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The Schmittian Political: Deciding on the Unpolitical

Inna Viriasova

PhD Candidate, Centre for the Study of Theory and Criticism
University of Western Ontario
iviriaso@uwo.ca

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Abstract

The question of “the political” and its difference from “politics” has preoccupied so-called post-foundational political thought for several decades now. Along with praise, the political, as one of the major notions of contemporary political ontology, has received a number of criticisms. For example, Badiou, Rancière and Foucault point at its overly philosophical nature and a resulting lack of engagement with real politics. However, there has been almost no criticism of the thought of the political in regard to its nearly totalizing ontological status. I suggest that the totalizing tendency of the political can be traced back to Carl Schmitt, a German legal theorist who introduced the concept into the theoretical discourse of the 20th century. While Schmitt famously defines the political through the *distinction* between friend and enemy, I suggest that we can fully comprehend the scope of the political only by complementing it with a reading of his *Political Theology* (1922) that proclaims that the political is “the total, and as a result we know that any decision about whether something is *unpolitical* is always a political decision.” In other words, it is not enmity but a *decision on distinction* that defines the political. I argue that there are two kinds of decision on distinction that define the political: a decision on “us” and “them,” and on “the unpolitical.” In the latter case the political is constituted and delimited through a decision on that which is different from it, neither friend nor enemy – the unpolitical (not a-political) or an exception. As a result, the political leaves no room for the unpolitical as such, i.e. an outside beyond exception.

The historical and intellectual context of Schmitt's thought

Carl Schmitt's *The Concept of the Political* is often regarded as the first major instance of theorizing “the political” in a new way, that is, beyond the sphere of the state. Even though Schmitt introduced the concept of the political into the theoretical discourse of the 20th century, he was not the one to 'invent' the term itself. The substantivized adjective, “the political” (an English translation of German *das Politische* and French *le politique*) appeared, according to Kari Palonen (2007), long before Schmitt in the works of Schiller and Schlegel. However, both of them used the concept in a more traditional way, that is, they used it to refer to politics defined by the activity of the state in its institutions. Furthermore, an abstract concept of the political was used by another German thinker, Georg Jellinek, in his book *Allgemeine Staatslehre* (1900). But again, for him it was subordinate to the state. In general the question of the nature of the political was an open and controversial one in the Wilhelminian and Weimar debates (Palonen 2007, 70). It is within this intellectual climate that Schmitt's thought arises. In a way, he responds to the prior usages of the concept of the political, and its subordination to the state.

Considering the historicity of Schmitt's thought: a critique of liberal depoliticization

Such a response points to one important dimension of Schmitt's thought: its historicity. It is important to keep in mind that the concept of the political arises primarily as a *response*, a *reaction* to the classical liberal conception of politics as state. The political, in Schmitt and further on, does not seem to stop reflecting on its historical origins, and that is where it seems to gain its theoretical energy. The political is a return of the repressed of politics in two ways: first, the return of the *historico-theoretical* repressed (those features that were recognized by liberal thought but eventually denied conscious existence in political space, e.g. conflictuality); second, the continuous disruption of the ordered realities by the political – a flexible and evasive principle of concrete life. So, these are two dimension of the political that can be found in Schmitt: abstract-theoretical and realist-concrete.

So, Schmitt's critique of liberalism, as an ideology and movement of neutralization and depoliticization, is a point of departure for his concept of the political that aims at not only repoliticization of reality through introduction of conflict, but also at affirmation of the autonomy of the political in the specificity of its criteria. Leo Strauss notes, in a similar way, that “...Schmitt's basic thesis is entirely dependent upon the polemic against liberalism; it is to be understood only qua polemical...” (Strauss 2007, 84), i.e., set against the processes of neutralization and depoliticization. According to Schmitt, in the 17th century there occurs a shift in Europe from Christian theology to “natural” science. At the core of the shift lies “an elemental impulse that has been decisive for centuries, i.e. the striving for a neutral sphere,” a sphere in which there would be no conflict, in which common agreement would be reached through debates and exchange of opinion (Schmitt 1993, 137). This trajectory can be traced within liberal narrative of transition from the conflictual state of nature to the neutral sphere of political state, which can be interpreted, in Schmitt's terms, as a deliberate depoliticization of reality, as a repression of the essence of the political (for example, as in Thomas Hobbes' *Leviathan*). In his attempt at lifting this repression, Schmitt explicitly rejects identification of the state with the political; in response, he re-introduces conflict into politics, and posits the “ever present possibility of [war-like] conflict” (Schmitt 2007, 32) as the central principle of “the political.” In this way Schmitt locates “the state of nature,” expressed by this possibility, at the heart of the political, thus reversing the Hobbesian desire for its containment within the

order of the state.

