Two Faces of Politics: Political Implications of Kant's Aesthetics

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This paper aims to define political life as transcendentally ideal and empirically real by proposing an unorthodox reading of Kant's aesthetics of the beautiful and the sublime in the light of Schmitt's concept of the political. Kant's aesthetics of the beautiful suggests that the first face of politics is an aesthetic idea giving political significance to sensible experience through symbolic representation by analogy. Meanwhile, Kant's aesthetics of the sublime indicates another face of politics as the sublime experience of inevitable enmity. The former permits politics to remain objectively undefined, thereby enabling limitless experiences of the political, while the latter points to the specifically political distinction between friends and enemies founded on Kant's aesthetics of the sublime. The paper argues that Kant's aesthetics suggests a twofold foundation for political life, presenting a political antinomy between politics as boundless experience and as antagonistic struggle.

1. Introduction

The search for the foundation of politics has been a standing question within political philosophy. Surprisingly, Immanuel Kant, who revolutionised the whole Western philosophical tradition, has limited impact on a critical review of the foundation of politics since the status of politics has not been explicitly discussed in any of Kant's *Critiques*. However, Kant's critical philosophy is such an open philosophical system which justifies inquiries regarding even those philosophical questions that Kant himself has not explicitly addressed. According to Kant, his critical philosophy contains an "entire outline of the science of meta-

physics" (Kant 1998: 133), in which there "cannot be a single meta-physical problem that has not been solved here, or at least a solution of which the key has not been provided" (Kant 1998: 101). Not many of Kant's scholars have tried to explore the problem of the foundations of political life within his critical philosophy.[1] Hannah Arendt's interpretation of Kant's aesthetics is one of the most creative efforts to rethink the foundations of politics by using Kant's critical system as its reference point.

Against traditional interpretations of Kant's political writings linking them to Kant's ethics, Arendt argues that neither Kant's epistemology nor ethics but aesthetics[2] can give the foundations of the politics within Kant's critical system (Arendt 1989: 9). However, Arendt's interpretation of Kant has been criticized by various scholars for being unfaithful[3] to Kant's philosophy due to its insufficient attention to Kant's ethics[4] and "sociologizing and anthropologising readings" of Kant's theory of aesthetics. Moreover, Arendt has only explored the possibility of defining politics in Kant's aesthetics of the beautiful, while an alternative conceptualisation of politics based on the aesthetics of the sublime was left without further consideration.[5]

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[1] Howard L. Williams observed that Kant's "political philosophy is part and parcel of his critical system" (Howard 1983: 273). However, according to Charles Taylor, Howard L. Williams himself failed to make this connection sufficiently well (Taylor 1984: 45). Onora O'Neill's attempt to relate Kant's conception of politics to his critical philosophy was more successful, but was limited to the *Transcendental Method* of *the Critique of Pure Reason*, which examines the structural similarity between the authority of thought and the political order presented by Kant's political metaphors (O'Neill 1992: 50-80).

[2] Among Kant's scholars Kant's aesthetics of the beautiful is recognised as one of source within Kant's critical system that allows to approach Kant's philosophy as irreducible to morality by showing that certain aspects of human life can have autonomic value independent from Kant's morality. For example, Jane Kneller argues that Kant's aesthetic of the beautiful justifies the autonomous value of nature independent from Kant's view of morality (Kneller 1998: 403-414). Moreover, Luigi Caranti and Diana Piroli claim that Kant's aesthetics of the beautiful is that part of Kant's critical system that makes Kant's philosophy relevant to climate change debates (Caranti and Piroli 2024).

[3] According to Andrew Norris, Arendt's reinterpretation of Kant's critical theory is based on Arendt's effort to find the non-empirical foundation for her political theory (Norris 1996: 193-194).

[4] Scholars Patrick Riley and Robert Dostal criticized Arendt due to her misinterpretation of Kant's political thought since Arendt neglected the link between Kant's political thought and Kant's ethics. However, the issue with both Kant's works, traditional interpretation of Kant's works and Arendt's interpretation lack of clear identification of how politics as a distinguished sphere of human experience could be defined within Kant critical system (Riley 1987: 379-392; Dostal 1984: 725-755).

[5] Suzan Shell's study *The Politics of Beauty: A Study of Kant's Critique of Taste* is one of rare efforts to rethink politics in terms of Kant's aesthetics by following an assumption that "Part One of the Critique of Judgment presents the faint but distinctive outlines of that aesthetic–political project". However, even this study

Despite some criticism, Arendt's effort to reinterpret Kant's critical works is praiseworthy since Arendt's interpretation raises a broader question of how politics is *a priori* given as a part of the total human experience, while Kant's critical system serves as a way to reconsider the foundations of political life. However, Arendt's interpretation of Kant's aesthetics lacks a clear definition of politics, which follows from Kant's aesthetics.[6] By reinterpreting Kant's aesthetics of the beautiful and sublime from a political perspective, this paper aims to define the foundations of politics in terms of aesthetic ideas and the sublime. I do not argue that Kant has any explicit or implicit intention to show the dual foundations of politics based on the aesthetics of the beautiful and sublime. Nevertheless, Kant's *Critique of Judgment* here is a source to rethink the foundations of politics in the light of Kant's critical works. Similar to Arendt's interpretation of Kant, this paper is a creative effort to reconsider the foundations of politics using Kant's critical thought as one of the sources to define political life in terms of a transcendental framework.

