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Schmitt and Mouffe on the 'Ontology' of the Political

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Abstract:

This paper addresses the issue of 'ontology' in Schmitt and Mouffe. Two related questions are important in this regard. First, it is of interest to see whether Schmitt considered the political in its ontological form, specifically in his The Concept of the Political. By ontological I mean that the political has had a particular form throughout history, without room for other manifestations than the known friend/enemy distinction. Second, I will propose that the 'ethical dimension' present in the treatise informs the relation and the tension of the political in its ontological form. By focusing on passages on neutrality and pacifism in Schmitt's treatise, my claim is that the content of the political as friend/enemy distinction cannot solely be articulated in antagonistic form, which is Mouffe's position.

Key words: *Schmitt, Mouffe, the political, political difference, ontology*

Introduction

Schmitt's concept of the political has been widely debated in political theory and political philosophy. The concept is either rejected as an outdated way to view politics – a form of traditional *Realpolitik* that is not fit for postmodern societies [Beck, Giddens, Habermas, Rawls][2]; or it is applauded as an articulation of the fundamental characteristics of democratic states [Lefort 1986, 1989; Rancière 1999; Strong 1988][3]. Despite Schmitt's critique of democracy, these scholars claim that agonism is necessary for a 'vibrant' democracy [Mouffe 2000: 104]. The position of both arguments remains an issue of dispute and pertains to ideological persuasions of respective scholars. As important as that debate is, this paper focuses on the status or ground of the political and the tense relation between ontology and contingency in Schmitt's work and the proposed adaptation by Chantal Mouffe. Ontology should be understood loosely, as a historical relation between beings that necessitates conflict. In this sense, several alternative terms may be applicable: anthropological or meta-historical, referring to an inherent trait in human nature. The preference to the term 'ontology' is due to recent articulation of the political as "our ontological condition" [Mouffe 2005a: 16].

  I give several arguments defending the position that the tension in Schmitt's work pertains to his legal background in seeking legitimacy of conflicts; namely, Schmitt is looking

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[2] Representative of their œuvre, but not limited to these works alone: Beck [1996]; Giddens [1994; 1998] Habermas [1998]; Rawls [1971, 1993].

[3] To a great extent Slavoj Žižek [2009] refers to the political in the Schmittian sense, however without direct references.

for an answer to the question why certain situations lead to physical killing of the other and tries to find justifiable reasons for these outcomes. Mouffe's model, I argue, cannot accommodate the theoretical background it finds in Schmitt's work, as the original tension between ontology and contingency is absent. Whereas Schmitt's treatise is in constant realignment between the two positions of ontology and contingency, and although the general tone may lend to the political being perceived as an ontology, Mouffe's later work focuses on the political as antagonism between groups in ontological sense.[4] Schmitt is careful not to give rise to such reading by illustrating theoretical examples of the possibilities of the end of the political through/by pacifism and neutrality. Schmitt's position is rather straightforward; he only seeks to establish a theoretical framework for legal reasons, and not an ontological articulation. This paper thus argues that the concept of the political lacks any ontological premises. More forcefully, it points out that Mouffe's adversarial model is flawed from the outset as it claims to inform us on the political, but remains within the domain of analysis of politics.

Numerous scholars have pointed out that Mouffe's version of agonism is problematic and requires more attention. Most of these scholars have focused on the content of ethico-political values, which Mouffe, it would seem, deliberately remained silent about. The reason for this silence is precisely that for Mouffe the content of these values must remain disputable. More recently, critique has been directed to her views of conflict and consensus. Erman, for instance, argues that Mouffe does not qualify what type of consensus is needed, and claims that deliberation remains an integral part of agonistic pluralism, despite it being forcefully rejected by Mouffe [Erman 2009]. From a different angle, Fritsch has pointed out that Mouffe's reliance on Derrida in her discursive theory is questionable and her lack of reference to Derrida's seminal work on Schmitt is "imprudent" [Fritsch 2008: 181]. In particular, Fritsch points out that creation of identities is marked not through simple dissociation, but "by the infinite porosity of a supposed inside and outside, and hence its constant re-negotiation"; and even if that were the case, the consequent relation between the groups is not necessarily an antagonistic one [Fritsch 2008: 181]. Most recently, Wenman emphasises that the concept of the political is not an empty concept that can be adopted willy-nilly by the left. On the contrary, for Schmitt the concept is intrinsically linked with his "*authoritarian conservatism, with its focus on the priority of order and security*" [Wenman 2014: 88].

Although this paper is generally in agreement with the recent critique, it proposes that the insights from these scholars can already be detected in Schmitt, without a reliance on Habermas or Derrida. Furthermore, I do not share the optimism that adjusting Mouffe's agonistic pluralism is possible by discovering historical conditions for enmity [Wenman 2014], or accepting consensus as an important aspect of the political [Erman 2009]. On the contrary, I argue that Mouffe's premise of antagonism as an ontological condition is the cause for the inconsistencies in her work; and these inconsistencies cannot be remedied by proposing concrete steps to be taken in politics, but require a different ontology altogether. To put it bluntly, her fault is in the confusion of putting forward a *normative* claim on what political ontology *is*; the confusion, in other words, between ontology and ontics.