So, depoliticization is problematic for late-modern thought in two ways: first, the absence of the political is feared; second, such absence is presented as never fully possible due to ontologization of the political. While the former, however negatively, drives Schmitt's thought of the political; the latter makes it possible for Schmitt to proclaim that "the political is the total," to which I will return in more detail below. This fear of the the absence of politics is similar to what Oliver Marchart (2007) calls the "neutralization or sublimation thesis," which is common to Schmitt and many contemporary thinkers of the political and. He writes: "According to this thesis, the political becomes increasingly neutralized or colonized by the social ... or sublimated into non-political domains ... The primacy of the political is ... always in danger of becoming entirely closed up in the 'iron cage' of bureaucratized, technologized, and depoliticized society" (Marchart 2007, 44). I suggest that because of such a fear of the non-political, contemporary theories fall into the same trap as their classical counterparts: they ignore the fact that their visions of the political are primarily inspired by the pressure of what is considered non-political: for Hobbes is was the state of nature, in Schmitt's case it is liberal politics.

So, Schmitt's affirmation of the conflictual nature of reality arises as a critique of liberal depoliticization, however, there are other factors that contributed to his affirmation of conflict and its irreducibility, as well as his subscription to pessimistic anthropology. Schmitt suggests that "optimistic anthropology" views humans as beings driven towards consensus and agreement with each other, while "...all *genuine* political theories presuppose man to be evil, i.e. by no means an unproblematic but a dangerous and dynamic being" (Schmitt 2007, 61). Many Schmitt scholars suggest that such fascination with conflict and dynamism of life makes sense within the historical context of Schmitt's thought. He lived and worked in a conflict-ridden age: the horrors and aftermath of the World War I, the struggles of Weimar Republic, and specifically the failure of its democracy all contributed to his despise for liberalism and life-long attraction to the thought of conflict and, especially, to Hobbes (Gottfried 1990).

In addition to conflict, two other, opposing tendencies characterized the time of the beginning of the 20th century. These are, first of all, the emergence of effective, non-state political actors and processes, such as expansion of democracy and politicization of civil society (see Arditì 1996, 15); that is, state institutions and borders, supposedly, play less and less important role in defining proper political spaces. Second, there is the opposite process of disappearance of 'no-man's space', i.e., the proper outside of the nation-state system. As Hakim Bey suggests, the historical development of the 20th century is characterized by the "the closure of the map," meaning that "[t]he last bit of Earth unclaimed by any nation-state was eaten up in 1899. Ours is the first century without *terra incognita*, without a frontier" (Bey 1991, 102). I suggest that the disappearance of the proper outside of the state triggers the thought of the political, which, in a way, performs a function of compensation for the lost "beyond."

The political as critique of reason and transcendence

The 20th century is the first century that denies, rejects or abandons transcendence in both material and ideal sense: the material space of the globe is fully appropriated, consumed by either states or the international community of states, and the 'ideal space' of thought falls prey to the "seduction of immanence... a denying and averting of every form of transcendence" (de Wit 2008, 165), as a result of secularization and devaluation of traditions.

Due to his deep indebtedness to Catholic religious thought, Schmitt is critical of such a rejection of transcendence; however, he does not preserve it in a non-modified form of an absolute that radically extends beyond the “city of man.” Schmitt introduces “transcendence within immanence” into political thought in the form of the sovereign decision – the founding *event* of politics (cf. Ojakangas 2005, 28-29). So, beyond the historical events of the beginning of the 20th century, one can point out a wider intellectual context that influenced Schmitt's thought: he was prone to the influence of wide-ranging critiques of modernity, reason and transcendence happening against the background of “the closure of the map” and emergence of the non-state political actors.