In this paper, I will try to argue that political life is both transcendentally ideal and empirically real, yet Kant's aesthetics suggests two opposite faces, or conceptualisations, of politics. As this paper will seek to demonstrate, Kant's aesthetics of the beautiful suggests that politics is an aesthetic idea where the symbolic representation ensures the union between supersensible ideas and concrete sensible experience. This perspective strips politics of any fixed, objective definition, leaving it inherently indeterminate by rendering social relations indistinguishable from politically specific experiences.

From my point of view, Carl Schmitt's concept of the political poses one of the most radical challenges to the conceptualisation of politics as aesthetic ideas. By connecting Schmitt's concept of the political and Kant's aesthetics of the sublime,[7] I argue that transcendentally ideal and empirically real enmity is the sublime experience that negatively represents Kant's morality devoid of symbolic representations. However, the sublime experience of the political reveals the tragic face of

does not discuss the status of politics in Kant's critical system, while leaving Kant's aesthetics of sublime aside from her inquiry (Shell 2022: 6).

[6] By tracing links between Kant's theory of aesthetics and his political writings, Arendt argues that Kant's political ideas such as perpetual peace, progress of humanity and federal union are founded on sociability which can be only traced from Kant's reflective judgment. Although Arendt acknowledges the political significance of ideas, their status within Kant's critical system has left undiscussed by Arendt.

[7] Schmitt's political thought received conflicting interpretations over its relationship with aesthetics. On the one hand, some Schmitt's interpreters such as Jürgen Habermas,sources Richard Wolin and Jan-Werner Müller criticized Schmitt political thought due to its aesthetic character Jacques RancièreJacques Rancièrea has(Habermas 1989: 137; Wolin 1992: 424-447; Müller 2003: 8).criticise On the other, Neil Levi refuted this criticism by the effort to understand aesthetics in Schmitt's terms which openly oppose anesthetization of the politics, while acknowledging some aesthetical elements within Schmitt's political thought (Levi 2007: 27-43).

political life as the inadequacy to achieve the ideal of humanity without enemies within concrete reality.

Schmitt's political thought has been a source of inspiration for contemporary political thinkers (e.g., Chantal Mouffe, Jacques Rancière, Slavoj Žižek), who critically engage with liberal democratic theorists such as John Rawls and Jürgen Habermas, who are traditionally associated with Kant's philosophical tradition. Reducing contemporary philosophical debates to a simple dichotomy of "Schmittians" and "Kantians" would be unforgivably misleading - for instance, Jacques Rancière has been writing on Kant's aesthetics of the sublime. Nonetheless, the return to the original works of Kant and Schmitt in searching for a *priori* the foundations of political life can complement contemporary debates on the nature of politics, which is one of the key questions for the philosophers of post-politics (Wilson & Swyngedouw 2014: 1–22). Yet direct engagement with these contexts is beyond the scope of this paper.

2. Politics as an aesthetic idea

From the perspective of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, politics can be either framed as a concept of understanding or an idea of reason.[8] The natural world is conceived through concepts of understanding, while human actions are conceived through ideas of reason. Even though Kant acknowledges such transcendental ideas as God and soul, freedom is the only transcendental idea that directly relates to human action, ensuring its practical reality without enhancing human cognition. Kant acknowledges that human actions can be conceived as if they are a part of the natural world, yet there would be no place for freedom and morality in such a deterministic natural world. Although crimes can be explained as conditioned by external factors, they have to be rightfully condemned as if they are independent of external conditions, since the reason is not determinable but determining. As Kant argues "if we say that regardless of the entire course of life he has led up to that point, the agent could still have refrained from the lie, then this signifies only that it stands immediately under the power of reason, and in its causality reason is not subject to any conditions of appearance or of the temporal series" (Kant 1998: 544). For Kant, freedom and determinism are only compatible if a clear distinction is made between the law-abiding world of nature and human action, where the idea of freedom is presupposed.[9] The identification of politics with concepts of understanding

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[8] According to Kant, "to think of an object and to cognize an object are thus not the same" because "if an intuition corresponding to the concept could not be given at an, then it would be a thought as far as its form is concerned, but without any object, and by its means no cognition of anything at all would be possible", (Kant 1998: 254).

[9] "In freedom a relation is possible to conditions of a kind entirely different from those in natural necessity, the law of the latter does not affect the former; hence each is independent of the other, and can take place without being disturbed by the other" (Kant 1998: 545).

would violate Kant's solution of the antinomy between determinism and freedom since politics consists of human actions which should be treated as if they are transcendental and, thus, undetermined by concepts of understanding.

