

Conceptions of the political

Between Schmitt and Arendt

Babrak Ibrahimy

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University of East Anglia

School of Philosophy

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*So listen, son, so that one day you may be
an old father, too!*

– Hafiz

Abstract

This thesis aims to answer the question ‘What is the political?’ While much has been written on individual conceptions of ‘the political’, the main aim of this thesis was to conduct a comparative research between different conceptions of the political. In particular, the thesis presents the conceptions of the political by Carl Schmitt, Hannah Arendt, and Chantal Mouffe, and analyses in what sense and where their conceptions differ. In doing so, three aims were set as a framework of comparison: 1) to clarify the relation between politics and the political; 2) to question the dissociative and associative traits of the political; and 3) to shed light on the relation between the notion of humanity and the concept of the political. The main conclusions drawn as a result of this research are thus also threefold: 1) the relation between the political and politics should not amount to privileging of the former, and contra contemporary emphasis on a political ontology, Schmitt and Arendt do not envision the political in these terms – instead, their conceptions of the political serve as a desired state of politics; 2) any actual association is one that functions according to the logic of democratic exclusion, whereby the distinction between associative and dissociative traits of the political become superfluous; and 3) utilising the notion of humanity, Schmitt and Arendt aim to overcome the restrictive imposition of the political, while Mouffe embraces the democratic principle of exclusion. The concluding chapter aims to bring together the findings of individual scholars and to pave way for a concept of the political that integrates the individual elements found in each scholar.

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Preface

I want to emphasize the date on which I am writing this. It is the summer of 1995, and as far as specifying the situation of the earth and humans is concerned, nothing is more pressing (how could it really be avoided?) than a list of proper names such as these, presented here in no particular order: Bosnia-Herzegovina, Chechnya, Rwanda, Bosnian Serbs, Tutsis, Hutus, Tamil Tigers, Krajina Serbs, Casamance, Chiapas, Islamic Jihad, Bangladesh, the Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia, Hamas, Kazakhstan, Khmers Rouges, ETA militia, Kurds (UPK/PDK), Montataire, the Movement for Self-determination, Somalia, Chicanos, Shiites, FNLC-Canal Historique, Liberia, Givat Hagadan, Nigeria, the League of the North, Afghanistan, Indonesia, Sikhs, Haiti, Roma gypsies of Slovenia, Taiwan, Burma, PLO, Iraq, Islamic Front Salvation, Shining Path, Vaulx-en-Velins, Neuhof. . . .”

This extract is from the opening of Jean-Luc Nancy’s booklet *Being Singular Plural*. What follows is an elaboration of a problem deeply rooted in ‘the situation of the earth and humans’, which consists in our understanding of politics, its association with the concept of the political – i.e. ‘political difference’ – and the worry that arises from ascribing specific categories/relations to political endeavours. I ask the reader to keep Nancy’s emphasis on the date in mind. I write in the winter of 2015, some twenty years later. The number of names on the list has not decreased, some of the names still appear today, though we perhaps no longer refer to some groups/states by the same names. Other names have been added. . . . The ‘situation of the earth and humans’ stimulates this research, makes it necessary, and ultimately unending.

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I dedicate this work to my father Fereydoun Forolledin Ibrahimy, a communist and a revolutionary.

Introduction

This research aims to clarify the endeavour of demarcating between politics and the political. I aim to do so by clarifying the two dominant frameworks of the political – referred to as the dissociative and the associative traits. These two traits are commonly attributed to Carl Schmitt on the one hand, and Hannah Arendt on the other. Both scholars view ‘true’ politics as a domain that stands in relative autonomy from other (state) interests. In contemporary literature this relative autonomy is viewed as a demarcation between politics as practice, and its underlying ontology or condition that shapes political practice – termed ‘political difference’ and reminiscent of Heidegger’s ‘ontological difference’ (Marchart, 2007). At the core of political difference, both authors claim, is the ‘autonomy’ of the political domain vis-à-vis other fields that are deemed to be part of it.