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[4] Note here that it is only in her publications on Schmitt that such an articulation is possible. In her earlier co-authored *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, for instance, antagonism is not (yet) articulated in ontological sense, but only as a means that "*forecloses any possibility of a final reconciliation, of any kind of rational consensus, of a fully inclusive 'we'*" [Laclau, Mouffe 2001: xvii]. It should not be surprising that on publication of *New Reflections*, Laclau states in an interview that antagonism "*was not enough because constructing a social dislocation – an antagonism – is already a discursive response. You construct the Other who dislocates your identity as an enemy, but there are alternative forms*" [Laclau in Worsham, Olson 1999: 9].

The paper is divided into four parts. I will (1) briefly elaborate on Schmitt's concept of the political; (2) present Mouffe's transformation of Schmitt's view for democratic theory; (3) examine the relation between ontology and contingency in Schmitt and Mouffe, and propose an ethical reading of the treatise; and (4) substantiate my claim through examples of pacifism and neutrality in Schmitt.

Schmitt and the Political

The concept of the political (*das Politische*) as defined by Schmitt has three characteristics: it is a decision on the distinction between friend and enemy; this decision has a potential of erupting into conflict; and the content of the political can only be correctly recognised by its participants. Politics (*die Politik*), in contrast, is the everyday matter of the state, where decisions are not on the friend/enemy, but on public administration. Schmitt does not treat the characteristics of the concept equally. Especially the last – correct recognition by the participants – is only briefly presented towards the end of the second chapter. He thus states that it is only the participants who "*can correctly recognize, understand, and judge the concrete situation and settle the extreme case of conflict*" [Schmitt 2007a: 27]. According to Schmitt, external forces cannot understand the nature of the distinction making, presumably because the antitheses from which the differentiation stems would be unclear to them. He wants to emphasise the intensity that only the actual participants can feel – that is to say, only through actual feeling of enmity can the decision on the enemy be made, not through reason or expediency.

The decision is made by the sovereign; an often repeated passage of Schmitt is "*Sovereign is he who decides on the exception*" [Schmitt 2005: 5]. One can observe three distinct terms being used to clarify each other. The sovereign is both dependent on and revealed by/in an exception – it is his decision that reveals his presence, as well as the exception that necessitates this decision to be made. His sovereignty is cogently enforced through the decision; yet, it is the decision that creates the exception and establishes his sovereignty. Although some commentators have argued, with partial success, that Schmitt is concerned with a strong state [Schwab 2007; Fritsch 2008; Wenman 2014], it is not the state's authority that is the sovereign, but only that the state's sovereignty is temporarily revealed by an individual.[5] Schmitt is therefore concerned with the sovereign as a robust intervention and revision of the accepted norm. The sovereign thus also stipulates the necessity of the exception. In other words, his role is dually constituted: he decides on what the exception is, and how to aptly deal with that exception – the first being an intervention to the current norm, and the second a proposition of how that norm is to be challenged or reconstituted. In Schmitt's words, the sovereign decides "*whether there is an extreme emergency [and] what must be done to eliminate it*" [Schmitt 2005: 7].

It is therefore also the decision on the exception that reveals the other two characteristics of the political: friend/enemy categories and the potentiality of conflict. Schmitt thought that "*a definition of the political can be obtained only by discovering and defining the specifically political categories*" [Schmitt 2007a: 25]. The political has to be distinguished from other:

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[5] Cf. Schmitt's views of barons Stein and Kleist during Napoleonic Wars, and to a greater extent Cromwell [Schmitt 2007a: 67-68].

„endeavors of human thought and action, particularly moral, aesthetic, and economic... the political has its own criteria which express themselves in a characteristic way. The political must therefore rest on its own ultimate distinctions, to which all action with a specifically political meaning can be traced" [Schmitt 2007a: 25-26].

Schmitt is looking for the final distinctions (*die letzten Unterscheidungen*) in the concept of the political. "*The specific political distinction to which political actions and motives can be reduced is that between friend and enemy* (Freund und Feind)" [Schmitt 2007a: 26]. This may sound simplistic and it certainly is reductionist; however, Schmitt's reduction to friend/enemy is supposed to encompass all aspects through which political differentiation could be made [Schwab 2007: 7]. Although the political is an independent domain in some sense, it cannot be wholly isolated from other domains. Schmitt thus notes that the political stands independently from other domains and cannot "*be traced to these*" [Schmitt 2007a: 26]. It can, however, rely on other domains "*for support*" [Schmitt 2007a: 26, 38]. Its independence is exactly in the variety of (unknown) antitheses that it draws support from. Schmitt adds that by virtue of being different, regardless of which other domain a distinction comes from, a decision can be made on who is the enemy and who is a friend. This is indeed to say that any form of discrimination is, at least in potentiality, political. Independent of the domain that differentiation is made from, the decision on the enemy is based on his nature: "*that he is, in a specially intense way, existentially [existenziell] something different and alien, so that in the extreme case conflicts with him are possible*" [Schmitt 2007a: 27].

Mouffe and Agonistic Pluralism

Mouffe understands the limits of Schmitt's position for democratic theory, and announces to work 'with Schmitt against Schmitt' [Mouffe 1993: 2; 2005a: 14], to reject "*any kind of essentialism*", and to affirm that there are no "*fixed identities, prior to the contingent and pragmatic form of their articulation*" [Mouffe 1993: 7; 2005a: 18]. However, Mouffe overstates Schmitt's essentialism, and inadvertently contributes to an understanding of Schmitt as an essentialist.