Kant's ideas of reason are absolute concepts which help to conceive totalities transcending concrete sensible experience (Kant 1998: 399–400). Particular political ideas (such as democracy, state and the people) and politics itself refer to different totalities of human actions; therefore, political life is unthinkable without reference to ideas.[10] Kant's ideas of reason are also distinguished from the concept of understanding because "no appearance can be found in which they may be represented *in concreto*" (Kant 1998: 551–552). However, politics is not limited only to supersensible ideas but is also linked to sensible experience, which allows us to conceive political life as a concrete reality instead of pure abstractions. For example, John Gerring argues that voting in the elections would be meaningless without making reference to the idea of democracy (Gerring 2012: 156–158). Also, the opposite is true – the idea of democracy would be meaningless without making reference to concrete, sensible experiences such as elections. Without linking the idea of the state with the concrete actions of its officials, it would be impossible to say anything about the (mal-)functioning of the concrete state. The idea of the people would be just an abstraction without the capacity to acknowledge a concrete political community.

In *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant discusses the relationship between ideas of reason and concrete sensible experience by introducing the notion of the ideal, which is "idea not merely *in concreto* but *in individuo,* i.e., as an individual thing which is determinable, or even determined, through the idea alone" (Kant 1998: 551). According to Kant, ideals such as the perfect humanity give a standard ("original image") to evaluate human actions upon the ideal, which "provide an indispensable standard for reason <…> to assess and measure the degree and the defects of what is incomplete" (Kant 1998: 551–552). Kant's definition of politics is closely related to Kant's notion of the ideal since politics as "an applied branch of right" relies on the ideal of perfect humanity without enemies, which serves as a standard to judge to what extent concrete sensible experience approaches it.[11] However, Kant's attempts to bridge ideas of reason and concrete sensible experience in his political writings suggest that politics itself is neither an idea of reason nor concrete experience alone, but is both ideas and concrete sensible experience. To think of human actions as concrete political experience instead of pure transcendental abstractions, politics has to be both transcendentally ideal and empirically real. Without the possibility of

[10] In the *Doctrine of Right*, Kant argues that the state is an idea which "serves as a norm (norma) for every actual union into a commonwealth (hence serves as limited only for its internal constitution)" (Kant 1991a: 125).

[11] In Kant's political writings, politics is defined as "an applied branch of right", while morality is "a theoretical branch of right" (Kant 1991b: 116).

a priori connection of ideas with sensibility, politics would be just a life-less abstraction, while Kant's ideal is unable to explain how something as transcendentally ideal and empirically real is possible at the same time.

Aesthetic ideas, introduced in Kant's *Critique of Judgment,* give *a priori* foundations to conceive politics as a phenomenon depending on both sensible experience and ideas, or transcendentally ideal and empirically real. According to Kant, an aesthetic idea is "like the counterpart (pendant) of a rational idea," yet imagination has the power to create "a second nature out of the material supplied to it by actual nature" (Kant 2007: 143). Although Kant associates aesthetic ideas with beauty, which is an "expression of aesthetic ideas" (Kant 2007: 149), politics also can be conceived as a special kind of aesthetic idea. Samantha Matherne argues that the aesthetic ideas can also conceive of the experience of human everyday life (e.g. death, vice, love, reputation), making aesthetic ideas a relatively independent area from Kant's epistemology and ethics (Matherne 2013: 26–17; 29–30). Since political life is an inseparable and unavoidable part of human life, Kant's notion of aesthetic ideas opens the possibility of conceiving politics beyond identification with the three transcendental ideas of God, soul and freedom. While Kant's political writings rely on Kant's moral theory, Kant's aesthetic ideas give *a priori* foundations for the multitude of political ideas (e.g., democracy, state, nation, etc.) and an idea of politics itself, which is a separate area of human experience from both understanding and morality.

Although Kant has not explicitly discussed how politics could be conceived as aesthetic ideas in his *Critique of Judgment*, Kant mentions an analogy of a hand-mill representing the governance of the state as an example of symbolic *hypotyposis*.[12] Like a hand-mill symbolically representing the state,[13] the whole political experience can be conceived as symbols of supersensible ideas. Since symbolic representation brings abstract ideas to life,[14] political life is also possible as transcendentally ideal and empirically real due to symbolic *hypotyposis*. The symbolic representation allows politics to appear as concrete political experience

[12] Byron Ashley Clugston argues that one of the purposes of symbolic hypotyposes judgment is to achieve a harmony between supersensible ideas and concrete sensible experience: "contradiction is a basic feature of Kant's transcendental idealism, yet for our purposes at the level of the power of judgment's being able to grasp both ideas and sense and see their affinity or harmony" (Clugston 2019: 4).

[13] "In this way a monarchical state is represented as a living body when it is governed by constitutional laws, but as a mere machine (like a hand-mill) when it is governed by individual absolute will; but in both cases the representation is merely *symbolic*" (Kant 2007: 179–180).

[14] Rodolphe Gasché argues that symbolic hypotyposis is "this very limited, but also extremely essential type of presentation, one without which our pure concepts would remain lifeless, that Kant refers to as hypotyposis, as sensible presentation, as vivid illustration" (Gasché: 1990: 93).

through analogy by disinterested reflective judgment that gives sensible experience superensible political significance. In other words, one can think of concrete sensible experience as political only indirectly by linking it to supersensible ideas thanks to symbolic representation.