Prior to proceeding with Schmitt and Arendt, some context is necessary. A useful way of approaching this issue is by referring to Paul Ricoeur’s seminal essay *The Political Paradox*. In this essay, Ricoeur views ‘true’ politics as separable from other fields that a state is commonly interested in; it is approached as an autonomous field not concerned with other matters of state. Thus, questions of administration, economics or morality are deemed separate from the field of politics; even though these form a prime concern of political ‘subjects’, or the recurring themes of political rhetoric. Since its conception as an autonomous field, the notion ‘politics’ has required a new and different concept. For Ricoeur, the two conceptions of politics were differentiated by the articles ‘la’ and ‘le’ *politique*.¹ In his view, the former referred to the ‘evils of political power’ – the specifically *political* violence that could not be reduced to economic alienation. The latter, on the other hand, referred to the possibility of acting together – and thus a specifically *political* relation that overcame violence and could not be reduced to class antagonisms.

In both cases, the autonomy of politics is discernible, and yet for Ricoeur ‘la politique’ and ‘le politique’ were not wholly separate – there always remained an interplay between the two. His aim was to point towards the specifically political ills, untainted by an economisation of the society. It was thus a response to Marxist claims of economic alienation as the sole cause of political alienation. And yet, for Ricoeur, the political realm could only be “quasi-independent” (Kaplan, 2003: 125), and his conception of the political only a “quasi-autonomy” (126), precisely because the two concepts ‘la’ and ‘le’ *politique* remained so deeply intertwined.

¹ Similarly in German ‘die Politik’ and ‘das Politische’, in Dutch, ‘de politiek’ and ‘het politieke’, etc. For the purpose of clarity, only the English equivalents will be used in the following chapters – politics and the political respectively.

Ricoeur's differentiation between 'la' and 'le' politique plays a constitutive role in the grounding of politics. 'Political difference' is reminiscent of Heidegger's 'ontological difference'. Because for Heidegger accessing the ontological was deemed impossible – and specifically because the ontological could not be approached without the historically laden ontics – 'political difference' struggles with a similar difficulty. As Marchart notes,

it is precisely because we cannot access the ontological level *directly* that – if we want to approach it at all – we will have necessarily to pass through the ontic level, in order to 'wave' at something which will always escape our grasp because of the irremediable gap between the ontological and the ontic . . . the ground and what is grounded (Marchart, 2007: 24).

This 'quasi-transcendentalism' of Heidegger posits the difficulty of characterising 'le politique' as separable from 'la politique'. It remains a '-transcendental' position because the possibility of a ground is opened; and yet it can only remain a 'quasi-' position because the characteristics of 'le politique' will necessarily be imposed on by the historical affairs – i.e. by 'la politique'. In effect, any articulation of 'le politique' must first admit to the contingency of its ground. It is in this sense that Marchart can be seen to deal with post-foundational thought – the aim of which is not to erase all grounds, but to emphasise the lack of the final or ultimate ground. Post-foundationalism thus emphasises the "necessity for *some* ground" (14), albeit in its weakened state. Marchart's attribution of 'quasi-transcendentalism' to Heidegger, however, only partially answers Ricoeur's initiation of the autonomy of the political. It elucidates the post-foundational project as *a* ground; it cannot sustain the difficulty of assessing the ontological as separate from the ontic.

1. Research aims

Contemporary academic literature is thus confronted with two conceptions of *politique* as distinguished by Ricoeur. The first aim of this thesis is to clarify the relation between politics and the political by looking at the works of Carl Schmitt and Hannah Arendt, in which, arguably, the genesis of and motivation for Ricoeur's distinction may be identified.

While the distinction between 'le politique' and 'la politique' (hereafter: the political/politics distinction) is fundamental, it is not the sole interest of the research project. One premise in contemporary literature is that Ricoeur's distinction has been followed by two traits of the political, with scholars aligning with *either* Carl Schmitt *or* Hannah Arendt. The two traits are termed 'dissociative' and 'associative', following Schmitt or Arendt respectively. The traits are only "schematic" – they do, however, both capture what Ricoeur had detected as the autonomous field of politics (Marchart, 2007: 38). The second aim is to question the distinction between dissociative and associative traits.

Because the Heideggerian ontology cannot be accessed, it can only be grasped through an already tainted ontic level. The foundation or ground towards which one turns is, therefore, already based on a decision. We are confronted in this regard with the political as 'first philosophy' – a position which determines all following positions. This claim "is a political move in itself. A first philosophy has to be *made* first: a

decision has to be taken as to the ground or starting point” (83). The third aim thus questions the status of the political as first philosophy; and, in order to do so, it looks into the notion of humanity that is present in the scholars proposing a conception of the political.

