination than space permits. Suffice it to say, however, that from their earliest days children choose within the context of a particular culture with concepts and traditions of its own. These are just as much a part of their self-identity as any desire they might have or choices they might make. Indeed, it is impossible to see how children could come to want anything at all without reference to this common framework. Not only does it determine their whole conception of themselves, it provides them with the wherewithal for the adoption of those ideals in accordance with which they are able to conclude that it is better to do one thing rather than another. To begin to appreciate this is to begin to appreciate the social nature of man.

The key to understanding what is involved here is not so much the idea of individual choice, but reflection leading to discoveries as to what is of ultimate significance in our lives. Expressed in this way, it may look as though one is advocating an account of the way in which values come to be assigned which is excessively deterministic, and yet values are not simply adopted at will.[20] Having acquired a conceptual vocabulary with which to make sense of the world, one is in a position to render articulate one's evaluations and thereby assume a measure of responsibility for failure to re-evaluate one's decisions. As such, one's behaviour cannot be explained as the mere end product of a complex causal chain, which means that we are not merely passive with regard to what we judge to be of value. In other words, people learn how to want, but the reasons underpinning commitment to a set of values are not themselves self-chosen. They are, in part, due to choices made in the past by reference to reasons which

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[19] For reasons why this is so, see Scruton, R., (1981) 'The significance of a common culture', *Philosophy* 54:66.

[20] In his article 'On seeing things differently', in *Radical Philosophy* (1971, 6-14) Richard Norman shows that although the figure in Leeper's Ambiguous Lady Illusion can be seen as a picture of a young woman or an old woman, this is entirely subjective. Yet what is there imposes limits on what is seen. As Norman says: 'What is possible for us to see depends on how it is possible for us to conceptualise our experience'. And he draws a parallel between ways of seeing such pictures and *Weltanschauungen*: 'the possible ways of seeing man's nature and his place in the universe are made available by the moral and intellectual traditions within one's culture …. The available traditions do not confine us once and for all; new ways of seeing can be developed and extended – *but not arbitrarily*' (p. 11, my emphasis).

are public and non-arbitrary. People should be provided with opportunities to discuss their most deeply held convictions and have them exposed to critical assessment. In so doing, their autonomy is strengthened as they are engaged in that all-important process of self-discovery and self-affirmation.

Recent work on well-being has been dominated by James Griffin's emphasis on the importance of 'informed- desires', or those desires one would have were one in possession of information enabling one to appreciate the implications of satisfying a particular desire.[21] The *prima facie* attractiveness of this over the actual-desire account is obvious. Assuming that one is aware of the implications of satisfying certain desires whereby one has a clear understanding of the objects of one's desire, one is less likely to be confronted with unresolved conflict and certainly less likely to fall victim to one's desires. The informed-desire account would also appear to accord very nicely with the view that there is no universally applicable *summum bonum* to which we should all aspire. People vary in their interests and dispositions, tastes and convictions, and personal well-being varies accordingly. And yet, there are problems. Firstly, there is the problem of rendering the account of well-being, in terms of informed-desire, intelligible. How, for example, are we supposed to decide, given two incompatible courses of action, which one would lead to most desire-satisfaction? Our desires are far from consistent. Secondly, there are numerous occasions where the satisfaction of one's informed desire (for something like tobacco, say) is manifestly incompatible with well-being. One cannot restrict informed-desires to only those desires people *would* have were they properly to appreciate the information, unless they can provide us with an account of what it is to 'appreciate' such information that is not circular.[22] Griffin concedes as much, but I confess to finding his account of how such circular reasoning might be avoided, both unclear and unconvincing. If something is in accordance with my well-being, it is in virtue of something other than the fact that I have an informed preference for it. It is precisely because we see things in a certain light – as something *worth* obtaining or avoiding (Griffin's own example is that of 'accomplishment') – that we end up having some informed preferences rather than others. While Griffin parts company with Hume in seeing understanding (cognition) and desire (appetite) as distinct existences, he denies that 'one can explain our fixing on desirability features purely in terms of understandings' and insists that there is still a strong case for saying that the explanation is from *desire* to *value*.[23] The issues are extremely complex and cannot be pursued here, but there is a growing literature lending support to the view that desire *as an independent element* in the explanation of actions is altogether redundant.[24]

