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Political Unity and the “Existential Meaning” of Conflict. On Carl Schmitt’s *The Concept of the Political* (with some remarks on The Dreyfus Affair in Hannah Arendt’s *The Origins of Totalitarianism*)

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Summary

The article deals with the conflict as an indispensable element of democracy and politics from the perspective of Carl Schmitt’s concept of the political. According to Schmitt, the specific criterion of the political is to be found in the *friend-enemy* distinction. Denoting the utmost degree of association and dissociation, it corresponds to other antitheses (good-evil, beautiful-ugly, profitable-non-profitable, etc.), but is independent of them and should not be mistaken for them. Understood in this way, the political for Schmitt has an existential meaning, as it characterizes human life as such and as conflict cannot be solved in advance through some general norm or by a neutral third party. Although Schmitt’s definition seems to limit the proper phenomenon of the political to the state – which as political unity monopolizes the friend-enemy relationship and excludes enmity from its domestic affairs – the author finds in Schmitt’s “secondary concepts of the political” the possibility to think the conflict as the principle of domestic politics as well. This would mean to accept antagonism as inevitable and legitimate, without moral or other disqualification of the opponent, and to subdue conflict to the rules of political quarrel and debate. In the second part of the article, the author discusses Schmitt’s critique of liberalism. Although at first sight liberalism seems to be a negation of the political, in the last instance it not only fails to elude the political, but exacerbates and intensifies the conflict. By presenting its claims as universal, it disavows its adversaries as “enemies of humanity”, falling in this way victim to political hypocrisies. In the last part of the article, the author considers some similarities between Schmitt’s and Hannah Arendt’s understanding of the political. Despite all differences between them, these can be noticed in Arendt’s treatment of the Dreyfus Affair in the *Origins of Totalitarianism*, where she makes clear that conflict is not only a threat to the “political entity”, but can also be the way in which that entity is saved.

Keywords: Carl Schmitt, Political, Friend-Enemy Distinction, Conflict, Liberalism, Hannah Arendt, Dreyfus Affair

Introduction

I will begin my article by mentioning two occurrences of the recent past in Germany. First: Since the German Chancellor Angela Merkel opened the German borders in September 2015 for refugees from Syria and other parts of the world, an intensive debate on migration and refugee policies seems to split the German public and politics. Most parties and also most of the media – and, not to forget, the Catholic and the Protestant Church likewise – are advocating the generous immigration policy of Angela Merkel, while only the AfD party, the “Alternative for Germany”, not represented in the parliament, the *Bundestag* and the Christian Social Union, CSU, ironically forming itself a part of the government, and some online platforms are opposing this policy. The debate, however, is an asymmetric one, since the supporters of Merkel’s position criticize their opponents in the following way: first, demands for closing the borders and for a strong limitation of immigration are considered to be *contra legem*, and prohibited by human rights and international conventions like the Refugee Convention. Second, claiming for themselves a superior moral position based on an “ethics of humanity”, Merkel’s supporters usually declare the refusal of the admittance of immigrants and refugees as immoral, as founded in egoism, nationalism, chauvinism or racialism.

Some observers, however, are considering this criticism to be an illegitimate attempt to narrow the scope of political debate. They emphasize that immigration is not a legal or moral, but first a political question. In particular, the tendency to qualify one’s opponents as immoral is suspected to jeopardise the liberty of speech in public that the Ancient Greeks called *Parrhesia* and what is commonly seen as an indispensable element of democracy. Thereby it has been suggested that the political is partially at odds with moral and law, and – as one might add – to truth – as Hannah Arendt has remarked in an article on *Truth and Politics* (Arendt, 1977: 227). Why is this? Obviously, politics or “the political” seems to be associated with some sort of conflict which is not asymmetric like that between good and evil, right and wrong, legal and illegal or true and false.