In all the three aims, the concern is with Carl Schmitt and Hannah Arendt. However, given the historical circumstances under which each was writing, as well as the theoretical nature of their work, it is of interest to offer an analysis of a contemporary political theory that is rooted in the overall discussion. I thus also consider Chantal Mouffe’s agonistic pluralism, which, although openly Schmittian, falls within the tradition of Hannah Arendt as well. Moreover, Mouffe considers her model of agonistic democratic theory to offer a practical solution to many contemporary social and political crises, such as populism, xenophobia, marginalisation and terrorism. In this regard, her work is suited to scrutiny in order to substantiate the three aims of this research project.

2. An interpretative framework for Schmitt

Political theory has been at times presented as offering criteria for the correction of political practice. This was notably the case with Plato, and it is my claim that this is also the case with Carl Schmitt’s articulation of ‘the concept of the political’. Having Schmitt as a starting position of a research aimed at understanding political difference is for this reason prudent. His involvement with Nazi Germany, however, has prevented a consistent (and impartial) analysis of his work in contemporary political theory. As George Schwab recalls, up until the early 1970s, roughly fifty years after his most proliferating years of publication, the “mere mention of Schmitt’s name” in support of a position would be met with “hostility” (Schwab, 1970: vi). This is not surprising given his involvement with the Nazi regime, and subsequent alterations to his work in order to fit with the contemporary political climate. As publications slowly followed in the 1980s, giving clear historical accounts of Schmitt’s views and their development over the years, his critique of Nazism prior to 1933, and his involvement with the established order in the mid-1930s, including adaptations of his work to accommodate Nazi propaganda, etc.; Schmitt scholarship seemed to be more balanced.

Following a “near explosion of Schmitt studies” since the 1980s (ibid.), a clear distinction has to be made between three types of Schmitt scholarship currently available. On the one hand, there are works concerned with Schmitt’s contemporary events, detailing his proceedings and relating his written views to contemporary circumstances. As Schwab himself notes, Schmitt’s “ideas should not be separated from specific constitutional events” (8).² On the other hand, there are works that detail the discontinuity of Schmitt’s pre- and post-1933 publications. These works generally follow an ‘apologetic’ tone, accentuating the opportunism of Schmitt’s character and detaching that from the originality of his thought. The clearest case of this is Joseph Bendersky, whose book title (*Carl Schmitt: Theorist for the Reich*) contradicts the

² Kennedy (2004), Schwab (1970).

content of the book.³ Finally, the 1990s have reversed this claim and have focused on pointing out a lack of reasons to support a theoretical discontinuity following 1933, even though a practical one may have been present. These scholars claim that Schmitt's early work easily lent itself to the Nazi regime.⁴

These three types of Schmitt scholarship may give rise to reading Schmitt in a particular way. Even though the third type of Schmitt scholarship makes a compelling case against discontinuity between pre- and post-1933 Schmitt, it is my view that there are nevertheless prudent reasons to hold to the discontinuity. This research thus primarily borrows from Schmitt's early body of work. There are three reasons for this. First, Schmitt reversed his 'Nazi' laden revisions that occurred in the 1930s after the fall of the Third Reich. Whatever Schmitt's views were during the 1930s, and for whatever reasons, he clearly resorted to previous editions. Given his unsympathetic character, as well as lack of willingness to 'redeem' himself during the Nuremberg trials, it seems that he held these views to be more correct than what followed. Additionally, it should be stressed that Schmitt did, in fact, edit his work, and although the main text has remained unchanged, as Heinrich Meier notes, "Schmitt silently changed the division of paragraphs and of footnotes, the orthography, and the punctuation. Italics in the text are likewise added or omitted without being so marked" (Meier, 2006: 7n). This indicates, to me, that a preference to a particular text by Schmitt was made even after three decades (the last edition appeared in 1963).

Second, although numerous new publications followed after WWII, they are not more than elucidations of his previous work from the 1910s and 1920s. Though these may on occasion substantiate the arguments made, they are otherwise not essential for the aims of *this* thesis. There is one exception to this regarding Schmitt's conception of humanity, which is dealt with in the sixth chapter of the thesis.