A critique of reason is developed by Schmitt in his recourse to certain “irrationalism” or even mysticism in definition of the political and especially the decision that it is founded on. As Radhika Desai (2002) suggests, Schmitt's thought is founded on “philosophical irrationalism” that draws its inspiration from Nietzsche's critique of Enlightenment reason. The main opposition it relies on is between “the political, an irrationalist 'real', and the rational” (Desai 2002, 394), i.e., the state and its institutions – classical liberal politics. The rational is a domain of orderly conceptions, and the irrational refers to an actual chaotic reality that resists conceptualization and rationalization, “the formless unformulable world of the chaos of sensations,” as Nietzsche put it in *The Will To Power* (ibid, 395). These two Nietzschean realities – of “life” and “intellect,” – as Desai suggests, are present in Schmitt in the form of the opposition between “the immediacy of life” and its “rational interpretation” (ibid, 395). I believe that Schmitt's conceptualization of the political emerges as an indication of such an ever present (but suppressed by liberalism) “immediacy” that manifests itself in the potentiality of conflict and war, in an actual existential threat. It is a “vital substance” or “pure life” that breaks through the crust of habitual repetition and formalism of law. It is important to note that these two principles (vitality and repetition) are inseparable from each other, moreover, they become manifest only at the moment of their interaction or, to be more precise, at the moment of conflict. The conflictual nature of reality implies, according to Schmitt, that not only the major concepts of political theory are polemical, but that their real manifestation has to emerge out of *polemos* in order to be “genuine.” In this way, the political, as dynamic life, is necessarily attached to or *correlated* with its Other – politics, state, repetition, life at stand-still. To speak of the political beyond this confrontation would mean to depoliticize it, which is clearly not what Schmitt wants to achieve.

Another important feature that emerges as a result of the “crisis mentality” and the critique of modernity is existentialism: since most traditional values are devalued at that time, “human *existence*, in its brute factivity, became a value in and of itself ” (Wolin 1990, 394). Such “brute primacy of human existence” implies that in a world devoid of meaning, which used to be guaranteed by transcendent absolute, the major certainty of life becomes death. As a result, the threat of death, its inevitable possibility is presented by Schmitt as the indicator of “genuine” politics, that is, the political. The conflict that he puts at the core of the concept of the political is measured only against the *real possibility* of dying and killing, and this is not surprising since there is no other certain measure left that could form a “foundation” of new politics. In the words of Richard Wolin, in such a context “naked self-preservation” becomes “the highest end of political life” (ibid, 405). In fact, since no life is free from the possibility of real death, life in itself becomes unavoidably political, with war being its highest and most intense manifestation. Schmitt writes that “Politics means intensive life” (quoted in Wolin 1990, 406), which implies that the political is living with a certain degree of intensity. (It is important to note here that potentiality displaces the primacy of action in such a definition of the political. I will return to this point below.)

So, Schmitt's concept of the political represents a new tendency in political thought: it is a self-referential reflection on the “essence” of late-modern politics, its tendencies. At the same time Schmitt's thought itself is an instance of the new historico-political consciousness, in which politics is no longer reduced to the actuality of the political as a *sphere* (the state and its institutions), but extends far beyond its limits, merges with life itself and thus becomes total in a new, ontological way. What is interesting about this approach is not necessarily its content, but the approach itself – its really novel methods and framework (cf. Szabo 2006). Regardless of the content that might be attributed to the political by Schmitt, the overarching framework remains without much variation: the political is approached as potentiality that exists and can actualize anywhere and anytime, be it in a form of an event, decision, resistance, revolution, insurrection, inscription of the excluded, and so on.

Defining the political

A new interpretation of politics is famously reflected in Schmitt's friend-enemy opposition. He writes:

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 one indicative of *substantial content*. ... The distinction of friend and enemy denotes the utmost degree of *intensity* of a union or separation, of an association or dissociation. (Schmitt 2007, 26) The political distinction is the strongest and most intense of the distinctions and categorizations... (ibid, 27)

Several important points emerge here: according to Schmitt, the political gains its *autonomy* through *specificity* of *criterion* and does not refer to any essence; *distinction* as such is given an important role; an energetic aspect of the political is expressed through the reference to *intensity*. Finally, the political exhibits *expansive* and *parasitic* tendencies, insofar as it is not limited to a specific sphere of activity and derives its abundant energy from a variety of human activities.

Autonomy of the political: the specificity of the political criterion

One of the main goals that Schmitt proclaims as he pursues the concept of the political is to show that the political is not limited or subordinated to the state; thus the opening sentence of the essay: “The concept of the state presupposes the concept of the political” (ibid, 19). It is important for Schmitt to assert certain autonomy of the political in relation to the state, but not only that. He wants to distance himself from the common 'negative' definitions of the political sphere of his time, and to present a positive one that proceeds from its own criteria and extends beyond the limits of politics as a sphere (spheric thinking). Schmitt notes that politics is often defined negatively, “in contrast to various other ideas, for example in such antitheses as politics and economy, politics and morality, politics and law...” (ibid, 20). Moreover, politics is often subordinated to those other spheres, resulting in it being just an extension of all other human activities and not their constitutive part. In contrast to such attitude, Schmitt introduces into the discourse of political and legal philosophy a specifically political distinction, between friend and enemy, that forms the basis of the concept of the political.