Through symbolic representation, concrete human experience acquires political significance when they are linked to supersensible ideas. For example, voting in elections becomes a symbol of the idea of democracy due to analogy, since casting a ballot in a ballot box would be conceived just as mechanical behaviour governed by the laws of nature without a reference to the supersensible idea of democracy. However, the concrete experience is not identical to supersensible ideas due to the analogical nature of the relationship between ideas and concrete experience. For Kant, the symbolic representation is a "mere rule of its reflection upon that intuition to quite another object of which the former is but the symbol" (Kant 2007: 179). Taking into consideration the example of democracy, voting (a physical behaviour) in elections is not equal to democracy, but one of the many symbols of it. Nonetheless, symbols (such as voting) which ensure that supersensible ideas (such as democracy) would attain concrete existence ensure the possibility of conceiving political experience as transcendentally ideal and empirically real. In other words, representation is necessary to ensure the foundations of political life, which is at the same time ideal and real.

Symbolic representation is enabled by reflective judgment whose *a priori* status means that human beings have a universal faculty to link particular sensible experiences to universal ideas without predetermined rules (Kant 2007: 355). Accordingly, just like contention and disputes over aesthetic ideas are objectively inevitable, yet unsolvable (Kant 2007: 165–175), contention and disputes over definitions of politics are also objectively unsolvable, yet unavoidable due to the absence of predetermined rules in reflective judgment. Since aesthetic ideas rely on subjective universality,[15] there is no objective rule on how to attribute a particular political idea to particular human actions (e.g., there is no objective rule to attribute voting only to the idea of democracy). Therefore, any concrete sensible experience could be attributed to politics by a free play of disinterested reflective judgment.

The lack of objective definitions of politics does not mean that politics lacks subjective definitions. Kant himself suggests a subjective definition of politics with a reference to morality in his political writings. Although Kant's ideal of humanity without enemies serves as an *a priori* standard to evaluate how concrete reality approaches the ideal, there is no objective standard on how to link Kant's ideal of humanity without enemies to sensible experience. Any concrete, sensible experience could become a symbol of advancement towards the ideal of

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[15] Andrew Chignell stresses that "one of the essential features of an aesthetic idea is that it involves a plurality of representations or thoughts linked together" (Chignell 2007: 423–424).

perfect humanity without enemies. Even the same sensible experience could be treated as a symbol of either advancement towards or regression from the ideal, since there is no objective rule to determine the link between ideas and their symbolic representation as objectively necessary. However, Kant's aesthetic ideas enable us to conceive political experience as independent from morality; therefore, Kant's definition of politics is only one of the possible ways of its conceptualisation.

One could also argue that structural similarities between Kant's notion of aesthetic ideas and politics are insufficient to ground politics on Kant's aesthetics. However, this paper aims to try to find the most appropriate place for politics within Kant's critical system that draws *a priori* limits of the whole human experience. Since Kant's aesthetic ideas allow us to find *a priori* foundations for politics as a separate area from morality and understanding, the association of politics with Kant's aesthetic ideas gives a promising opportunity to establish politics within a framework of Kant's critical thought. The remaining two alternatives to politics as an aesthetic idea are these: either political life could not be grounded on any of Kant's *a priori*, or politics has another face based on not yet discussed Kant's aesthetics of the sublime. While the former alternative is fruitless, the latter is the only option worthy of exploration within Kant's critical thought.

3. Politics as the sublime

Political experience defined in terms of Kant's aesthetic ideas leaves politics not only without an objective definition but also without an *a priori* political standard based on which sensible experience has to be judged as specifically political. What Carl Schmitt argues about the identification of state and society also applies to the definition of politics based on Kant's aesthetic ideas: "Everything is at least potentially political, and in referring to the state it is no longer possible to assert for it a specifically political characteristic" (Schmitt 2007: 22). By paraphrasing Schmitt, we could say that any social relations can be symbolically represented as political due to conceptualisation of politics in terms of Kant's aesthetic ideas. Hence, Schmitt's concept of the political is an effort to address whether there is a possibility of having any *a priori* standard to distinguish specifically political experience from any other social relations.

Despite the key difference between politics as Kant's aesthetic idea and Schmitt's political thought, these two thinkers share some commonalities, suggesting that a connection between Kant's critical system and Schmitt's political theory is not so distant as it seems at first glance. Firstly, Schmitt's ambition[16] to define the limits of political experience resembles Kant's ambition to define the *a priori* limits of

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[16] "A definition of the political can be obtained only by discovering and defining the specifically political categories" (Schmitt 2007: 21).

human thought itself. Although Schmitt presents the concept of the political in existential terms, Schmitt's concept of the political has a very similar character to Kant's *a priori*[17]. Schmitt argues that "nonpolitical and even antipolitical system serves existing or newly emerging friend-and-enemy groupings and cannot escape the logic of the political" (Schmitt 2007: 79). The political is also abstracted from specific empirical content, therefore any concrete experience could potentially become political: "Political can derive its energy from the most varied human endeavors, from the religious, economic, moral, and other antitheses" (Schmitt 2007: 36).

Moreover, Schmitt's concept of the political seems to be transcendentally ideal and empirically real too[18]. In the Transcendental Aesthetic of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant argues that space and time are both transcendentally ideal and empirically real because both of these pure forms of cognition are necessary parts of any sensible experience, while conditioning any sensible experience at the same time (Kant 1998: 155–192). Meanwhile, Schmitt's concept of the political is sensibly present in every truly political experience, while relying on a non-empirical and purely formal standard of friends-enemies grouping at the same time. Schmitt's concept of the political, much like Kant's aesthetic ideas, appears to share the dual character of being both transcendentally ideal and empirically real.