The second occurrence happened on June, 16th last year, when former German chancellor Helmut Kohl died. All over the place Kohl was honoured as a “great European” and praised for his merits for the German unity and the European Unification. But, an article in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, the most influential German newspaper, honoured Kohl as *Der Kanzler der Zwietracht*, that is: the Chancellor of discord, or – of conflict. And indeed, this is a sound characterisation of Helmut Kohl. For, as the author emphasizes, Kohl was always prone to using a “rhetoric of polarisation” and during his political life he, a conservative politician, always showed a strong hostility against socialists and Social Democrats. But, on the other side, Kohl did not at all regard it illegitimate to be a socialist. And while

he was determined to conflict with the socialists, he expected unanimity and unconditional loyalty in his own party. Opponents he treated as “traitors” and searched to deprive them of all influence on the party’s decisions. What does this imply? The author declares that no one understood better than Kohl the “fundamental law of parliamentary democracy”: “What is regarded to be the common welfare, in democracy has to be determined by ‘organized conflict’” (Bahners, 2017).

The question raised by these examples is: Is conflict an indispensable element not only of democracy but of politics as a whole? Or is it on the contrary an evil we should avoid wherever it is possible? Should we follow the opinion of Jean-Jacques Rousseau who declares in his *Social Contract* that “long debates, dissension, and disorder are a sign that particular interests are in the ascendant and the state in decline” (Rousseau, 1994: IV, 2) and who holds universal consent as a prerequisite of a good state, which he characterizes in this way: “The first man to propose them [laws] merely puts into words something that all have felt already. There is never any question of vote-catching or speech-making in order to make it a law to do what everyone has already resolved that he will do himself, once he is sure that others will do the same” (*ibid.*: IV, 1).

In the following section, I shall deal with a thinker who estimates conflict not only an indispensable element of “the political”, but, moreover, its very criterion. This thinker is Carl Schmitt. Without exaggeration, one can call Carl Schmitt the most notable – and also the most notorious – jurist in 20th century Germany. Schmitt, born in 1888, died in 1985, was a man of the political right.

Schmitt was attached to conflict in a specific way, partly by personal reasons – he was a brilliant scholar with strong political inclinations – and partly by his social position. Schmitt was a catholic and had to excel in a university dominated by a protestant atmosphere. This situation was of crucial importance, since the Church in “Vaticanum I” had definitely adopted a hostile attitude against the modern secular world, and, in particular, against modern democracy. The Church’s members were requested to limit their intercourse with non-Catholics to the absolute necessary; they were asked to organize their own trade unions, associations and parties – thus efforts had been made to establish what we today might call a “parallel society”.

Hence, being a Catholic, Schmitt’s thinking was deeply rooted in the 19th century philosophy of counter revolution, namely in that of the Spanish diplomat Juan Donoso Cortés (1809-1853) on whom I will dwell shortly. Cortés points out in his *Essay on Catholicism, Liberalism and Socialism* that only a catholic monarchy is suitable for the European countries. His argumentation, however, is not theological but sociological, since Cortés is convinced that every reign, society and state can only be stable through maintaining its religious foundation – so the Roman Empire in the Roman religion and the European states in Christianity. And, to put it

simply, like Christ is a heavenly king ruling the world as a whole, European monarchs should reign the state on earth. Cortés maintained that the catholic principle was challenged by atheist socialism (represented for Cortés by Pierre-Joseph Proudhon), and Europe would have to make a decision between the two, which for Cortés was a decision between Christ and Barabbas. Liberalism, however, for Cortés is a political position which seeks to avoid this kind of decision (Cortés, 2017, Book 2, Chap. VIII). As Carl Schmitt puts it later in referring to Cortés, liberalism, confronted with the alternative "Christ or Barabbas", will bring forward a motion of postponement, prorogation or will install an inquiry commission (Schmitt, 1985: 62). While Cortés on the one side respects socialism as his deadly adversary, he, at the same time, despises Liberalism for its indecisiveness.