There is another reason to distinguish between 'Weimar Schmitt' and 'Third Reich Schmitt', which can be found by looking at Hannah Arendt. Even though her mention of Schmitt is only sporadic, in one footnote Arendt mentions that Schmitt, along with others, volunteered their services because they were "convinced Nazis"; and yet, she equally clearly states that a distinction is to be made between "professors who adopted the Nazi creed and those who owed their careers exclusively to the regime", and that one should not confuse "the earlier careers of the concerned scholars and thus indiscriminately [put] well-known men of great achievement into the same category as crackpots" (Arendt, 1979: 339-340). Specifically of Schmitt, she notes that his "very ingenious theories about the end of democracy and legal government still make arresting reading" (ibid.).⁵ Having Hannah Arendt as an aid to hold to the discontinuity, this thesis thus primarily focuses on the pre-1933 publications by

³ Bendersky (1983), McCormick (1999).

⁴ Cristi (1998), Dyzenhaus (1997), Scheuermann (1999).

⁵ This passage is present almost verbatim in an earlier *Image of Hell* from 1946. In that passage she is more receptive of Schmitt than in the later *Origins of Totalitarianism*: "only a careful and complete bibliography of all these scholars' pre-Hitler publications would have shown their real standing in the world of scholarship" (Arendt, 1994: 201). A case for discontinuity is further made in *Men in Dark Times*: "Carl Schmitt, the famous professor of constitutional and international law who later became a Nazi" (1968: 252).

Schmitt, with only occasional references to his later publications for support of an argument.

Despite the rich Schmitt scholarship, it should also be made clear that certain important aspects do not enter the discussion. In particular, I am not concerned with one otherwise fundamental factor, namely the context under which Schmitt was writing. Even though some scholars have posited, convincingly, that Schmitt's publications cannot be separated from his environment – and indeed the episodes following 1933 only attest to this fact – it is nevertheless prudent to leave these aside. There is little reason to bring Schmitt's involvement with different people of state, including Präsident Hindenburg, into the discussion on the *theoretical* viability of a concept. While this particular episode, and many like it, make for remarkable reading, they add little to the politico-theoretical level of understanding of the problem at hand and would not enrich the three aims that this research deals with. Additionally, Schmitt's conception of the political no longer resides with the author. Thus, even though a particular position is defended regarding Schmitt's views, it is nevertheless prudent to keep the concept that is attributed to Schmitt as separate from the man himself.

3. Arendt and Mouffe

Arendt scholarship is as divided on the validity of interpretations as is that of Schmitt. There are three strands of Arendtian scholarship, schematically characterised as modernist, postmodernist and civic republican. The modernist position generally emphasises Arendt's insistence on communicative mode of action, her theory of power as action in concert, as well as her views on narrative and intersubjectivity. In this regard, Arendt's views are assimilated to the liberal-democratic ideology and consensus-driven politics.⁶ The postmodernist position generally emphasises Arendt's critique of ultimate grounds and foundations, homogeneity and unity, and highlights her insistence on the contingency of historical events, the spontaneity of action, and agonistic politics. This view promotes an alternative to the liberal democratic project.⁷ Recently, more attention has been paid to Arendt as a civic republican whose main concern is with the agency of the citizens to exercise their power actively. On this interpretation, there is no common conception of the public good that the citizens strive for, nor an agreement in form of consensus to be achieved.⁸

These three lines of interpretation do not necessarily exclude one another. It is, for instance, possible to read Arendt as someone promoting agonistic politics, while equally holding a strong view of citizenship; or to emphasise her 'communicative theory of action', while simultaneously rejecting a conception of common good in form of, say, consensus. The approach taken in this thesis tries to reconcile what is significant in each of them with the overall research project, while acknowledging my

⁶ Benhabib (2003), Habermas (1977), Isaac (1996).

⁷ Honig (1993), Kristeva (2001), Vasterling (2003), Villa (1996).

⁸ Passerin-d'Entrèves (1994).

close ties to the postmodernist position. The main concern is not to deduce Arendt's thought, but to engage her views with the distinction between politics and the political.