Finally, similarly to Kant's reflective judgment where the general rule[19] has to be derived from the particular situation,[20] Schmitt's concept of the political does not rely on pre-determined criteria of the political but depends on the judgment over the particular situation: [friend and enemy grouping] „can neither be decided by a previously determined general norm" (Schmitt 2007: 27). However, Schmitt's political judg-

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[17] Schmitt refers to existence when introducing the concept of the political: "The friend and enemy concepts are to be understood in their concrete and existential sense" (Schmitt 2007: 27). However, the foundation of the political is not necessarily existentialistic, while different scholars' opposing views shows that the foundation of the political is an open question. For example, Leo Strauss argues that Schmitt concept of the political is a polemic with the liberal understanding of the state of nature (Strauss 2007: 119). However, Heinrich Meier claims that Schmitt's concept of the political could not be understood without taking into account theology (Meier 2011: 27).

[18] Schmitt himself stresses the theoretical and practical character of the political: "It can exist theoretically and practically, without having simultaneously to draw upon all those moral, aesthetic, economic, or other distinctions" (Schmitt 2007: 26–27).

[19] Some Kant's scholars, such as Ted Cohen, argue that general rule cannot be finally derived from particular judgments since reflective judgments in aesthetics do not guarantee universal agreement (Cohen 1990: 137–145).

[20] Kant distinguishes two types of judgment – reflective and determining. The judgment is determining "if the universal (the rule, principle, or law) is given", while judgment is reflective "if only the particular is given and the universal has to be found for it" (Kant 2007: 15).

ment is not "judgment of a disinterested and therefore neutral third party" (Schmitt 2007: 27). Schmitt even openly criticises the imposition of aesthetical judgment on the political since "aesthetic value judgment is absolutely autonomous, that artistic genius is sovereign" (Schmitt 2007: 72). In contrast to disinterested and neutral aesthetic judgment, Schmitt's political judgment directly concerns a particular political community in the face of a mortal enemy: "Only the actual participants can correctly recognize, understand, and judge the concrete situation and settle the extreme case of conflict" (Schmitt 2007: 27). However, Schmitt's critique of an aesthetic judgment does not mean that political decisions could not be identified with Kant's reflective judgment as such. From Kant's perspective, Schmitt's political decision is a special kind of reflective judgment, yet not a disinterested one.

Nonetheless, Schmitt's concept of politics challenges not only attempts to conceive politics in terms of disinterested judgment but also to reapproach politics in terms of Kant's aesthetic ideas. While aesthetic ideas are objectively undefinable, politics has an "inherently objective nature and autonomy" (Schmitt 2007: 26). In contrast to the free play of reflective judgment, Schmitt's concept of the political is distinguished from other kinds of human experience by its serious character due to the reference "to the real possibility of physical killing" (Schmitt 2007: 33). As Schmitt points out, the world without seriousness is just "entertainment" (Schmitt 2007: 53–54) where humanity is "a culturally interested public" (Schmitt 2007: 72). Schmitt also emphasises that friend-enemy grouping cannot be reduced to the "fact that the entire life of a human being is a struggle and every human being symbolically a combatant" (Schmitt 2007: 33). Therefore, the political enmity cannot be simply reduced to symbolic representation.

Leo Strauss rightly points out that Schmitt's concept of the political is an attempt to criticise the prevailing understanding of aesthetics by replacing it with the concept of the political (Strauss 2007: 102–103). By extending Leo Strauss's point, there is a possibility that Schmitt argues not against aesthetics in general but against a particular kind of aesthetics based on symbolic representations. However, Schmitt has not extensively discussed any alternative theory of aesthetics behind his concept of the political in his works, despite his acknowledgement of the political significance of the relationship between aesthetics and politics[21]. However, it seems evident that Schmitt's concept of the political implies non-symbolic representation behind transcendentally ideal and empirically real enmity of the political.

An alternative, non-symbolic aesthetic theory — one potentially compatible with the concept of the political—opens the possibility of reinterpreting Schmitt's political thought in light of Kant's aesthetics of the sublime. Since Kant's theory of the sublime presupposes an alter-

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[21] According to Schmitt, politics and aesthetics is closely interconnected: "art is the necessary result of the social, political, and religious condition of peoples" (Schmitt 1986: 9).

native mode of non-symbolic representation to Kant's aesthetics of the beautiful, it seems that Kant's notion of the sublime provides perhaps the most coherent aesthetic framework for revisiting Schmitt's concept of the political.[22] Kant's notion of sublime feeling is characterised by five main features that Schmitt's concept of the political well corresponds to: 1) absence of symbolic representation; 2) formless character; 3) resistance to sensible interests and seriousness; 4) absolute greatness; 5) direct, yet negative representation of Kant's morality.