Mouffe's alternative is what she calls the adversarial model: "*Instead of trying to design institutions which, through supposedly 'impartial' procedures, would reconcile all conflicting interests and values, the task of democratic theorists and politicians should be to envisage the creation of a vibrant 'agonistic' public sphere of contestation*" [Mouffe 2005a: 3, 20; 2000: 104]. She argues that when we are confined to a politics which does not accommodate channels "*through which conflicts could take an 'agonistic' form, those conflicts tend to emerge on the antagonistic mode*" [Mouffe 2005a: 5]. The adversarial model 'replaces' the antagonistic mode (i.e. Schmittian paradigm) in one significant way. Mouffe proposes to transform the 'friend/enemy distinction' into the 'we/they opposition' – that is, a transformation from antagonistic combat to agonist conflict [Mouffe 1999: 5; 2005a: 19-21]. In a way, she proposes a middle ground, a third way, between the Schmittian paradigm of antagonism, and the liberal opposition to that paradigm: "*taming*" [Mouffe 2005a: 20]. The adversarial model, in this regard, is a solution between the two extremes; and it is the task of democracy to accommodate this solution.

The adversarial model acknowledges the limits of fully inclusive association and maintains the possibility of conflict. However, for conflict to be considered legitimate, it "*needs to take a form that does not destroy the political association. This means that some kind of bond must exist between the parties in conflict*" [Mouffe 2005a: 20]. This bond cannot be too strong and Mouffe continuously stresses the possibility of antagonism. This means that the adversaries acknowledge the validity of the political association, yet strongly oppose the content or direction of that association – they acknowledge "*that there is no rational solution to their conflict, nevertheless [they] recognize the legitimacy of their opponents*" [Mouffe 2005a: 20]. The type of association Mouffe seems to have in mind can be found in her earlier essay. Relying on Oakeshott, she states that a political association "*does not postulate the existence of a substantive common good, nevertheless [it] implies the idea of commonality, of an ethico-political bond that creates a linkage among the participants in the association*" [Mouffe 1993: 66]. The ethical aspect of this bond is the liberal idea of freedom and equality, whereas the political is the contestation of the exact content of the idea – a characteristic theme since the publication of *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*. Mouffe thus stipulates that an association is not defined by the common actions towards the same good, but in relation of the participants to one another "*in the acknowledgement of the authority of certain conditions of acting*" [Mouffe 1993: 66].

There is, however, a problematic relation between the type of association Mouffe has in mind and her aims of fostering agonistic conflict. She thus only acknowledges association between those who *already* share a set of basic democratic principles. To quote at some length from the concluding lines of *On the Political*:

"*To avoid any confusion, I should specify that, contrary to some postmodern thinkers who envisage a pluralism without any frontiers, I do not believe that a democratic pluralist politics should consider as legitimate all the demands formulated in a given society. The pluralism that I advocate requires discriminating between demands which are to be accepted as part of the agonistic debate and those which are to be excluded.* A democratic society cannot treat those who put its basic institutions into question as legitimate adversaries. *The agonistic approach does not pretend to encompass all differences and to overcome all forms of exclusions. But exclusions are envisaged in political and not in moral terms. Some demands are excluded, not because they are declared to be 'evil', but because they challenge the institutions constitutive of the democratic political association.*" [Mouffe 2005a: 120-121]

Although democracy by definition is an exclusion of some groups/agents through a demarcation of what constitutes the demos, Mouffe's position becomes too closely associated with those that she criticizes at the beginning of the book. Specifically, while evaluating Beck and Giddens' views of post-modernist societies, Mouffe points out that both oppose those groups/agents who:

> "*... reassert the old certainties of tradition. Those traditionalists or funda-mentalists, by their very rejection of the advances of reflexive moderniza-tion, place themselves against the course of history and obviously they cannot be allowed to participate in the dialogical discussion. In fact, if we accept the distinction which I have proposed between 'enemy' and 'adversary', this type of opponent is not an adversary but an enemy, i.e. one whose demands are not recognized as legitimate and who must be excluded from the democratic debate.*" [Mouffe 2005a: 49-50]

It is surprising how close the two passages are in content and wording, which raises several complications with regard to her view, summarised by Beckstein under the following categories: "distorting antagonism", "lack of theoretical originality", and "anthropomorphizing the other" [Beckstein 2011].[6] It is not the intention of this paper to question Mouffe's origi-nality or philosophical relevance – what is fundamental in the assessment of her view is the transformation she proposes and the consequent question of ontology of the political.

The first couple in the proposed transformation – friend/we – can be easily grasped in political discourse through statements such as 'we, the people', or allied forces. It is commonly ignored that the decision on the friend is equally a political decision, i.e. potential conflicts are not excluded. As Schmitt notes: "*Nothing can escape this logical conclusion of the political*" [Schmitt 2007a: 36]. In other words, friendship too remains a political decision, to the extent that even a statement such as "*true friendship is eternal and unbreakable*" remains a political decision – as a confrontation, contest and even combat; indeed, to the extent of physical killing of the other – simply "*because it can be broken by [the political]*" [Zweerde 2007: 164]. On an interpersonal level too, Schmitt's conception of the political as friend/enemy distinction is troublesome; as he notes elsewhere, one "*must determine for himself the limits of his loyalty, especially when the situation becomes so abnormal that one no longer knows the real position of his closest friend*" [Schmitt in Bendersky 1983: 267].