It is worth noting that there are two important parts in Schmitt's project: first, there emerges “something” new called “the political,” at least it is meant to refer to politics in a

new way; second, the *concept* of this “something” is at stake, not its intrinsic essence. Schmitt recognizes a Nietzschean difference between “life” and “intellect,” which implies that his concept of the political is first and foremost an intellectual exercise that aims at thinking what cannot be fully grasped with intellect – life. Schmitt points at the reality of “pure life”, which is, supposedly, inherently political in both an abstract and a very concrete way, but the only way he can speak of this reality is through its concept. However, since he recognizes the incommensurable nature of the political real, his concept is no longer a Hegelian one that aims at total reconciliation and thus eventual total, encyclopaedic representation. For Schmitt it is an incomplete concept, a non-concept, “a name for that what cannot have a name” (Ojakangas 2005, 36), that does not refer to “the essential substance,” but finds its temporary certainty in a “criterion,” which, by definition, is always potentially multiple since it does not refer to any essence. In words of Marton Szabo, “The political does not seek the essence, but the specific,” meaning that “Schmitt chooses from the competing possibilities of specification that one *aspect* based upon which things get a political meaning, namely the friend-enemy distinction” (Szabo 2006, 32). It is interesting that Schmitt wants to affirm the autonomy of the political, but instead he ends up affirming the specificity of the political criterion (cf. Arditi 1996, 17).

The political as an expansive totality: from intensity to a general economy of the political

Schmitt redefines the basic concepts of political theory: not only is the political no longer limited by the sphere of the state, it turns out not to be limited by anything, it becomes a new, open totality that cannot ever complete itself or become closed. Many authors note this radical move and similarly suggest that the political transforms from a limited concept into an expansive, deterritorialized and parasitic one; it becomes an ontological horizon and merges with life itself (see, for example, Arditi 1996; Arditi 2008; Chrostowska 2009; Deuber-Mankowsky 2008; Marder 2005; Shapiro 2003; Shapiro 2010; Szabo 2006; Wolin 1990).

There are several factors that contribute to this *new totalizing tendency* of the political. (I prefer to call it “new” in order to suggest that the old monopoly of the state on politics, which is a rigid totality in itself, is replaced by a new, fluid totality of the political that leaves no outside even as it refuses to complete itself.) The first contributing factor is the notion of *intensity* and its relation to the concept of the political. Schmitt suggests that the main difference of the political distinction from other distinctions is the degree of its intensity, which results in Schmitt's proposition that any distinction can be politicized: as the intensity of a certain opposition grows, it eventually can reach its highest level – that of friend and enemy, and if it reaches this level, then it is no longer an ethical, religious or any other opposition, but a political distinction. The quantitative augmentation of the intensity of an opposition results in its qualitative transformation – politicization. So, Schmitt's discussion of the political introduces potentiality or possibility as an important factor of the concept of the political: any opposition *may become* political. The combination of the criteria of intensity and potentiality results in the construction of the political as totality, meaning that everything can potentially reach the level of intensity necessary for the political to emerge. As Michael Marder put it, “[g]iven that any opposition can become political if it reaches the maximal intensity of friend-enemy groupings, the political “principle” assumes the place of potentiality inherent in various other spheres” (Marder 2005, 15-16). More than that, according to Schmitt's anthropology (human beings are evil: dangerous and dynamic) everything tends towards politicization, is attracted to it in its very “nature”: attracted to the potentiality of war and real conflict where life and death are at stake.