Firstly, Kant argues that "perhaps there is no more sublime passage in the Jewish Law than the commandment: Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven or on earth, or under the earth" (Kant 2007: 104). Schmitt's concept of the political is an embodiment of the Jewish Law prohibition of symbolic representation within political experience. For Schmitt, politics is an area of forms such as a state,[23] party politics, various policies, political tactics and practices, images and concepts which contain "only some sort of antagonistic moment", which "turn into empty and ghostlike abstractions" when concrete friend-enemy grouping disappears. Meanwhile, Schmitt's concept political itself is deeper than any particular political forms and cannot be reduced to them since "the concept of the state presupposes the concept of the political" (Schmitt 2007: 19). To use Kant's terms, politics is an area of symbolically representable aesthetical ideas, yet political forms themselves are conditioned by the presence of the necessary hidden enmity which itself cannot be symbolically represented. According to Schmitt, political life concerns not an actual war but the war as "an ever present possibility" that "creates a specifically political behavior" (Schmitt 2007: 34). Any attempts to

[22] Schmitt's positive theory of aesthetics is presented in *Hamlet or Hecuba. The Irruption of Time into Play*. On the one hand, Schmitt argues that true tragedy cannot be represented in terms of symbolic representation: "It is impossible to overlook the fact that the tragic is not case compatible with play-acting" (Schmitt 1985: 35). On the other, Schmitt argues that Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is both a real tragedy and an artwork. According to Schmitt, Shakespeare succeeded in achieving the representation of tragic events because *Hamlet* expresses tragic events negatively as the absence of the tragedy within a play: "The play within the play in the Third Act of Hamlet is no peep behind the backcloth, but on the contrary, it is the true play itself replayed in front of the backcloth" (Schmitt 1985: 37). Schmitt's aesthetics of tragedy resembles Jean-François Lyotard's interpretation of Kant's aesthetics of the sublime since both Schmitt and Lyotard share the same question – how non-symbolic representation is possible. According to Lyotard, the sublime art is possible due to reference to the difference as a source of sublime (Lyotard 2006: 140). For Schmitt, the very difference between tragedy in a play and tragedy in a life (a play within a play) is a non-symbolic representation of tragic events which justifies *Hamlet* as a true play and true tragedy at the same time. The similarity between Schmitt's aesthetics of tragedy and Kant's aesthetics of sublime (at least with Lyotard's interpretation) favours an effort to reapproach the concept of the political through Kant's aesthetics of the sublime.

[23] Schmitt, in his correspondence with Alexandre Kojève, even argues that the concept of the political remains even after 'mortal God' (the state) is no longer exist as political form (Kojève and Schmitt 2001: 101–103).

represent the enmity symbolically would create an illusion that the enemy is not the transcendental principle of the political experience but a temporal obstacle towards the ideal of humanity without enemies which eventually could be eliminated with neutralisation of the specific enemy.

Secondly, Schmitt's concept of the political and Kant's sublime share formless character.[24] For Kant, the sublime arises from formless experience: "sublime is to be found in an object even devoid of form" (Kant 2007: 75). Schmitt's concept of the political can be compared to Kant's reference to the formless nature since the inevitable presence of possibility of the real enemy signifies an unavoidable disorder and irregularity as the foundation of political life. Kant refers to "chaos", "wildest and most irregular disorder and desolation" as signs of the formless character of the sublime (Kant 2007: 77). Schmitt's concept of the political is also founded on the inevitable disorder of political life since the concept of the political relies on the exceptional case of the real possibility of an enemy. According to Schmitt, any political order is based not on the norms but on the inevitable presence of an exceptional case upon which any political order is built.[25] Although the political decision on the exception lies as the foundation of any political order, any political order cannot eliminate the real possibility of the enemy as such, therefore, "the political world is a pluriverse, not a universe" (Schmitt 2007: 53). In other words, an exceptional case of the inevitable possibility of war impedes any attempts to establish the ultimate political order of humanity without enemies - the political experience at its foundations is necessarily chaotic.

Thirdly, Kant's sublime also implies seriousness: "[sublime] is an emotion that seems to be no play, but a serious matter" (Kant 2007: 76). The serious character of the sublime can be traced to might as a sign of the sublime concerning "greatness of the resistance" (Kant 2007: 90). Kant's aesthetics of the beautiful involves disinterested judgment, whereas Kant's aesthetics of the sublime implies a judgment that stands in "resistance to the interest of the senses" (Kant 2007: 97). To specify, the sublime requires the reflective judgment which is not disinterested but against natural interests. Schmitt's political decision in inescapable life-death situations is the most radical resistance against the senses. As Kant points out, the sublime as might is associated with "object as fearful, and yet not be afraid of it" (Kant 2007: 91). For Schmitt, the community establishes itself as political when it succeeds in resisting the fear of physical killing. Even Kant himself refers to war as resembling the sublime: "War itself, provided it is con-

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[24] Deleuze argues that "sublime is experienced when faced with the formless or the deformed" (Deleuze 1984: 50).

[25] In *Political Theology*, Schmitt emphasises that "there exists no norm that is applicable to chaos. For a legal order to make sense, a normal situation must exist, and he is sovereign who definitely decides whether this normal situation actually exists" (Schmitt 1985: 5–16).

ducted with order and a sacred respect for the rights of civilians, has something sublime about it" (Kant 2007: 93). Kant's notion of the sublime might offer a way to situate Schmitt's political decision (and the political itself) within Kant's critical system, as a politically relevant reflective judgment that is not disinterested but stands in opposition to all-natural interests.