The second couple – enemy/they – is less palpable. It is probable that Schmitt relied on von Clausewitz in his understanding of the concept of the political: next to a reference to von Clausewitz in the treatise on the essence of war [2007a: 33-34], as well as stylis-tic similarities – e.g. terms 'political existence' or 'real world'; the analysis that proceeds in the discussion on hostile feelings and hostile intentions in von Clausewitz [2007: 14-15] and the discussion on the enemy and potentiality of conflict in Schmitt [2007a: 27-28]; or even more clear are Schmitt's later *Theory of the Partisan* and the compatibility of the concept of the enemy with Lenin's notion in his notebooks on von Clausewitz [Ho-hendahl 2011: 5-6], and his 1963 edition of *The Concept of the Political* which refers to the stated passage in the *Theory of the Partisan*. It seems plausible to state that Schmitt's view of the enemy thus stems from his reading of von Clausewitz. The enemy is under-stood by von Clausewitz as "*a war of annihilation, a struggle for political existence,*" or more commonly "*to gain a number of advantages that could be exploited at the peace conference*" [Clausewitz 2007: 37, 234-235].[7] In a note for revision of his magnum opus, Clausewitz distinguishes between two kinds of wars, which present two views of enemies:

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[6] For some recent critical evaluation of these, see Wenman [2014], Erman [2009], Fritsch [2008]. For an at-tempt to defend Mouffe, see Beckstein [2011].

[7] Similarly in Spinoza's *Political Treatise*: "*War is only to be made for the sake of peace... either the enemy, on*

"... in the sense that either the objective is to overthrow the enemy – to render him politically helpless or militarily impotent, thus forcing him to sign whatever peace we please; or merely to occupy some of his frontier-districts so that we can annex them or use them for bargaining at the peace negotiations." [Clausewitz 2007: 7]

The enemy thus understood, is either to be defeated, or to be gained advantage of; he is unlike Mouffe's enemy who accepts the outcome of democratic discourse because he belongs to an association.

Mouffe's transformation from 'enemy' into 'they', therefore, faces a fundamental definitional complication: an adversary whom one listens to, and usually does not agree with, still accepts the results of the votes, "*not because he has ceased to believe in his own case, but simply because he admits defeat*" [Canetti in Mouffe 2005a: 23]. This seems deeply implausible. Certainly, an adversary is not an enemy, and therefore needs not to be destroyed; however, an adversary should relate to the logic of the political as does the friend concept. Even if we accept, as does Beckstein, that there are two levels of distinction – friend/enemy and adversary/enemy – the antagonistic relation towards the enemy as someone to be annihilated remains intact [Beckstein 2011: 38-39]. In other words, Mouffe seems to ignore that the we/they opposition cannot be constituted without transforming back into the friend/enemy distinction, or without defusing it in the liberal manner. More specifically, even though she acknowledges that antagonism is never fully removed from 'society'; the adversarial model cannot function if those who do not accept the basic democratic principles are excluded from the democratic debate, if only because the antagonistic relation of friend and enemy is still present at all times. Simply put, the agonistic mode does not replace the antagonistic one, but only marginalises the 'new enemies' to the outer limits of democratic states; it denies the 'enemies' their hegemonic articulation over democratic debates.[8]

The Ethical Dimension and Legitimacy of Combat

Even if we accept Mouffe's premise that conflicts should ideally take place without jeopardizing the political association, it is still necessary to address the concern about "*the political as our ontological condition*" [Mouffe 2005a: 16]. As indicated above, Schmitt's position on the status of the political is ambivalent: on the one hand, he promotes the view that the expression of the political depends on the historical context; on the other hand, that expression must follow the 'logic of the political', which is the antagonistic friend/enemy distinction. Mouffe's transformation of the political, however, seems to accept only the latter. She presents the political as ontological through reference to Heidegger's ontological difference. Heidegger's vocabulary is used to distinguish between the practice of politics, and that which informs/institutes the particular practice [Mouffe 2005a: 8; for Heiddeger

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accepting the terms of peace, should be allowed to redeem them [cities] at a price, or, if... there would, by reason of the danger of the position, remain a constant lurking anxiety, they must be utterly destroyed" (VI. 35 Of waging war).

[8] One could argue that the extent of dissociation itself should be questioned, as the focal point of the adversarial model remains the preservation of the political association [Mouffe 2005a: 20, 31, 51, 52, 120-121].

cf. Critchley, Schurmann 2008: 69-83]. Paradoxically she states that her "*main field of enquiry [is] located at the 'ontic' level (...) [but] it is the lack of the understanding of 'the political' in its ontological dimension which is at the origin of our current incapacity to think in a political way*" [Mouffe 2005a: 9]. Unfortunately, she does not further substantiate her claims on the political as our ontological condition; on the contrary, she repeats several expressions to that effect: "*the ever present possibility of antagonism*" [Mouffe 2005a: 15, 16, 17, 24] or "*the ineradicability of antagonism*" [Mouffe 2005a: 3, 10, 19, 30, 119]. These expressions warrant for further scrutiny on the status of the political in Schmitt's original work.

