Reconceptualizing Liberty in the Time of Disorder: Maruyama Masao’s Request for Responsible Liberty in Postwar Japan

The ongoing crisis of the Covid-19 pandemic raises a difficult question about the proper relationship between individual liberty and responsibility because irresponsible behaviors are conducted in the name of “individual liberty.” Thus, one might ask why we should value individual liberty in the first place if it keeps silence on irresponsibility. This question is explored via a reading of the postwar Japanese thinker Maruyama Masao’s redefinition of liberty as a notion that involves a high degree of sense of responsibility. Through the notion of responsible liberty, he tried to provide Japanese people with a new understanding of liberty that could produce active and responsible democratic citizenship in the midst of postwar disorder. At the same time, however, Maruyama’s request for liberty left several crucial tensions. After examining these issues, I conclude with my thought on how these different understandings of liberty is affecting the different responses to the current public health crisis across the East and the West.

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