Fourthly, Kant refers to magnitude as another sign of the sublime which refers to what is "*absolutely great*" and "*beyond all comparison great*" (Kant 2007: 78). According to Kant, the judgment on what is great without qualification cannot rely on any standard outside the nature but on standard within itself alone (Kant 2007: 80). Similar to Kant's notion of magnitude, Schmitt's concept of the political does not rely on any outside standard in nature but on the political decision which is a standard for judging political experience. Although Schmitt argues that non-political antithesis can become political "if it is sufficiently strong" (Schmitt 2007: 37), the shift from non-political to political antithesis is not a qualitative but a substantial one: "non-political antithesis, at precisely the moment at which it becomes political, pushes aside and subordinates its hitherto purely religious, purely economic, purely cultural criteria" (Schmitt 2007: 38). Besides the political judgment on friends-enemies alone, there are no outside standards to determine what the political experience is. While "that is sublime in comparison with which all else is small" (Kant 2007: 80), against political experience, any other human experience is "small" since "the political is the most intense and extreme antagonism" (Schmitt 2007: 27).

Lastly, Schmitt's concept of the political cannot be linked to Kant's aesthetics of the sublime without delineating its relationship with Kant's morality. Kant's aesthetics of the sublime implies the necessary connection to Kant's ideas of practical reason: "Feeling for the sublime in nature is hardly thinkable unless in association with a disposition of mind resembling the moral" (Kant 2007: 99). For Kant, the practical reason, or morality, is the highest faculty commanding its realization in sensible experience because the practical reason autonomously determines human actions instead of being determined by empirical conditions. Consequently, epistemic interests are subordinated to the realisation of the supersensibly moral ends of a rational being determined by moral law alone (Deleuze 1984: 44–45). Kant's political writings, raising the ideal of humanity without enemies, are an expression of this command to realise ideas of practical reason into concrete existence.

Kant's morality and Schmitt's concept of political seem incompatible since Schmitt argues against any attempts to think the political in terms of morality.[26] However, the common ground between Schmitt's

[26] According to Schmitt, "political enemy need not be morally evil" (Schmitt 2007: 29), while moralization of politics and seeking to realize the ideal humanity without enemies into concrete existence are perceived as the depoliticization of the political (Schmitt 2007: 83–84).

political thought and Kant's critical system is the acknowledgement of the strict division between the ideal and concrete reality. In *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant argues that "to try to realize the ideal in an example, i.e., in appearance, such as that of the sage in a novel, is not feasible <…> since the natural limits which constantly impair the completeness in the idea render impossible every illusion in such an attempt" (Kant 1998: 552). In *Critique of Judgement*, Kant similarly argues that any efforts of positive representation of practical reason into concrete experience would be "*fanatism,* which is a delusion that would *will some VISION beyond all the bounds of sensibility*; i.e. would dream according to principles (rational raving)" (Kant 2007: 105). Schmitt remains faithful to the Kantian distinction between concrete existence and the ideal. Kant's humanity without enemies is not concrete but the ideal reality, while Schmitt's concept of the political concerns the concrete reality which is not ideal since the political "does not have to be common, normal, something ideal, or desirable" (Schmitt 2007: 33). Just as it is fanaticism for Kant to positively and directly represent ideas of reason into concrete existence, so it is "inhuman" for Schmitt to wage the wars in the name of humanity "by transcending the limits of the political framework" (Schmitt 2007: 36).

Schmitt's concept of the political is paradoxical because Schmitt rejects any possibility of approaching the political as the ideal, yet the political is not only empirically real but also transcendentally ideal since the grouping alongside enemies and friends is the necessary non-empirical condition for any specifically political experience to appear to our sensibility. Kant's sublime as a direct, yet negative representation of the ideal is the key to explaining how the political could be both ideal and empirically real. Morality (and its ideal of humanity without enemies) can be represented in concrete reality directly, yet negatively only as sublime feeling since "the safeguard [of morality] is the purely negative character of the presentation" (Kant 2007: 105). For Kant, the experience of the inadequacy of concrete reality to represent morality gives the sublime feeling since the sublime "concerns ideas of reason, which, although no adequate presentation of them is possible, maybe aroused and called to mind by that very inadequacy itself which does admit of sensuous presentation" (Kant 2007: 76). The political is a sublime experience aroused from the very inadequacy of concrete existence to represent Kant's ideal of humanity without enemies. The inevitable grouping between friends and enemies, specifically as a politically sublime feeling, is both a transcendental ideal (negatively as the absence of humanity without enemies) and an empirical reality (as an actual feeling) experience of human beings. The political as a negative representation of the ideal of humanity without enemies might sound like a paradox, yet Kant's sublime aesthetics relies on such paradoxes.[27]

[27] According to Jean-François Lyotard, the sublime relies on such paradoxes that even the absence of republican regimes and federation of states in concrete existence is a representation of the idea of practical reason (Lyotard 1989: 170).