Although Schmitt, a Catholic himself, is not at all bothered with the establishment of a catholic monarchy, he adopts Cortés' decisionism. In 1922, in *Political Theology*, he states the decision regarding the state of emergency as the main criterion of sovereign power (*ibid.*: 5). Every political order, Schmitt declares, is founded in this decision and not in natural or positive law. Before there is law, there must exist an order created by sovereign decision (*ibid.*: 10). And, as we shall see, Schmitt's book *The Concept of the Political* will present a variation of this decisionism.

Schmitt also adopts from Cortés the hostility against liberalism. But while Schmitt emphasizes liberalism's indecisiveness and its inclination to "eternal discussion", he at the same time asserts that the liberal essentials of parliamentary and public discussion have lost their proper function in modern mass democracy. Liberal principles have become masks of tendencies which are in effect illiberal – hence Schmitt regards the discussion in a modern parliament only as a disguise of conflicts between powerful interest groups which are solved elsewhere, but not in parliament. Therefore, Schmitt says, debates in a modern parliament look as if someone had painted red a central heating in order to evoke the impression of burning fire (Schmitt, 2000: 6). This is the diagnosis he gave in his 1923 writing *The Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy*; in fact, it differs little from Marxist criticism of parliamentary democracy, and this affinity Schmitt is eager to expose. For this reason, the text of *The Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy* has inaugurated a Schmittianism of the political left.

Being a catholic conservative who respected the Marxist tradition of political thinking, Schmitt had little confidence in the German republic of Weimar. In 1932, he advocated a dictatorship of the *Reichspräsident* in order to suppress the aspirations of both Nazis and Communists. After Hitler's takeover Schmitt curried favour with the victorious national socialists and tried to exert some influence on their politics; this attempt, however, proved to be a complete failure. Nonetheless, after

the war he was imprisoned by the Americans and lost his position as a professor of law at German university. He retired to his hometown Plettenberg in the province of Westphalia, which he, alluding to Machiavelli's exile from Florence, called his "San Casciano".

The Concept of the Political

I shall begin by exposing the three main propositions of Schmitt's book.

1. The criterion of the political is the *friend-enemy distinction*. This distinction or antagonism signifies the most intensive grade of association or dissociation, which dissociation, in principle, can always entail a deadly conflict.

2. The political, identified by this criterion, is defining the state in double respect. A) The state is a unit monopolizing the friend-enemy distinction: only the state may have an enemy, and no domestic group may have the state's enemy as friend.

3. B) The state is a state only if it prevents all domestic conflicts from becoming a friend-enemy antagonism in its proper sense.

Schmitt's monograph *The Concept of the Political* was published first in 1927 and is the most renowned of Schmitt's writings; it is of central importance for his understanding of politics and state. And, although Schmitt likes to emphasize his catholic faith, this book marks a break with the catholic tradition of political thinking which has its root in Aristotle.

The Aristotelian tradition in political thinking always supposed a unity of ethics and politics – in the sense that politics is closely limited by and dependent on some general ethics. This holds for Aristotle and for Thomas Aquinas likewise. St. Thomas even extended that unity also to the field of war in unfolding the doctrine of the *just war*. Modern political thinking founded by Machiavelli, however, strictly tried to dissolve that unity of ethics and politics and asserted some sort of autonomy and independence of the political sphere from general ethical issues. This Machiavellian line of thinking, represented by Thomas Hobbes, Baruch de Spinoza and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (although Hegel in that case, according to Schmitt, also shows his "double face"), was uncontested. It was rejected most directly by Immanuel Kant, who in his book on *Perpetual Peace* defined politics "as the applied doctrine of right" (Kant, 2006: 94), in order to show that, ultimately, there cannot exist any conflict between morality and politics. In our times, an independence of the political sphere from ethical issues has been denied by John Rawls, whose *Theory of Justice* has been widely regarded as a revival of political philosophy.