Furthermore, the political does not have a place of its own, it does not belong to a limited sphere, it is guided by a criterion of distinction and its intensity that can potentially consume (politicize) anything and everything. In this regard Szabo (2006) suggests that the political acquires an *infinite character*, that is, it can refer to anything by “touching” (and not encircling) its subject. The political is a total contact or “an infinite substance that penetrates life as a whole” (Szabo 2006, 33). As already mentioned above, the political is nothing else but “intensive life.” One can draw an interesting parallel with such a view of politics and Georges Bataille's “general economy,” both of which use the language of energies and intensities. Bataille (1988) revised major economic concepts and introduced the concept of “general economy,” which is, in a sense, the unconscious of a “restricted” or “rational economy” limited to principles of productive activity and accumulation. General economy considers, contrary to economic science, the heterogeneous “play of living matter in general” (Bataille 1988, 23) and is not limited to a particular domain or a utilitarian aim. Such a general play is very similar to what Schmitt suggests about the political: its energy is not restricted to a specific domain; the concept refers to the play of the political distinction in general or, in Bataille's language, to a general economy of the political. One might object that the political is not capable of forming either an internal or external economy (cf. Marder 2009, 59), but such an objection is still derived from the notion of economy as restricted. As a result, I suggest that we can still speak of a *general economy* of the political.

Such generality comes at a cost. First it infinitely absorbs life even in its potentiality; second, it feeds off and digests the heterogeneous energies of life: “[t]he political can derive its energy from the most varied human endeavours, from the religious, economic, moral, and other antithesis” (Schmitt 2007, 38). The political, as a decision on the friend and enemy distinction, “is itself 'parasitic' insofar as it draws its power from nonpolitical commitments” (Shapiro 2003, 107). This parasitism, on the one hand, results from the absence of the proper place of the political; on the other hand, it is a defining feature of the political distinction as such. The ability to feed off the heterogeneous energies is not an outcome of delocalization or displacement of politics, but is indicative of the political itself as the principle of displacement. As Marder suggests, “Schmitt frames his discussion of the political in a kind of negative ontology, in the non-space or, better yet, in the displacement of different domains of human action” (Marder 2009, 60).¹

As a result of the totalizing tendency of the political, it becomes impossible to draw a line, to distinguish between what is political and what is not. The destruction of spheric thinking by the political, as already indicated, submits life in its generality and potentiality to total politicization. If, for example, ancient Greek, medieval and classical liberal thought had the criteria for more or less clear delineation (at least theoretical) of politics from the non-political,² late-modern political thought, of which Schmitt is just one representative, finds such distinction problematic. Due to displacement of the state's monopoly on politics there is no longer an institution or objective structure that could take the place of the state and draw the

1 The political as the principle of displacement is taken up seriously by contemporary political thought, especially in relation to the analysis of the massive phenomena of human displacement and dislocation. For example, the political is exemplified by a figure of refugee that represents anything that flees from the rigid state-centred framework, challenges and transcends it towards the general economy of the political, where the play is “performed” by living matter in general.

2 For example, in ancient Greek political thought *polis* is opposed *oikos*, public to private, freedom to slavery, inside to outside (thus city, circuit, wall as “the *sine qua non* of the Greek *polis*” (McK. Camp II 2000, 47); in Medieval thought there is an Augustinian distinction between “the city of men” and “The City of God”; finally, liberals distinguish politics-as-state and sovereignty from the state of nature, public political sphere from the non-political private one.

line between political and non-political (cf. Szabo 2006, 29). Moreover, since the political potentially invests all non-political spheres, they ultimately rely on it in the last instance.

Correlation of 'the political' and 'politics'

I would like to further suggest that at the core of the political as totality is *correlation*, meaning that this totality is split or “doubly inscribed”. There are two notions that remain infallibly present in discourse of modern political theory – politics and the political – even as one attempts to prioritize or even get rid of, or forget about one or the other. The political differentiates itself from itself in self-critique, in self-overcoming or becoming. There are at least two dimensions to this self-differentiation of the political – external or historical and internal. As discussed above, the former refers to an attachment to a historical 'origin', meaning that late-modern thought of politics is self-referential, it builds itself not in opposition to some non-political reality but originates from the historical tension with the preexisting (liberal) political thought.

The 'internal' dimension of the split or correlation in Schmitt's thought lies in his recognition of two principles: rigid (politics-as-state, bureaucracy, etc.) and fluid (the political as intensive life, conflict and expansive movement of distinction). Schmitt recognizes this opposition by distinguishing not just between the concepts of the state and the political, but also between “real life” and a crust of repetition. In his *Political Theology*, which came out before *The Concept of the Political*, he writes: “In the exception the power of real life breaks through the crust of a mechanism that has become torpid by repetition” (Schmitt 2005, 15). Even though he speaks of the exception here, such a relation between real life, or event, and repetition applies to his concept of the political as well: the power of the decision on distinction between friend and enemy interrupts a presumably neutral, liberal, non-conflictual reality of everyday life.