The political as sublime is not only paradoxical but also highlights the moral tragedy which is at the core of the political experience because "as long as a people exist in the political sphere, this people must <…> determine by itself the distinction of friend and enemy" (Schmitt 2007: 49). Schmitt's concept of the political as sublime feeling expresses the moral tragedy of human beings – the impossibility to attain the ideal of humanity without enemies within concrete human existence. The concrete existence of human beings implies the concept of the political since nobody can escape the real possibility of physical killing until the ideal of humanity without enemies is realised (Schmitt 2007: 29). However, the realisation of such an ideal into concrete experience is unattainable as long as human beings are bound to the concrete experience. In other words, the political experience begins when the concrete experience fails to positively and directly represent moral ideals. Kant's own political writing, focusing on the ideal of humanity without enemies, is limited to the realm of ideas without seriously taking into account the concrete, yet tragic political reality emphasised by Schmitt. Meanwhile, Schmitt gives insufficient attention to the foundation of the political as being essentially connected to the realm of ideas since the concept of the political depends on the necessary non-empirical standards, giving specifically political significance to sensible experience.

Kant's aesthetics of the sublime in the light of Schmitt's concept of the political suggests the alternative conceptualisation of politics as being essentially connected to Kant's moral ideal of humanity without enemies, bounded by concrete sensible existence. Although Schmitt argues that political experience is essentially distinguished from all other human experiences, including morality, morality takes precedence over political experience since the latter depends on it.[28] Kant rightly argues that "true system of politics cannot, therefore, take a single step without first paying tribute to morality" (Kant 1991b: 125). Schmitt's political thought is not an exception here. In Kant's critical system, inevitable enmity is *a priori* given to human experience as the sublime feeling which negatively represents Kant's ideal of humanity without enemies as its absence in concrete reality. However, the dependency of the political experience on morality does not mean that the political is identical to morality.[29] The transcendentally ideal and empirically real enmity as the sublime experience distinguishes politics from the symbolic representations of aesthetic ideas, which lack serious character and morality, yet lack their representation within concrete existence. Hence, Kant's aesthetic of the sublime gives the alternative conceptualisation of political life as the transcendentally ideal and empirically

[28] Lyotard even argues that "the gap between Ideas and observable historical-political reality would bear witness not only against that reality but also in favour of those Ideas" (Lyotard 1989:180).

[29] Lyotard argues that "sublime feeling is neither moral universality nor aesthetic universalization" because of the "differend" which is the "destruction of one by the other in the violence" (Lyotard 1994: 239).

real enmity, which is incompatible with politics defined in terms of aesthetic ideas.

Conclusions

Kant's aesthetics suggests at least two very different foundations of political life, defining politics as both transcendentally ideal and empirically real. Based on Kant's aesthetics of the beautiful, politics as an aesthetic idea is a specific phenomenon where supersensible ideas are referred to concrete experience through symbolic representation thanks to analogy. Although Kant's aesthetic ideas give the political experience *a priori* status, politics remains inherently objectively undefined and contingent on the free play of reflective judgments. Schmitt's concept of the political essentially challenges efforts to define politics as aesthetic ideas by proposing the specific political standard of inevitable enmity that distinguishes political experience from any other social experience. Kant's aesthetics of the sublime suggests another, yet specific definition of political experience as inevitable enmity, which, in Kant's terms, is transcendentally ideal and empirically real.

Although Kant's aesthetics could suggest two different conceptualisations of politics, they are not entirely mutually exclusive. Both conceptualisations of politics pay tribute to Kant's morality. While politics as a symbolic representation respects Kant's solution to the antinomy between freedom and determinism, politics as the concept of the political is dependent on Kant's morality, yet as a negative representation. However, these conceptualisations essentially differ in their answers to what the limits of political experience are. Aesthetic ideas allow us to conceive political experience as limitless as far as there is no objective rule on how to attribute the particular experience to politics; therefore, any social relations could be conceived as a representation of the political. However, Kant's sublime feeling suggests a specific definition of the political experience, limiting politics to inevitable grouping between friends and enemies that gives political life its serious character.

Political experience defined in terms of Kant's aesthetics brings out a political antinomy between politics, where any social relation could be defined politically, and politics as the specific human experience expressing the moral tragedy of the realisation of the ideal of humanity without enemies into concrete existence. One might argue that Kant's aesthetics of the beautiful and Kant's aesthetics of the sublime are two sides of the same coin, as the former suggests the conceptualisation of political experience as politics (symbolically representable side of political life), while the latter, as the political (symbolically unrepresentable and hidden side of political life). However, Schmitt's radical criticism of any attempts to symbolically represent truly political experience resembles Kant's aesthetics of the sublime, whose essence is the prohibition of any symbolic representation of morality, while suggesting an

alternative kind of aesthetics based on direct, yet negative representation of moral ideals.

Reapproaching Kant's aesthetics in the light of Schmitt's political thought allows us to highlight the political antinomy embedded in the core of political life. From Kant's aesthetic point of view seems that political life *a priori* appears either as an area for continuous contestation over its definitions or as the tragedy of humanity to reach its moral ideals in concrete reality. This conclusion challenges the usual readings of both Kant's political writings and Schmitt's political thoughts. The political antinomy paradoxically highlights how Kant's critical thought enables a rethinking of politics without reducing it to morality, while Schmitt's concept of the political can, contrariwise, be examined through the lens of Kantian morality. Although this effort to reinterpret Kant's critical philosophy results in the political antinomy, the antinomy itself is an answer to the question that Kant himself did not sufficiently explore: the place of politics within the critical system.

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