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[21] The notion of informed-desire was employed as long ago as 1907 by Henry Sidgwick in his *Methods of Ethics*. Its most recent defence is in Griffin's *Well-Being: Its Meaning, Measure and Moral Importance,* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986, sections i-iv.

[22] As Garrett Thompson puts it: 'it is circular to define 'appreciation' in terms of our informed preferences matching what is valuable, e.g. a person appreciates what he prefers if and only if he prefers *Y* to *X* only when *Y* is more valuable than *X*....Without an independent grip on the ... notion of appreciation in the phrase 'what a person would prefer if he appreciated what it is like to have what he prefers', it advances us no further to define prudential value in terms of this phrase.' See, Thompson, G., (1990) *Needs*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, pp.46-47.

[23] *Op Cit.,* pp. 27-29

[24] See, e.g. Platts, M., (1979) *Ways of Meaning,* London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, and Arrington, R.L., (1989) *Rationalism, Realism and relativism: Perspectives in Contemporary Moral Epistemology*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

2. Positive Freedom, Well-being and Autonomy

A recent and spirited account of freedom has recently been made by Joseph Raz who was at pains to demonstrate that freedom is not merely instrumentally valuable in helping satisfy our desires but is to be defended as a condition of personal autonomy.[25] One thing which leaves negative freedom so empty is the fact that it rests content with the view that freedom's value lies in nothing more than the absence of constraints to desire-satisfaction. But freedom's value has more to do with choosing between an array of significant alternatives. A free person is an autonomous chooser. She is, as it were, in the driving seat of her own life; she lives her life in accordance with a script she writes for herself. As Raz puts it; 'The ideal of personal autonomy is the vision of people controlling, to some degree, their own destiny, fashioning it through successive decisions throughout their lives.'[26] And again; 'The autonomous person's life is marked not only by what it is, but also by what it might have been and by the way it became what it is. A person is autonomous only if he had a variety of acceptable options to choose from, and his life became as it is through his choice of some of these options. A person who has never had any significant choice, or was not aware of it, or never exercised choice in significant matters but simply drifted through life is not an autonomous person.'[27]

Without such a capacity, a life lacks dignity and a persons opportunities for flourishing are diminished. Slaves, and for much of human history women, have been denied the opportunity to develop and exercise their autonomy whereby opportunities for decision-making were severely circumscribed, which is precisely why the treatment of people in such ways was, and continues to be, morally repugnant to the extent that it denies them what Mill called 'the distinctive endowment of a human being.'[28] An autonomous life has a value which is both intrinsic, and to which attaches a deeper significance in ways that are completely absent in any version of the desire-satisfaction account of well-being. The autonomous person has the ability to relate what she now chooses to both her past and her future and in so doing is capable of providing some kind of shape or direction to her goals and projects. It is this, the capacity to give a sense of direction to one's life in which one's choices and decisions, one's aspirations and life-style, one's values and opinions are in large part one's own in the sense that they are authentic and neither adopted uncritically nor alien in origin, which captures the essence of what it is to live autonomously. Children are, for the most part, deficient in these respects; their choices and decisions lack the requisite degree of deliberation to merit the label 'autonomous'. And yet it is not a requirement of an autonomous life that each and every action should be preceded by a lengthy deliberation. On the other hand a measure of coherence of belief and action is a necessary condition.[29]

