

George Weasley

It is not possible to speak of political government without speaking of freedom; not is it possible to talk about freedom without talking about political government. - Hannah Arendt

Already Aristoteles has defined mankind as a "ζῶον πολιτικόν", suggesting that human beings have the urge to govern and to be governed. Politics and freedom however, are often rather seen as contradictory aspects, one belonging to the civilised society, the other to a uncivilised natural state.

I believe that, in order to analyse and evaluate this quote by Arendt it is necessary to discuss some of the implicit preambles stated. First of all the concept of freedom. Freedom is a enigmatic term, describing a complex concept, often used in a populist fashion by politicians and philosophers. But is Freedom not, as suggested by the German philosopher Carnap, a "Scheinbegriff", which has no meaning? There are, according to him, two criteria in order to define the meaning of a word and its right to exist. First of all the position of this word in an elementary sentence must be given (possible for the term "freedom"), secondly it must be stated, from which sentences the word x can be derived and which sentences can be derived from x (impossible for "freedom"). More precisely is the second criterion demanding the so-called protocol sentences, which must be referring to an observable phenomenon of the real world, and thus excludes any sentences, which lead back to metaphysical terms or logically inadmissible expressions. In short: feelings and abstract or metaphysical words are defined as "Scheinbegriffe". Freedom may be described as a state, where there are no restrictions on a human being from the outside, and some of them, as restrictions imposed by the government might be objectively describable, however I believe that there is always a highly abstract and subjective component accompanying this concept, even if this would be negligible according to Carnap.

Secondly, it must be discussed, and eventually defined, who is and who is not included by the impersonal form "it" (originally: "man"). Are, as in our modern government, all adults included in the political dialogue, or only the male population who possesses the citizenship, as in ancient Athens, or maybe only those who fulfil the criteria of Peter Singer's "Definition of Person" (Personenbegriff)? This is a concept, which is admittedly restrictive and also neglecting the fundamental human rights of infants and mentally disabled people and thus has caused controversies in German speaking areas. As far as having come to know Arendt as a very progressive philosopher, it seems rather logical, that the impersonal "man" extends to everyone, who's freedom is affected or promoted by the government, which is too often forgotten. As an example: while immigrants are given basic human, social and economic rights, they are

George Weasley

generally neglected the right to vote, and thus the right to shape a society, in which they have often been living for decades.

Now I believe to finally be able to turn to the question, which this quote seems to imply: Which form of government, if any, promotes freedom?

Rousseau states in his theoretical writings, that natural freedom, from his point of view the only true one, can only be found in the natural state. It is probably his most iconic quote, which summarises that: "Man was born free, but everywhere he lies in chains". Viewing the natural state in the light of evolution, it is a state, where mankind only responds instinctively to its most basic needs, the end however was brought to this state of absolute freedom when the first man plucked the first apple and declared the tree his possession. Entering a governmental contract mankind lost his natural, but gained civil rights. Similarly, Hobbes describes in the "Leviathan" that mankind gave up his freedom in order to escape the imminent anarchy ("homo homini lupus") and entered a governmental contract, giving up its freedom and right in exchange for safety. In summary, both philosophers argue, that in our civilised society, far from the natural state, the existence and achievement of true freedom is impossible. As a believer in democracy I tend to disagree with this thesis. Absolute freedom can only be gained within a enlightened and educated society, where the fundamental basis for critical and philosophical thinking is guaranteed. Thus this can only be realised in a democratic society, where everyone over a certain age, both men and women, people with and without citizenship, are allowed to take part in the political discourse, which enables each of them to take part in the shaping of the society and the future and to express their subjective opinions. The freedom of opinion, speech, press and assembly is recorded in our constitution, and this fundamental institution guarantees the greatest freedom possible within a developed society. In the end, this speaks indeed for Rousseau's theory, only that the civic freedom, is neither less precious, nor less true than the natural one. However, democracy has often been defined as a tyranny of the mob, most prominently by Plato. Aristoteles listed it among the "bad" forms of government, defining it as an "ochlocracy". While Plato suggests in his "Republic" a totally different model, where the state is reigned by the wisest, the so-called "Philosophykings" and its aim is the promotion of the absolute good, he believes that this can not be achieved within a democracy, as the "absolute good" is a further "Scheinbegriff" and open to interpretation, as all moral values are neither objective nor absolute. Further he argues, that a democratic society will unavoidably be weak, unsteady, erratic and tyrannical. A prominent example can be found in the 5th century BC, when the assembly of Athens decided to massacre a whole city-state, however the decision was luckily withdrawn the next day. The Brexit Referendum was equally, one could argue, the result of demagogues and populist, all enabled by our democratic systems and protectionist,

George Weasley

reactionary and conservative implicit beliefs of ones background (Hintergrundueberzeugungen der Lebenswelt), as they are called by Habermas. Even though many democratic states seem to have Bentham's basic principle "the greatest happiness for the greatest number" as a motto, and therefore minorities are disregarded or ignored, the frame of democracy still grants basic human rights and a freedom of absolute tyranny and restrictions against the common good.

In summary: democracy has shown to sometimes degenerate into a tyranny of the masses, however it is, as I believe, the only way to gain freedom, which could never be achieved in a totalitarian, aristocratic or monarchic state. Freedom and politics are irremediably entangled. True freedom, in an enlightened sense, not based on the idea, that one can only be free if anarchy rules, but rather that knowledge, political discourse and wisdom are the path to a higher type of freedom, can never exist without a government, and, to be more specific: without a democracy.