Several authors notice this relational nature of the political, specifically its unbreakable ties with politics-as-state. In the words of Benjamin Arditì, politics and the political are “two registers of political matter,” of which one is fluid, flexible, “living movement, the magma of conflicting wills” (Arditì 1996, 21), and the other is rigid, fixed. Slavoj Žižek calls such relation between the two principles a “double inscription” of the political: “the political is inscribed as a gentrified domain of normalized or institutional political exchanges (politics) and as the negativity of decisions and actions that put objectivity into question (the political), whether at the local or macro levels, within or outside the political sub-system” (quoted in Arditì 2008, 17). Basically this indicates that politics and the political penetrate each other; they are “doubly coded.” As a result, these are not alternative modes of inscription, but *correlated* terms that constitute themselves through a relation of mutual negation and interruption.

Regarding the differentiation of political matter into two registers, it is interesting to consider the role of *distinction* in general in Schmitt's thought. In the most obvious way, the distinction between friend and enemy is the criterion of the political. However, it not as much these two figures and their fight that define the political, it is rather the distinction itself that is decisive here. As Gary Ulmen suggested in his reading of Schmitt's later work, *Theory of the Partisan*, the political is “defined not by enmity (friend-enemy), but by the very *distinction*” (Ulmen 1987, 189). It is no surprise that later, after World War II, political thinkers will come up with a very appropriate term – “the political *difference*” – in order to refer to the never-ending play between politics and the political at the core of many contemporary post-foundational political theories (see a work of Oliver Marchart (2007) for

further discussion of this point).

Most of the accounts of the relation of the political with politics assert their interconnectedness in a strong and persuasive manner, however, there is no critical account of their relation. I would like to suggest that the political, as totality structured around correlation, does not effectively do what it promises: it does not “liberate” the fluid principle from the rigid one, on the contrary, in the attempt at rethinking politics the former is subordinated to the latter as negation. In more practical terms, the political is still subordinated to the state, only now it happens through other means, and not because of state monopolization of politics: the political remains attached to the state as its practical and theoretical (and historical) negation and interruption. In this respect, the opening sentence of Schmitt's *Concept of the Political* is prophetic: “The concept of the state presupposes the concept of the political” (Schmitt 2007, 19). It is ultimately the state that calls the political into question and into being, which is a reversal of the liberal social contract theories where politics is called for by the state of nature.

The correlative character of the political, together with its totalizing tendency, makes it hard to conceive of anything that remains beyond politicization, actual or potential. Insofar as political matter is split into two – the political and politics, antagonism and order, movement and immobility, – anything can be incorporated into it. Any element that escapes order is automatically politicized, re-inscribed in order as its negation and interruption by the very concept of the political. It is not solely the order of the state, as in liberal thought, that is political; on the contrary, an excess of order (e.g., conflict, antagonism, war, intensive life) is at the core of the political by definition. In this way, the political, as already suggested above, is still attached to the state in its very “nature.” Another problem with Schmitt's thought of the political, which I believe is inherited by contemporary thought, is its limited attention to anything that extends beyond the conflictual moment, that is, beyond the intensive life that breaks through the crust of repetition, or beyond war.

Beyond the political as totality: the neutral and the exception

So, what is *outside* the political? For Schmitt, nothing. The political is inherent in the very nature of humanity; it, as intensive life, is impossible to eliminate. Leo Strauss (2007) comes to a similar conclusion in his critique of Schmitt. He argues that insofar as the political is proclaimed by Schmitt to be “a basic characteristic of human life,” it *is* destiny, meaning that men cannot escape it (Strauss 2007, 94). Moreover, it is also *necessary* in this way, because it is given in human nature, and man ceases to be a man and human when he ceases to be political (ibid, 95). Strauss suggests that ultimately the question of negation or affirmation of the political can be reduced to a quarrel about human nature: whether humans are “good” or “evil.” Schmitt's assumption about humans as evil cannot be deduced from his concept of the political; on the contrary, the political rests on the presupposition of the pessimistic anthropology. The latter is indeed no more than a “*supposition*,” which cannot be proved but largely remains a matter of an “anthropological confession of *faith*” (ibid, 96). As a result, insofar as the opposite anthropological belief is possible, the political is in principle “threatened,” and thus requires not mere “recognition” of its reality, but its decisive “affirmation.” Schmitt's *Concept of the Political* presents such an affirmation in a form of normative (and not in itself polemical, as he would prefer to view it) affirmation of a belief in human as “evil” by nature, that is, as dangerous and dynamic being (see Strauss 2007, 96-97).