Without any doubt, *The Concept of the Political* is part of the Machiavellian tradition. Like Machiavelli, Schmitt conceives the political as a specific sphere of

human existence, independent from ethics and also from economics. Schmitt intends to establish a criterion of the political. This criterion, however, cannot be seen in the preservation of state power and state's existence, since, as Schmitt declares in the first sentence of his book: "The concept of the state presupposes the concept of the political" (Schmitt, 2007: 19). The criterion Schmitt proposes is the *friend-enemy distinction*. "The specific political distinction to which political actions and motives can be reduced is that between friend and enemy. This provides a definition in the sense of a criterion and not as an exhaustive definition or an indicative of substantial content. Insofar as it is not derived from other criteria, the antithesis of friend and enemy corresponds to the relatively independent criteria of other antitheses: good and evil in the moral sphere, beautiful and ugly in the aesthetic sphere, and so on. In any event it is independent, not in the sense of a distinct new domain, but in that it can neither be based on any one antithesis or any combination of other antitheses, nor can it be traced to these. If the antithesis of good and evil is not simply identical with that of beautiful and ugly, profitable and unprofitable, and cannot be directly reduced to the others, then the antithesis of friend and enemy must even less be confused with or mistaken for the others. The distinction of friend and enemy denotes the utmost degree of intensity of a union or separation, of an association or dissociation. [...] The political enemy need not to be morally evil or aesthetically ugly; he need not appear as an economic competitor, and it may even be advantageous to engage with him in business transactions. But he is, nevertheless, the other, the stranger; and it is sufficient for his nature that he is, in an especially intense way, existentially something different and alien, so that in the extreme case conflicts with him are possible. These [conflicts] can neither be decided by a previously determined general norm nor by the judgment of a disinterested and therefore neutral third party" (*ibid.*: 26-27).¹

So, "enemy" does not mean simply something like opponent, adversary, rival or economic competitor. Standing above all norms and "neutral third party" judgments, the friend-enemy antithesis may always lead to a deadly conflict, since the enemy is denying my own being by his pure existence. Therefore, Schmitt conceives the friend-enemy antithesis as something "existential", which characterizes human life as such. And if the friend-enemy antithesis is the essence of the *Political*, the Political has an existential meaning for us. "From this most extreme possibility [of real combat] human life derives its specifically political tension" (*ibid.*: 35).

But why does Schmitt speak of "*political tension*"? Is every real combat political? Would Schmitt tell us, for example, that the *bellum omnium contra omnes*

¹ Since *The Concept of the Political* only offers a criterion, a substantial concept or notion of the political might well include something like "justice" or "search for the common good". Hence one could say that the title of Schmitt's book is somewhat misleading.

in a fictitious Hobbesian *state of nature* is a political conflict? Certainly, he would not. Since Schmitt emphasizes that the enemy in question is always the “*public enemy*” (*hostis*), not the private (*inimicus*) (*ibid.*: 28). But what does “public” mean? Of course, Schmitt cannot answer that public is that what is political, and subsequently define the political by the public, since this would imply a circular reasoning. The solution to this difficult question lies in the fact that the friend-enemy antithesis takes form not only in real enmity, but also in real friendship.² By friendship can be formed a collectivity of men. So, Schmitt concludes that the fighters in combat are collectivities. “An enemy exists only when, at least potentially, a fighting collectivity of people confronts a similar collectivity.” And the notion “public” is strongly related to such a collectivity: “The enemy is solely the public enemy, because everything that has a relationship to such a collectivity of men, particularly to a whole nation, becomes public by virtue of such relationship” (*ibid.*).

That very collectivity, in some way emerging from the friend-enemy relationship, is the state. The state is the political unit of a people or of a nation. The state is “in the decisive case the ultimate authority” (*ibid.*: 20). The state monopolizes the friend-enemy relationship, for only the state can have an exterior political enemy, while it excludes such enmity from its domestic affairs. The ultimate form of such enmity is war, in the sense of the law of nations. This, however, does not mean that war would be the end to which politics should aim. Schmitt emphasizes that his definition of the political is not bellicist or militarist, and he would not at all deny that “the politically reasonable course [could] reside in avoiding war” (*ibid.*: 33). War is only an always menacing possibility of the political, not its aim or destination. The state as the political unity is also sovereign in deciding on the “case of emergency”. Schmitt says of the state as the “decisive grouping”: “This grouping is therefore always the decisive human grouping, the political entity. If such an entity exists at all, it is always the decisive entity, and it is sovereign in the sense that the decision about the critical situation, even if it is the exception, must always necessarily reside there” (*ibid.*: 38).