As I have stated earlier, by ontology is understood a relation between beings that necessitates conflict, that it refers to some inherent trait in human nature, and that this relation is not defined by the current historical state of affairs. In this regard, both Schmitt and Mouffe find this meta-historical inherent human trait to be antagonism through dissociation; they both find that it is the possibility of conflict that characterises human endeavour. For Schmitt, this possibility has an 'existential' character. Schmitt's emphasis on existential character of the enemy is fundamental – the political difference is only viable if the enemy is actual: the political is to be understood in a "*concrete and existential sense, not as metaphors or symbols, not mixed and weakened by economic, moral, and other conceptions*" [Schmitt 2007a: 27-28].[9] The term existential is used in an ordinary sense to refer to the existence of the enemy, to state that he is overtly *there*. It is for this reason that Schmitt uses the term alongside the term "real" [Schmitt 2007a: 27, 33, 38, 49]. Schmitt maintains his position by continuous display of examples and his claim on the existential distinction remains constant throughout.[10]

Schmitt's emphasis on existentiality is crucial as the friend/enemy distinction holds the value of the enemy in a theoretical sense – that is, that the purpose of the enemy is combat and defeat. Schmitt thus refers to distinctions between πολέμιος and εχθρός. The former is the public enemy; it literally derives from war – πόλεμος. One is to fight him, overthrow him, and render him weak. He is the barbarian enemy, not an Έλληνας. Unlike the latter, who can be either Greek or barbarian, but he is private. There could be utmost enmity, but no collective is involved in fighting him. He similarly refers to a distinction in Latin between *hostis* and *inimicus*, citing Forcellini's *Lexicon totius latinitatis* for support: "*A public enemy (hostis) is one with whom we are at war publicly (...) In this respect he differs from a private enemy (...) They may also be distinguished as follows: a private enemy is a person who hates us, whereas a public enemy is a person who fights against us*" [cited by Schmitt 2007a: 29n]. It is the intensity of the relationship between friend and enemy that by/in itself results in a possibility of combat – the presentation of the enemy as existentially something different, makes conflict a necessary condition. Combat too, Schmitt contends, "*is to be understood in its original existential sense (...) The friend, enemy, and combat concepts re-*

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[9] Proposing a theoretical alternative, van der Zweerde posits a possibility to read the friend and enemy concepts in an adjectival way: "*The meaning of the political is adjectival, not substantive, and to identify something amicable or inimical with its 'bearer' – an institution, a human, a country, a terrorist network – is possible (it is what happens in 'war'), but not necessary*" [Zweerde 2007: 157]. Such a position would drastically change Schmitt's view however, evidenced by his continuous references to 'concrete antagonism' and 'concrete situations', which adjectival reading cannot support.

[10] Similar expressions are found in other works, for example: "*All essential concepts are not normative but existential*" [Schmitt 2007b: 85]; and "*The bygone fact has the existential quality of the real. It is concrete and actual, not capricious poetry*" [Schmitt 1985b: 69].

ceive their real meaning precisely because they refer to the real possibility of physical killing. War follows from enmity. War is the existential negation of the enemy." [Schmitt 2007a: 33]

It is here that we find a fundamental difference between Schmitt and Mouffe. For Schmitt, conflict cannot be an 'exercise' of adversaries. Mouffe notes that adversaries are in conflict, and that the term should be distinguished from liberal discourse as "*the presence of antagonism is not eliminated but 'sublimated' so to speak (...) for the liberals an adversary is simply a competitor*" [Mouffe 2005a: 21]. Furthermore, it is not a competition between elites for power, but between hegemonic projects. "*The antagonistic is always present, it is a real confrontation but one which is played out under conditions regulated by a set of democratic procedures accepted by the adversaries*" [Mouffe 2005a: 21]. However, a presentation of the distinction along these lines does not constitute a *real* confrontation, but is a recourse to metaphor – something explicitly denied by Schmitt [Schmitt 2007a: 27].[11]

Combat for Schmitt is closer to Hobbes' view on war. Hobbes asserted that war cannot be reduced to battles only, but consists "*in a tract of time, wherein the will to contend by battle is sufficiently known.*" [Hobbes 1998: 77] He presents an analogy (not metaphor) to weather to clarify his view:

"*For as the nature of foul weather lieth not in a shower or two of rain, but in an* inclination *of thereto of many days together: so the nature of war, consisteth not in actual fighting; but in the known* disposition *thereto, during all the time there is no assurance to the contrary. All other time is peace*" [Hobbes 1998: 77, my emphasis].