While there is no need for an interpretive approach as required to examine Schmitt's work, it will be noticed that a greater emphasis is given on some of the texts over others. In particular, the primary material relied upon is from *The Human Condition* (HC) and *On Revolution* (OR). The reason for this is that although Arendt's political theory has not been presented in any single text in an exhaustive fashion, HC and OR offer a greater insight into her political theory than sporadic remarks found in other books and essays.

Similar to Arendt, two of Mouffe's relatively late publications are of interest for the purpose of this thesis: *On the Political* and *The Democratic Paradox*. The choice for Mouffe may seem odd, given that there is relatively little secondary literature on her work isolated from the co-publication of *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* with Ernesto Laclau. It is my view that precisely because she is concerned with the practicability of agonistic pluralism, instead of a purely theoretical elucidation of particular modes of action, or a theoretical analysis of practices present within contemporary democracies, that a close look into a theoretical consistency is warranted. In my interaction with Chantal Mouffe during a conference held in Prague 2013, it became all the more clear that she would find agonistic pluralism a solution to many social woes in contemporary Western democracies. The emphasis on the practicability of the agonistic model also becomes apparent in the introduction to *On the Political*, where Mouffe points out that the events of the past few decades – rise of populism, terrorism, xenophobia, and most notably the import of morality into political discourse – can be understood in light of the lack of our acknowledgement of the political. Given this emphasis on the practicability of agonistic pluralism, Mouffe offers a necessary offset to an otherwise theory driven research project, while nevertheless being closely tied to it in light of her insistence to work with the Schmittian paradigm.

As will become clear, her work heavily relies on Schmitt's conception of the political. She thus takes over several of his insights, while critiquing his essentialism and advancing a strategy for contemporary social ills. This interaction with Schmitt, however, also warrants a closer look at the sustainability of the reliance on his views, the similarities in their approaches, as well as the differences in their conclusions. Additionally, even though Mouffe rejects the Arendtian conception of the political, it is noteworthy that Mouffe's proposal to transform antagonism into agonism opens several parallels that could be drawn between Arendt and herself. As will be shown in the thesis, both Mouffe and Arendt rely on agonism and plurality in their theories, albeit that their projects differ considerably. An analysis of this interplay would thus be fruitful in covering the shortcomings in Mouffe from an Arendtian perspective.

4. Structure of the thesis

The thesis is divided into two parts: Part I – Conceptions of the political (Chapters 1, 2 and 3) and Part II – Associations and Humanity (Chapters 4, 5 and 6). The first three chapters of this research heavily borrow from the existing body of work in academia

regarding Schmitt, Arendt, and Mouffe respectively; while simultaneously maintaining a personal reading of each. In particular, in Chapter 1, after offering an analysis of how Schmitt views specific concepts necessary for his conception of 'the political', a certain 'philosophical challenge' is presented which offers a discussion on the seeming contradiction in Schmitt on holding both a historically articulated conception of the political as well as a ubiquitous conception. Additionally, Schmitt's ethical concerns are brought more prominently to the foreground, which has received very little attention in contemporary Schmitt scholarship. Finally, while this research project is only possible because of the rich Schmitt scholarship, it is also intended as a critique on the seemingly overwhelming consensus on Schmitt's 'invention' and endorsement of 'the political/politics distinction'.

Chapter 2 offers a similar approach to Arendt's conception of politics, with an emphasis on her theory of action. There are two main points of contention discussed in this chapter: a critical discussion on the problematic relation between spontaneity of action and violence, proposing that Arendt's conclusions on spontaneity of action could be turned against her views on violence; as well as the problematic relation between individuating speech and concerted action, proposing to look at speech not solely as 'speech acts', but also as supplementary to action.

There is currently relatively little secondary literature on Mouffe's position. The third chapter is thus more critical; a critique of her position is deemed necessary not because I find it *politically* objectionable, but precisely because a more *philosophically* consistent position is sought. After presenting an overview of the central concepts of Mouffe's theoretical proposition – namely, the ontological primacy of antagonism, her theory of hegemony and the shortcomings of liberalism – some points of critique are offered on the correct interpretation of Schmitt, her reliance on Wittgenstein, and her critique of deliberative democracy. Even though this chapter is more critical than the preceding ones, I nevertheless conclude that given some adjustments a plausible case for agonistic pluralism could be made. By pointing out these shortcomings, in other words, I hope to pave the way for further research on an alternative.