The state has to make “the decision about the critical situation” also in respect to its domestic affairs. These affairs typically are characterized by conflicts between, for example, religious, economic or ethnic groups. “Every religious, moral, economic, ethical, or other antithesis transforms into a political one if it is sufficiently strong to group human beings effectively according to friend and enemy” (*ibid.*: 37). Such antitheses must not reach the intensity of the political friend-enemy antithesis; otherwise the existence of the state, the political unity, is at stake. In respect to Marxist communist parties Schmitt remarks: “Were it possible to group all

² On friendship Schmitt has little to say; at least, he is rather implicit on that matter.

mankind in the proletarian and bourgeois antithesis, as friend and enemy in capitalist states, and if, in the process, all other friend-and-enemy groupings were to disappear [...], then the political identity is destroyed" (*ibid.*: 38). Therefore, the state has also to decide about the "domestic enemy", which is the potential enemy in civil war. The state has to prevent civil war at all costs for the sake of its own existence.

What is now to be said about the political? It has its own antagonistic structure, but it has not its own area – like the opposition of good and evil belong to morals, profitable and unprofitable to economy, beautiful and ugly to aesthetics, true and false to science and so on. The term "political" denotes only an ultimate intensity of possible conflict. But the political means not only the utmost degree of intensity of dissociation, but also of association. The strongest association in this sense is the political unity, the state. So, we can conclude: the friend-enemy distinction and notion of political unity in Schmitt are Categories of Reflexion in the sense of Hegel's *Science of Logic*. Such Categories of Reflexion like essence and appearance, form and matter, cause and effect are characterized by the fact that none of them can be thought of without its specific opposite. There is no friend without enemy, no enemy without political unity, which Aristotle, and also Schmitt, as I would like to suppose, conceive as a structure of friendship.

The conception of friend and enemy in the political leads to another point. The opposition of good and evil, profitable and unprofitable, beautiful and ugly, true and false is always asymmetric, since it is one of valuation and devaluation. The good, the profitable and the beautiful are all in some respect better than their relative opposites – in the sense that we, normally, would always prefer them to the evil, the unprofitable and the ugly. This does not hold, however, for the friend-enemy distinction. The enemy, insofar he is the enemy, is not worse in any sense than the friend or my own collectivity. This is a key point in Schmitt's thought which in particular let him reject the doctrine of the just war. For, according to that doctrine, the belligerent must have a just cause, which seems to imply that his enemy is unjust or guilty.³ Schmitt is convinced that a confusion of such valuations with the political would inevitably lead to corruption of all political categories. I will come back to that point later.

Political Controversy

The Concept of the Political, at first sight, seems to limit the proper phenomenon of the political to politics between the states, the political unities. As we have seen, "The endeavour of a normal state consists above all in assuring total peace within

³ Aquinas, S. Theol II-II, q. 40, a. 1: Secundo requiritur causa justa; ut scilicet illi, qui impugnantur, propter aliquam culpam impugnationem mereantur.

the state and its territory” (*ibid.*: 46). In order to achieve peace, the state must prevent that interior conflicts between different groups reach the intensity of a proper friend-enemy antagonism. In respect to a state’s domestic affairs, one may therefore speak of “secondary concepts of the political”, like “religious, educational, communal, social policy”. But even if these are “secondary concepts”, they are also concepts of the political. According to Schmitt, “this becomes evident [...] by two obvious phenomena. First, all political concepts, images, and terms have a polemical meaning” (*ibid.*: 30). And second, all domestic political controversies may eventually intensify in a way that they are endangering the political unity of the state and end up in civil war (*ibid.*: 32). Ernst-Wolfgang Böckenförde, a former judge at German Constitutional Court, gives an example of such a controversy in the German Reich and in Prussia in the 1870s and 80s, the so-called *Kulturkampf* between the Catholic Church and the Bismarck-Administration, which both parties broke up before it ended in dissolution of the state or civil war (cf. Böckenförde, 1991: 347).