Furthermore, Strauss rightly notes that the “inescapability of the political is displayed in the contradiction in which man necessarily becomes entangled if he attempts to eliminate the

political. This effort has a prospect of success if and only if it becomes political...” (ibid, 94). While here Strauss mainly thinks of the politicization of such an effort by its necessary intensification and thus transformation of the situation into that of enmity and war between the opponents of the political (pacifists) and its proponents (nonpacifists), the contradiction of an attempt to overcome the political goes much further. In particular, it arises in the decision on exception or the unpolitical; it is an originary contradiction that cannot be resolved logically, and which, consequently, acquires the status of a miracle-like event that institutes the abyssal ground of any political decision.

In 1933 Schmitt writes: “We have come to recognize that the political is the total, and as a result we know that any decision about whether something is unpolitical is always a political decision, irrespective of who decides and what reasons are advanced” (Schmitt 2005, 2). I suggest that this quote from a preface to the second edition of *Political Theology*, which was written shortly after *The Concept of the Political* and Hitler's coming to power in Germany, is the quintessence of Schmitt's political thought. It brings together two of the major concepts from two of his most influential works: the concept of the political, as a situation that revolves around the opposition between friend and enemy, and decision on exception, as a defining feature of sovereign. “Sovereign is he who decides on the exception” (ibid, 5). What is the relationship between the political and exception? I suggest that an answer to this question will help to shed some light on the fate of the unpolitical in Schmitt's thought.

I argue that the main connection between the political and exception in Schmitt is decision. In fact, upon a closer examination, one can distinguish between two kinds of decisions on two types of distinction: first, a decision on the exception and the unpolitical – an originary event; second, a decision about friend and enemy groupings, i.e., the political, that happens within the space already affected by the originary event. As noted above, Schmitt contends that any decision about something unpolitical is always a political decision, consequently, there can be no unpolitical *as such* (radically outside of the political), beyond its immediate politicization by decision. The unpolitical then is only an 'illusion' or the negative posited for a political purpose, which is fully consistent with Schmitt's view of the political as an expansive and totalizing principle. In this regard, Schmitt's thought of the political, a correlative affirmation of genuine politics against the background of liberal depoliticization, is a political gesture (decision) *par excellence*.

Nevertheless, there is a sense of the unpolitical in Schmitt beyond mere 'illusion': the 'real' of an exception. By claiming that any decision on the unpolitical is a political decision, Schmitt involves the logic of exception – an element is included through its exclusion. Something is unpolitical only as long as it is an outcome of a political decision, meaning that while the decision excludes an element from the political field, it simultaneously creates an unbreakable tie of the excluded with the political. I maintain that here the unpolitical, or whatever is outside the political, is only *partially* incorporated into the latter as an exception. However, it is worth noticing that Schmitt would rather suggest that there is no unpolitical beyond exception, that is, there is no radical outside of the political; there is only the immanent transcendence of an exception (cf. Ojakangas 2005), and more specifically of sovereign decision. Such a denial of the outside is “a pronounced *blindness*,” characteristic of the self-grounding phenomena (of which the political is an example), “to everything that surrounds or falls outside of it” (Marder 2005, 19). The political grounds itself in its own premises, it is self-referential, and thus the only “outside” it allows for is an exception – an inclusive exclusion. I suggest that contemporary, so-called post-foundational political thought inherits this feature from Schmitt: it becomes incapable of conceiving of the unpolitical

beyond an exception. In more practical terms this means that the political folds only at the gate of a concentration camp (cf. Agamben 1998).