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[25] Raz, J., (1986) *The Morality of Freedom*, Oxford: Clarendon Press
[26] *Ibid.*, p. 369
[27] *Ibid*, p. 204
[28] Mill, J. S., (1859) *On Liberty*.
[29] There are, of course dangers in pressing too hard for coherence so that it becomes a demand for a totally unified plan of life. An autonomous life is perfectly compatible with a diversity of goals and projects and a rigid adherence to any sort of blue-print would stand in the way of spontaneous action. The sense is which coherence is important for autonomy is the way in which a personality is in harmony not only with itself as it happens to be at any one time but with the developing self, directed from within in accordance with values, goals and the like which are authentic. Where these are in conflict, an autonomous person sets

What is it to determine one's life for oneself? A very great deal is required of someone before this can be said of her. At the very least she will need a great deal of knowledge of both herself and the world. Self-knowledge is particularly important if she is to understand the respects in which the agencies of socialisation have contributed towards shaping her in the way they have. Raz suggests three conditions as necessary for autonomy. They are: (i) The mental abilities to form intentions of a sufficiently complex kind, as well as the ability to plan their execution; (ii) Freedom from coercion and manipulation; (iii) The availability of an adequate range of options.[30] Autonomy, then, has a great deal to do with being in a position to make choices which have a significant bearing on the direction one's life takes. The conditions of choice are both objective and subjective. They are objective in so far as they are available, and subjective in that they presuppose some appreciation of their existence, as well as knowing how the adoption of one or another will affect one's future. It would be interesting to speculate on the extent to which autonomy is either enhanced or restricted by different political and economic systems; governments are profoundly influential in creating or frustrating opportunities, but it would of necessity require a more thorough investigation than space permits.

Objective choice conditions relate directly to views about freedom. Those who are imprisoned or enslaved may well retain a capacity to reflect on the choices they would make if they were unconstrained, but unless they are freed *from* such constraints their autonomy is undermined, if not destroyed. External positive constraints such as shackles or prison bars are not the only constraints affecting a person's freedom and/ or autonomy. Poverty and ignorance are equally effective in rendering a person un-free. A free and adequately resourced education system is essential for equipping anyone with the capacities for an autonomous and self-determined life, because without these capacities they are less likely to be able to withstand the force of those external pressures and influences where so much of what motivates is vicarious. Self-determination is more than being able to think for oneself; it requires effective means for its exercise.

The idea of a free society is not something that can be explicated without reference to kindred political concepts such as democracy, equality, power, rights and justice. A free society requires a democratisation of the media, opportunities for people to participate at every level of the decision-making process affecting their lives. It requires a more equal and just distribution of resources - material, educational and cultural. It requires a genuinely empowered citizenry which in turn requires the existence of a teaching profession that is sufficiently astute to pay heed to the social and political implications of what they are being asked to do by politicians more concerned with rhetoric and their public image than the well-being of future citizens, equipped with all that is required to play a full and active part in a democratic society.

While this is not the place to rehearse the countless arguments for and against affirmative action, I want to suggest that some form of this is compatible with both the promotion of social justice and the extension of the total amount of freedom a particular society may be said to enjoy. The justification of affirmative action by reference to either so-called group rights or, as some form of compensation for injustice in the past, have always seemed to me to lack credibility. In so far as a particular group merits preferential treatment in terms

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about resolving them in a structured way by reference to some broadly-based conception of herself with which she is able to identify.

[30] *Op Cit.*, pp. 372-373.

of the distribution of such vital ingredients of well-being as medical facilities, food, housing, and education, their claims to such treatment are much stronger by reference to the fact that without such goods they will have fewer opportunities to compete on an equal footing for all that is required for autonomous well-being. Without some form of positive discrimination disadvantaged groups will inevitably miss out on the advantages enjoyed by their more prosperous competitors, who will inevitably use their competitive advantage in securing yet more privileges for themselves. It is not only ethnic minorities and women whose claims to positive discrimination on these grounds may be upheld, but the same can be said for the children of those living in poverty, whose prospects of enjoying a genuinely free and autonomous life are seriously diminished unless, and until, there is a significant redistribution of the requisite resources in their favour.