The principle of the political is, therefore, conflict. This has two implications. First: “A world state which embraces the entire globe and all of humanity cannot exist” (Schmitt, 2007: 53), and second: also in domestic politics one should not expect an encompassing consent. Political dissent is not at all transitory, because it is not a dissent in which the opponents are good or evil, right or wrong. From this, one might derive some kind of “ethics of politics”: This ethics simply consists in considering the friend-enemy antagonism as legitimate, in not condemning the enemy or nourish hatred against him, and in accepting the inevitability of that antagonism, while, at the same time, striving to subdue this antagonism to certain rules – be that rules of war or of political quarrel and debate.

Liberalism

This ethics of the political, however, is at odds with the practice and doctrine of liberalism. But, is there something like “political liberalism” at all? According to Schmitt, there is not, since the question “whether a specific political idea can be derived from the pure and consequent concept of liberalism” “is to be denied” (*ibid.*: 69-70). Referring to liberalism, “the individual must remain *terminus a quo* and *terminus ad quem*” (*ibid.*: 70-71), and its only purpose consists in “protecting individual freedom and private property” (*ibid.*: 70). However: “In case of need, the political entity must demand the sacrifice of life. Such a demand is in no way justifiable by the individualism of liberal thought” (*ibid.*: 71). The activity of state and government for liberalism is “confined to securing the conditions for liberty and eliminating infringements on freedom” (*ibid.*).

What is wrong with liberalism? Individual freedom and private property are legitimate purposes, but liberalism denies the existentiality of conflict and the friend-

enemy antagonism. In his earlier writings, Schmitt condemned liberalism in line with Cortés as striving to avoid every decision by “perpetual discussion”, but now he accuses liberalism of the “negation of the political” (*ibid.*: 70). “Liberal concepts typically move between ethics (intellectuality) and economics (trade)” (*ibid.*). “Thus the political concept of battle in liberal thought becomes competition in the domain of economics and discussion in the intellectual realm. Instead of a clear distinction between the two different states, that of war and of peace, there appears the dynamic of perpetual competition and perpetual discussion. The state turns into society: on the ethical-intellectual side into an ideological humanitarian conception of humanity, and on the other into an economic-technical system of production and traffic” (*ibid.*: 71-72). So liberalism has changed and degenerated “all political conceptions” (*ibid.*: 69).

But, to make things complicated – although liberalism is a “negation of the political”, it at the same time “has failed to elude the political” (*ibid.*). In the liberal “negation of the political”, in denying or attempting to ban existential conflict from politics liberalism does not lessen, but on the contrary exacerbates such conflict. In struggling for peace, freedom and humanity liberalism disavows its enemy or adversary in political quarrel and debate. Liberalism establishes an asymmetry in political conflict by devaluation of adversary positions. In the 19th century, it created a scheme of antagonisms:

Freedom, progress and reason	against	Feudalism, reaction and force
Economy, industry and technology	against	State, war and politics
Parliamentarianism	against	Dictatorship

So, liberalism presents itself as part of a friend-enemy antagonism in which the enemy appears to be in some respect evil. Liberalism, according to Schmitt, claims to be in a morally superior position.

This also holds in international affairs, especially respecting war. The “polarity of ethical pathos and economic calculation”, which is typical for liberalism, Schmitt also finds in “the Peace of Versailles” after the First World War. In declaring the German *Reich* responsible “for all war damages”, the Versailles treaty “establishes a foundation for a juridic and moral value judgment”, which should justify the claim for “reparations, i.e., a continuous and unlimited economic exploitation of the vanquished” (*ibid.*: 73). Liberalism, in Schmitt’s view, perverts the political by politicisation of universal moral principles such as “humanity”. Thus, however, “a particular [fighting] state seeks to usurp a universal concept against its opponent”, and the concept of humanity proves to be “an especially useful ideological instrument of imperialist expansion”. Schmitt resumes: “Whoever invokes humanity wants to cheat.