It is crucial to stress the idea that Hobbes is trying to present. A mere inclination or disposition to battle one another is war itself. Without any evidence to the contrary, one assumes every man his enemy. This kind of enmity is the result of lack of absolute authority, which creates, defends, and enforces laws by any means necessary; for covenants "*without the sword, are but words*" [Hobbes 1998: 111].[12] In Schmitt's concept, the same disposition for the collectives is present; the sole reason for which is the existential character of the other, of his "*existential threat to one's own way of life*" [Schmitt 2007a: 49].[13]

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[11] For a detailed discussion on the meaning of conflict for Mouffe, and its implications for agonistic pluralism, see Erman [2009]. In short, she claims that conflict itself is a problematic concept – i.e. that one cannot speak of conflict without acknowledging that those involved already share a symbolic space: "*we have to share a symbolic space not only as adversaries, as Mouffe claims, but as antagonists as well – not only in order to identify antagonism as such (...) but also to be able to become adversaries (i.e. legitimate enemies) and to know what it means to comply with some ethico-political principles*" [Erman 2009: 1048-1049].

[12] There are numerous differences between Hobbes and Schmitt, which would require a different paper altogether. Briefly, regarding existential characteristic of war, two points could be made: in the Hobbesian state of nature it is men as individuals who combat one another, whereas in Schmitt's case it is the groupings that are disposed to this practice; moreover Hobbes' thought experiment pertains to a pre-political order, whereas Schmitt is concerned with the political.

[13] It is unclear what Schmitt means by the 'threat to one's way of life'; he does mention that this can be the sole justification/reason, to quote more fully: "*If such physical destruction of human life is not motivated by an existential threat to one's own way of life, then it cannot be justified*" [Schmitt 2007a: 49]; and earlier in his treatise: "*Each participant is in a position to judge whether the adversary intends to negate his opponent's way of life and therefore must be repulsed or fought in order to preserve one's own*

What Schmitt presents us with, in other words, is a lack of motives/reasons that drive men to war. The concept of the political, it would seems, does not only concern political differentiation; but rather follows Schmitt's initial question pertaining to the legitimacy of physical killing of the other, or what I call here the 'ethical' dimension: "*There exists no rational purpose, no norm no matter how true, no program no matter how exemplary, no social ideal no matter how beautiful, no legitimacy nor legality which could justify men in killing each other for this reason*" [Schmitt 2007a: 49]. As Schmitt is unable to find any reasons for such justification, he concludes that they must lay in the 'logic of the political' – i.e. the antagonistic relation between friend and enemy. He is thus commonly interpreted as ascribing the decision on friend and enemy an essentialist trait. It is this essentialism which explains the antagonistic element that is actualised in the moment of the existential threat to one's way of life. There are, as such, no justifications for warfare prior to the political – wars may well happen, but there could be no possible justifications for them. That is to say, the lack of motives/reasons prior to the political decision on the friend/enemy does not preclude us from waging wars; this lack is indicative of warfare and may well define the sole object of war. Quite strictly, Schmitt contends that exactly due to the lack of normative regulations, warfare does not need justification and functions with the singular goal of defeat, perhaps even annihilation, of the enemy: "*If there really are enemies in the existential sense as meant here, then it is justified,* but only politically, *to repel and fight them physically*" [Schmitt 2007a: 49, my emphasis].

It should be noted here that Schmitt is concerned with the presence of the enemy, albeit through a decision; and thus not with the creation of the enemy. The presence of the enemy, in Mouffe's view, defines the current hegemonic articulation which requires political action – even though the enemy is not to be repelled physically. On this point, her view closely follows Schmitt in understanding of the current state of affairs: there are no justifications and none are required – the presence of the enemy demands different hegemonic projects. My emphasis in the above citation may equally lend to this view.[14] However, her view can only be plausible in light of Schmitt as an ontological theorist – that is, as Schmitt disregarding the historical circumstances through which the political as antagonism has become our historical product. As I have pointed out earlier, Schmitt's interest in warfare follows Clausewitz' understanding of warfare as a political act; nonetheless, for Schmitt the political is prior to warfare: "*War has its own grammar (i.e., special military-technical laws), but politics remains its brain. It does not have its own logic*" [Schmitt 2007: 34n].

Neutrality and Pacifism in Schmitt

It should become clear that Schmitt's position on the political presupposes an ontology in the way beings relate to one another; but also that this relation is historically defined. In the remainder of this paper, I will give a number of arguments to substantiate my reading of Schmitt and contrast this with Mouffe's position on the political. As stated previously, the

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form of existence." [Schmitt 2007a: 27]

[14] Also Marcuse seems, on face value, to acknowledge that the only possible justification for physical killing of others is simply "*a state of affairs that through its very existence and presence is* exempt *from all justification, i.e. an 'existential', 'ontological' state of affairs – justification by mere existence.*" [Marcuse 2009: 21]

categories friend, enemy, and combat are frequently and explicitly depicted as existential concepts – by which Schmitt means real and actual. Such classification cannot lend to an ontological reading, but must retain a level of contingency from which the characteristics of the categories are historically created. However, the concept of the political is also presented as an ever-present possibility: a state of exception is always possible, which will necessitate the decision on the categories and the potential of combat.