An exception is not an enemy, an exception is beyond any friend and enemy distinction, it is similar to that, which Strauss called “the neutral.” He suggested that the Schmittian enemy figure appears as a result of the the dissolution of neutrality: “...each looks intently at his enemy; in order to gain a free line of fire, with a sweep of the hand they wave aside – *without looking at – the neutral* who lingers in the middle, interrupting the view of the enemy” (Strauss 2007, 106, my emphasis). Even though for Strauss the neutral seeks mediation and is a case of possible reconciliation of the enemies, one does not have to interpret it that way only. This neutrality can be viewed in more general terms, as the unpolitical that is blindly (“without looking at”) swept aside by the political desire or desire for the political and its advocacy. In this case one recognizes again the *blindness* to the outside (or the unpolitical) that necessarily accompanies the political as a self-grounding phenomenon (at least Schmitt's concept of the political). The neutral, as the third of the political distinction, is not only ignored but also actively repressed and eliminated, resulting in constitution of the ground for the political as *absent*. As Marder put it, “for Schmitt, the political begins with the cognitive-perceptual elimination of the neutral third” (Marder 2005, 18). This third, I suggest, is the unpolitical, the outside of the political as such. However, in Schmitt's work this neutral field is made present or visible only in a limited way – as an exception. Thus, the blind field of the unpolitical has a possibly visible spot – an exception – in which we can get a glimpse of the outside, and from which the political can observe itself. So, while Schmitt's political is the total and expansive, its outside is retained in an exception; its absent origin is “localized” and recreated in exception. In this way, the political is a borderline concept, meaning that it acquires its meaning by drawing a line between itself and its other, in this case the unpolitical. However, the latter is only partially incorporated (or domesticated) as an exception. This results in the political being an exception-based concept: it explains (and traces its origin) and legitimates itself through that which it is not, even though its other is granted recognition only in a form of an exception.

The primary example of such an exception in Schmitt is sovereignty or sovereign decision; in words of Chrostowska, sovereign exception is “a political event of the first order” (Chrostowska 2009, 104).³ Sovereign exempts himself from the law (or order) it institutes, since in order to be able to suspend it (like in the state of exception), he has to stay outside the law. The logic of sovereignty is that of the excluded middle; it is like a proposition about all propositions (e.g., all propositions are either true or false) that in its very utterance institutes a certain order (fixed relation) among all other propositions, but remains undecided on its own belonging to the set of those propositions (thus it cannot be decided if it is true or false). It is both inside and outside, an inclusive exclusion or just simply a paradox. William Rasch contends in this regard that “for the law of the excluded middle to operate, it must *be* the excluded middle, neither true nor false. Thus, self-exemption “solves” the paradox of totalizing propositions by rudely and insolently becoming the paradox” (Rasch 2002, 39). Sovereign self-exemption is such a paradox: an ultimate exception, *an instance* of the unpolitical, which is neither friend nor enemy, neither inside nor outside.

Giorgio Agamben's reading of Schmitt is emblematic here. In *Homo Sacer* (1998) he

3 It would be interesting to compare the status of a sovereign decision in Schmitt, as a political event of the first order, to an event as the starting point of politics, for example, in Rancière's and Badiou's thought. For Rancière (1999) an event, as the inscription of “the part with no part” into the order of police, signifies the initiation of politics proper. For Badiou, an event initiates the process of fidelity and politics as the truth procedure. For an interesting comparison between Schmitt's exception and Badiou's event see an article by Colin Wright (2008).

proposes that Western politics rests on the originary exception of bare life or sovereign banishment of *zoe* from the order of *bios* or good life, that is *polis*, politics. Bare life, as an exception or “the unpolitical” (ibid, 173), however, has its perfect double – the sovereign decision. The space of politics is thus established and continues to be re-established through double exception – of sovereign and bare life. This constant re-invention of the exception is necessary since, as Colin Wright points out, it performs a structurally stabilizing function that governs the field of (political) knowledge: the exception “policing an inside through an articulation with an outside, creating the strategic usefulness of a zone of indistinction – such as the Hobbesian sovereign, the Rousseauian Legislator, or, indeed, the Freudian primordial father” (Wright 2008, 11). Agamben's analysis of Schmitt seems to suggest that the neutral or the unpolitical in Western political tradition tends to be reduced to an exception.

To sum up, Schmitt invests the political with a new meaning that oscillates around the friend and enemy distinction, and exhibits a totalizing and expansive character. This totality of the political is centred on two types of correlation: a play between the state and the concept of the political (a play between two registers of political “matter”); and the historical correlation that takes a form of a critique of neutralization and liberal depoliticization. The political is conceived by Schmitt mostly as a reaction to or in correlation with what it wants to deny – the state of liberal political philosophy. Furthermore, beyond the totality of the political Schmitt leaves room for the unpolitical (or the neutral) only as an exception. As a result, while Schmitt famously defines the political through the distinction between friend and enemy, we fully comprehend the scope of the political only by complementing it with a reading of his *Political Theology* that proclaims that the political is the total, and that any decision about whether something is unpolitical is always a political decision. Consequently, two decisions define Schmitt's thought – a decision on distinction between friend and enemy, and a decision on the unpolitical, i.e. an exception. In the final analysis, the political seems not to leave any room for the unpolitical as such, for an outside beyond exception.

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