To confiscate the word humanity [...] has certain incalculable effects, such as denying the enemy the quality of being human and declaring him to be an outlaw of humanity; and a war can thereby be driven to the most extreme inhumanity” (*ibid.*: 54).

As Schmitt tells us, the economist Joseph Schumpeter claimed the methods of liberal politics to be “essentially unwarlike”. But, is liberalism “essentially unwarlike”, Schmitt asks. “Essentially unwarlike is [only] the terminology based on the essence of liberal ideology” (*ibid.*: 78). An imperialism inspired by liberalism will always try first to apply “its economic means, e.g. terminating credit, embargoing raw materials, destroying the currency of others, and so on”, but eventually will resort to “sufficient technical means to bring violent death”. But “For the application of such means, a new and essentially pacifist vocabulary has been created. War is condemned but executions, sanctions, punitive expeditions, pacifications, protection of treaties, international police, and measures to assure peace remain. The adversary is thus no longer called an enemy but a disturber of peace and is thereby designated to be an outlaw of humanity” (*ibid.*: 79).

Liberalism, as Schmitt puts it, regards state and politics as legitimate only if they serve the individual’s private purposes. Liberalism is therefore not a contemptible political ideology of the bourgeoisie or of the *classa discuditora*, as according to Donoso Cortés, but the real adversary of the political. The political, characterized by the friend-enemy antagonism, is founded in the human condition, and in denying it, liberalism is unable to “escape the logic of the political” (*ibid.*). Instead of avoiding conflict, liberalism is intensifying and exacerbating it, thereby perverting the political. Using a non-political language of morals and peace, liberalism falls victim to political hypocrisy. According to Hannah Arendt, hypocrisy is a capital vice in politics.

It may be interesting to compare Schmitt’s concept of the political with that of Hannah Arendt, which reveals a further aspect of the political: Political conflict in domestic affairs is not only a possible menace to the political unity and therefore tolerable only within certain limits, but sometimes even helpful to save that political unity. That is shown in an exemplary manner by Hannah Arendt.

Hannah Arendt and the Dreyfus Affair

In respect of political conflict, there exist some significant similarities between Schmitt’s and Hannah Arendt’s concept of the political. Despite obvious differences between them – Arendt would never explicate the political by referring to violence and war – their conceptions have something in common. To Arendt, as to Schmitt, the notion of the political also denotes an existential dimension of mankind. Arendt also would certainly refuse to conceive politics primarily as a search for the common good or common welfare, or as “an applied doctrine of right” in a Kantian manner. According to Arendt’s anthropology man is the acting animal, the *animal*

agens. Acting, however, essentially does not consist in pursuing certain purposes or ends, but rather in the self-revealing of the acting person and the performing of deeds that are apt to change the world in a certain respect. Such deeds are not only worth remembering and constitute human history; moreover, by these deeds humans “created a human world, a human reality” (Arendt, 2017: 251). Without deeds worth remembering and without history, as Arendt declares in a meditation on Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, human beings are not really human beings; “they behaved like a part of nature”, for whom nature “had remained, in all its majesty, the only overwhelming reality – compared to which they appeared to be phantoms, unreal and ghostlike” (*ibid.*).

In Arendt’s conception of politics or of the political, conflict is no element. But, in my opinion, in the most impressive example she gives of political action, conflict plays an important role. This example is Arendt’s analysis of the so-called Dreyfus Affair she gives in her book on *The Origins of Totalitarianism*.