Schmitt stipulates the ever-present possibility of the political by referring to exception in neutrality and pacifism. Both, he claims, have little meaning without acknowledging 'the logic of the political'. He thus states that a state of neutrality is not only possible, but can also be "*politically reasonable*" [Schmitt 2007a: 35]. However, such possibility by definition resists the existential character of the categories – "*the neutrality concept too is subject to the ultimate presupposition of a real possibility of a friend-and-enemy grouping (...) What always matters is the possibility of the extreme case taking place, the real war, and the decision whether this situation has or has not arrived*" [Schmitt 2007a: 35]. Similarly, Schmitt seems initially to admit a possibility of a pacified globe, with a nuance that such a world would be "*without the distinction of friend and enemy and hence a world without politics*" [Schmitt 2007a: 35]. He quickly retraces his point, however, by declaring that such a world too would first arise through "*this logical conclusion of the political. If pacifist hostility toward war were so strong as to drive pacifists into a war against nonpacifists, in a war against war, that would prove that pacifism truly possesses political energy because it is sufficiently strong to group men according to friend and enemy*" [Schmitt 2007a: 36]. The key term in this citation is 'if' – for it is the definition of the political that groups form through friend/enemy distinction; as long as pacifists deny, for moral or other reasons, to group along these lines, they lack political character.

Admittedly, such reading has certain validity and is presented as such by scholars like Mouffe. On neutrality, for instance, Mouffe states that her model "*acknowledges that society is always politically instituted*" [Mouffe 2005a: 34]; or on pacifism, she states that "*antagonisms, far from having disappeared, were manifesting themselves in new forms in both national and international contexts*" [Mouffe 2005a: 64]. This may well be true on the ontic level; however, it should not be hastily proclaimed that the political therefore 'belongs to our ontological condition'. For even here, within these passages Schmitt admits to the political as a historical product. In the middle of the paragraph on neutrality, Schmitt points out "*it is here even irrelevant whether such a world without politics is desirable as an ideal situation*", and it is so specifically because Schmitt is concerned with "*the definition of the political*" [Schmitt 2007a: 35].[15] The possibility of neutrality, through the logic of the political or not, remains irrelevant for his project – we should not think that it is therefore impossible, and that it thus belongs to our ontological condition. Similarly, in relation to pacifism, in a chapter devoted to humanism and international relations, Schmitt notes that if:

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[15] To quote at some length from a different passage: "*The concern here is neither with abstractions nor with normative ideals, but with inherent reality and the real possibility of such a distinction... rationally speaking, it cannot be denied that nations continue to group themselves according to the friend and enemy antithesis, that the distinction still remains actual today.*" [Schmitt 2007a: 28]

> "*human groupings on earth should be so unified that a conflict among them is impossible and even inconceivable...* then the distinction of friend and enemy would also cease. *What remains is neither politics nor state, but culture, civilization, economics, morality, law, art, entertainment, etc. If and when this condition will appear, I do not know.* At the moment, this is not the case" [Schmitt 2007a: 53-54, my emphasis].

What Schmitt aims at, is clearly a definition and understanding of the political – not as ontology, but as a present situation. In his *Nachwort* from 1931 to the second edition of the *CP*, Schmitt writes "*Was hier über den 'Begriff des Politischen' gesagt ist, soll ein unermeßliches Problem theoretisch 'encadrieren'*" [Schmitt 1991: 96]. Following on this issue in his 1963 edition preface, Schmitt further notes "*Es soll, mit andern Worten, ein Rahmen für bestimmte rechtswissenschaftliche Fragen abgesteckt werden, um eine verwirrte Thematik zu ordnen und eine Topik ihrer Begriffe zu finden*" [Schmitt 1991: 9]. His aim is to 'enframe an immense theoretical problem', 'to put order to a twisted thematic', 'to find the categories of the concept' – 'to provide a framework for specific jurisprudential issues'. This is not to say that the treatise is purely theoretical; it does show, however, the aim of the concept of the political to be definitional demarcation, possibly for legal reasons – not a concept referring to our ontology.

From a different perspective, already in Strauss the status of the political as an ontological condition is questioned by accentuating the relevance of history. It could be argued that Strauss' view is tainted by his liberal agenda; most contemporary readers, however, find there to be a relation between the concept of the political and resistance to liberalism expressed in *The Age of Neutralizations and Depoliticizations* (AND). Schmitt himself published the two together in the second edition in 1932. Recent publications also include both works, and Strauss' *Notes on Carl Schmitt*, together. Strauss' endeavour is the critique of liberalism (and culture) in both *CP* and *AND*; he refers to both by stating that the political expresses "*not an eternal truth but only a present truth*" [Strauss 2007: 99]. Additionally, *AND* promotes a view of the political which would substantiate the importance of contingency in Schmitt's work. From the start of the text, Schmitt emphasises the course of history:

> "*This is our situation (...) That all historical knowledge is knowledge of the present, that such knowledge obtains its light and intensity from the present and in the most profound sense only serves the present, because all spirit is only spirit of the present (...) There is no longer anyone today who would be deceived by the accumulation of facts as to how much of historical representation and construction is fulfilled by naive projections and identifications. Thus we must first be aware of our own historical situation.*" [Schmitt 2007b: 80-81]

Whether this would also apply to the concept of the political – whether the political as antagonism is merely a 'historical representation and construction' – could certainly remain disputable. However, as the preceding examples on neutrality and pacifism show, Schmitt remains concerned with the current state of affairs. Every possibility of the political as

a historical creation is attested by Schmitt's insistence on actuality by statements such as 'at the moment, this is not the case'.

