Collaborative Discussion 2 – Peer Response: Ying Chan – Michael Geiger

Thank you Ying for your reflective post on normative and practical liberty. The approach of looking at the term liberty in a philosophical context seems to me to be very important, since this is the only way to fully illuminate the definition and interpretation of the word.

Liberty has been a subject of philosophy for thousands of years. For Aristotle, liberty means the possibility of being able to choose between at least two alternatives, which can be seen as a basic human freedom of choice, but only illuminates the minimal concept of the term liberty (Leontsini, 2015).

For Socrates and Plato, the human has liberty when he/she uses reason to choose the best of the available options (Pateman, 1982). Reason thus tempts people to do "good". Liberty is generally understood as being able to choose and decide between different alternatives without being forced to do so. In modern philosophy, theology and jurisprudence, the term generally designates a state of autonomy of a subject. In Socrates and Plato, one is free when he/she chooses the best through reason, since reason empowers human to make good decisions.

In philosophy, practical liberty is a term coined by Kant, which describes the self-understanding of a rational being to make decisions according to self-imposed principles and thus to see themselves as free (Zöller, 2018). However, this practical liberty is not subject to arbitrariness, but is linked to the categorical imperative, according to which one should align one's actions with the common good.

Rousseau distinguishes between the contrast of natural liberty and civil liberty, where the natural liberty of the individual must be limited for the benefit of the civil liberty of society (Hancock, 1961).

If one follows the philosophical history of the interpretation of the term liberty, one finally comes to understand the interpretation of the term by Brownsword et al. (2016) with the division into normative and practical liberty and can understand the need for normative liberty to be limited and practical liberty to be encouraged.

References:

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