“Alfred Dreyfus, a Jewish officer of the French General Staff, was accused and convicted of espionage for Germany. The verdict, lifelong deportation to Devil’s Island, was unanimously adopted” (*ibid.*: 115). According to Arendt, Alfred Dreyfus became the central character not only in an anti-Semitic campaign, but also in efforts of the Catholic Church to restore its lost political power, and of the army, which planned to “gain the upper hand over the corrupt civil power” and to pave the way “for a bloodless *coup d’état*” (*ibid.*: 141). So, the Dreyfus Affair finally turned out to be an attack of “Army and Clergy against the Republic” (*ibid.*: 129), in which combat the hero was not Dreyfus, but Georges Clemenceau (*ibid.*: 123), who later became prime minister.

Why Clemenceau? Clemenceau, editor of the newspaper *L’Aurore*, realized the dimension of the Dreyfus case. He was not only convinced that Dreyfus was innocent, but also that “the republic [was] in danger” (*ibid.*: 142). Therefore “Clemenceau’s approach [...] was not directed against a particular miscarriage of justice, but was based upon such ‘abstract’ ideas as justice, liberty, and civic virtue” (*ibid.*). These general concepts proved to have indeed a polemic meaning. Clemenceau was able to convince his followers, the “Dreyfusards”, “that an infringement of the rights of one man was an infringement of the rights of all” (*ibid.*: 147). Clemenceau and the “Dreyfusards” “finally succeeded in splitting every class, even every family in France into factions over the Dreyfus issue” (*ibid.*: 148).

Georges Clemenceau and Émile Zola stirred up conflict, but also revealed that there was a fundamental conflict concerning the republic, the political entity, itself. In Arendt’s view, they revealed also the people, in the political sense of *populus*, in its true shape. What is the people? Arendt says: The people in its true shape is represented by the citizens who hear the call of the patriots in the hour of danger and

emergency and who can “rid” this call of all societal commitments.⁴ “They were a mixture of diverse elements: men as far apart as Zola and Péguy or Jaurès and Picquart, men who on the morrow would part company and go their separate ways. ‘They come from political parties and religious communities who have nothing in common, who are even in conflict with each other... Those men do not know each other. They have fought and on occasion they will fight again. Do not deceive yourselves: those are the “elite” of the French democracy’” (*ibid.*: 148-149). And in respect to those as the true representatives of the people, Arendt says, though only in the German version: It would not have been hubris, but simply the truth, if Clemenceau had regarded himself to be the voice of the people (which he did not). Although army and clergy failed at last in achieving their aims, the affair did not end with a victory of the Dreyfusards. There was no retrial of Dreyfus, but only an ambiguous pardon and an even more ambiguous amnesty, lumping together “men of honour and hoodlums” (*ibid.*: 155). However, as Arendt puts it, Jacobine patriotism, which regarded human rights always as part of the French nation’s glory, was to save France from the disgrace of a domestic fascism (only in the German version, p. 170).

Like Schmitt, Hannah Arendt holds that the political is something superior to all societal commitments and interests. It induces men to fight (although not with violence and weapons). And, we may conclude: Arendt makes clear that conflict in domestic politics is not only a menace to the “political entity”, the republic, but can also be a way in which that political entity is defended and saved.

Conclusion

Schmitt’s friend-enemy distinction is a criterion, not an essential definition of the political. And to me, it seems convincing to link sovereignty of the political unity and the friend-enemy distinction. Otherwise, an essential definition of the political would have to say something about the nature of political unity, with other words, not only about enmity, but also about friendship, seen in European political thought since the time of Aristotle as the basis of citizenship. Schmitt, however, has little to tell us on this topic, and so the title of his book appears to be partially misleading.

On the other side, Schmitt is emphasizing rightly the polemic character of political notions used in public discussion. But this polemic character is not only a threat to political unity, but, as Hannah Arendt has shown, sharp conflicts in public discussion also sometimes may foster that very unity. Referring to such polemic terms in debate, in Bernard Shaw’s play *Saint Joan* (Scene IV) the Earl of Warwick declares that “they are only east and west views of the same thing” (Shaw, 1934: 983), pointing not at the dividing potential of “east and west”, but at the uniting force of “the same thing” which is, in politics, the common good.

⁴ This statement is to be found only in the German version of Arendt’s book (Arendt, 1993: 198).

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