Schematic as this may seem, Mouffe's position clearly deviates from the preceding one. It would be misleading to find in the political an ontological condition. At its least, one would question the very fabric of contemporary Western democratic states if it were accepted that we live in continuous agony: a painful existence of persistent struggle. As one commentator pointed out, if Mouffe's position on antagonism is "*'pure' violence (...) it would both be superfluous and hard to discern what normative work it would do for a democratic theory (of any kind)*" [Erman 2009: 1047-1048]. And yet, there is little value in understanding antagonism only as a possibility of violence for Mouffe, which is Schmitt's position; because without the reference to 'ineradicability of antagonism' in that sense, there would be no need to transform antagonism into agonism – which alone suffices to explain the possibilities of violent conflicts.

This is not to say that Mouffe's contribution on the importance of the political is hereby fully diminished. Her importance lies in declaring, with Schmitt, that import of morals into actual politics can have devastating results. Approvingly, she cites Schmitt:

> "*When a state fights its political enemy in the name of humanity, it is not a war for the sake of humanity, but a war wherein a particular state seeks to usurp a universal concept against its military opponent. At the expense of its opponent, it tries to identify itself with humanity in the same way as one can misuse peace, justice, progress, and civilization in order to claim these as one's own and to deny the same to the enemy.*" [Mouffe 2005a: 78, Schmitt 2007a: 54]

Her views, however, do not fully correspond to Schmitt's, and the approving citation seems out of context in Schmitt's work. Although Mouffe grasps the fundamental aspect of moral import into politics, she is misled by the notion of humanity. Schmitt did not "*persistently [expose] liberalism's pretence of complete inclusiveness and its claim to be speaking in the name of 'humanity'*" [Mouffe 2005a: 78; 2005b: 247-48]. On the contrary, again in the following paragraph, Schmitt notes that humanity is "*not a political concept*", that "*there are no wars of humanity as such*" [Schmitt 2007a: 55]. In a remarkably clear Nietzschean formulation, Schmitt attributes the term humanity to a repudiation of the aristocratic feudal system of privileges. In relation to the concept of the political, humanity belongs to "*a system of relations between individuals*" [Schmitt 2007a: 55]. Outside this context, the term humanity (or perhaps humanism) is used not as a warning against universal values, but only and specifically as a warning of the political utilisation, explicitly in warfare, of universalization of values for political gains.[16]

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[16] For a related discussion, compare the quoted passage with his discussion on equality in *The Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy* [1985a: 10-13], where Schmitt once again points out to the actuality of the 'state of affairs': "*This democracy of mankind does not exist anywhere in the world* today"; and "*such an equality certainly does not exist anywhere*, so long as *the various states of the earth...*" (my emphasis).

Conclusion

It should be recalled that according to Schmitt, political differentiation is a decision by the sovereign on the state of exception. Such decisions on friend and enemy, which are not ontologically present, but historically construed, always serve a political aim. Schmitt rightly dismisses such use as the most devastating outcome of the twentieth century: "*To the extent that wars today have decreased in number and frequency, they have proportionately increased in ferocity*" [Schmitt 2007a: 35]. The treatise is dedicated to his friend, August Schaetz of Munich, who died during WWI; and *The Concept of the Political* tries to understand how the state can demand such sacrifice.[17] For the liberal depoliticizing agenda necessitates an outcome of wars for other reasons than political ones.

As I have tried to show in this paper, the political as antagonism does not belong to our ontological condition, but is only present as a contingent 'state of affairs'. The position held by Schmitt may be ambivalent on several issues presented here; however, neglecting the 'ethical' dimension in Schmitt's treatise only further complicates our understanding of the political. I have tried to argue that, unlike Mouffe's, Schmitt's view is that the political *as antagonism* is a historical/contingent product. Where for Mouffe the political as antagonism is an already ontologically settled position, for Schmitt the political is expressed as antagonism only in the current state of affairs. By analysing the theoretical examples of neutrality and pacifism in Schmitt, I have shown that the antagonistic relations too are contingent and specific for historical circumstances. Mouffe rightly stipulates that overlooking the political in its current form (i.e. antagonism), and overestimating the possibilities of consensus and deliberation, may result in greater dangers. That a solution to this problem is lacking in contemporary political discourse is equally rightly emphasised. However, these issues are located on the 'ontic' level, and not on an 'ontological' one – they concern politics and not the political. The adversarial model cannot, from the very outset of its aims – that is, as quoted earlier, Mouffe's main field of enquiry is "*located at the 'ontic' level (...) [but] it is the lack of our understanding of 'the political' in its ontological dimension which is at the origin of our current incapacity to think in a political way*" [Mouffe 2005a: 9] – be a matter of an analysis of the political. Unlike recent critique of Mouffe, my view is that this inconsistency will remain as long as she maintains that the political as antagonism is our ontological condition, and does not acknowledge, as did Schmitt, that the political can have different content. What this content can be, remains a speculation; but it cannot be excluded a priori that a different content for the political as something other than antagonistic relation is possible.

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[17] The validity of this point could be questioned with regard to wars of the 21st century (cf. Kaldor [2010]; for a methodological disputation cf. Kalyvas [2001]); more problematic to Schmitt's view would be the increasing development of Rapid Reaction Forces (especially in the EU under the Helsinki Headline Goals).

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