When turning to Part II of the thesis, my main concerns follow the problematic reliance by Mouffe on Schmitt. Chapter 4 thus deals with the problematic issue of unity as opposed to pluralism in political philosophy, characterised by the democratic and liberal traditions in political theory. By looking specifically at Schmitt's earlier work, a connection is made between the role of homogeneity and his concept of the political. I thus claim that the fundamental discord between Schmitt and Mouffe in their views of associations leads to a fundamental disagreement that cannot be overcome by 'sublimating' the effects of ontologically present antagonism.

The fifth chapter continues the theme unity and plurality of associations, but specifically concerns Hannah Arendt's conception of the political. I thus apply the debate on democratic unity and liberal plurality to Arendt, while scrutinising her examinations of the Greek city state and the later council system. What comes prominently to the foreground of this discussion, is the neglect of the potential tension between equality and plurality that was discussed in Chapter 2. In this chapter, I therefore reopen that discussion in relation to the political association.

Where Chapters 4 and 5 posit that all three scholars initially seem to aim towards a democratic unity of an association, the last chapter investigates the few references from their works to an all-encompassing notion of humanity. A case is made that ‘humanity’ plays a dominant role in each of the scholars; and this particular role of humanity points towards the question of foundations that the concept of the political is concerned with. To put it differently, the notion of humanity remains present in each scholar, and points towards the *political* character of the concept of the political. This chapter thus also concludes that the question of a foundation is central to the concept of the political, and thus cannot be treated in isolation from political concerns – effectively confirming politics as first philosophy.

Part I – Conceptions of the political

*for they have banished Hermodorus, the
best among them*
– Heraclitus, fragment 121.

Chapter 1, Schmitt's concept of the political

Introduction

This chapter offers a critical discussion of the concept of the political proposed by Carl Schmitt in the late 1920s. I primarily deal with the translation by George Schwab of the second edition (1932) of *The Concept of the Political* (CP), with only occasional references to the earlier 1927 and later 1963 editions. The choice of the second edition seems appropriate, because at the moment it is the most widely read edition of the work. Additionally, the second edition has undergone some major revisions as a response to Leo Strauss, while the 1963 edition has kept the main text unchanged, despite adding a new preface and three corollaries. In the spirit of thoroughness, although the main text has remained unchanged, as Heinrich Meier notes, “Schmitt silently changed the division of paragraphs and of footnotes, the orthography, and the punctuation. Italics in the text are likewise added or omitted without being so marked” (Meier, 2006: 7n). There has been some academic discussion on the third, 1933, edition of the treatise, which was adapted to the rise of National Socialism and subsequently abandoned by returning to the 1932 edition in the 1963 reprint. As outlined in the introduction to the thesis, there are good reasons to deal with Schmitt's pre-1932 body of work concerning the concept of the political.

The definition of the political can be given in rather straightforward terms: what constitutes the political is (1) a result from a decision on the distinction between friend and enemy, which (2) has a potential of erupting into conflict, and (3) whose content only the participants can correctly recognise. Throughout the chapter, ‘the concept of the political’, or ‘the political’, is used in this sense. Nevertheless, an elaboration on the use of some terms is necessary in order to substantiate the claims made in the following chapters. In particular, it is necessary to view in more detail what is meant by such terms as ‘friend’, ‘enemy’, ‘combat’, ‘sovereignty’ and ‘decision’; but also in order to understand the purpose and scope of Schmitt's conception, it is necessary to relate the political to Schmitt's conception of a state and its role in contemporary political practice. In the final section, I develop an argument defending the position that Schmitt's conception of the political is deeply rooted in the actuality of politics.

1. Schmitt's presentation of the concept of the political

Although Schmitt's definition of the political can be given in one sentence, the meaning of individual terms remains problematic. It is necessary, however, to give a general overview of the concept prior to analysing its specificities and implications. The purpose of this section is thus meant as a general introduction to Schmitt's conception of the political and forms the basis upon which the subsequent sections elaborate. It should first be stated that Schmitt does not construct an elaborate theory

on the political, but only stresses that this concept exists theoretically and practically. His view is that “a definition of the political can be obtained only by discovering and defining the specifically political categories” (Schmitt, 2007b: 25). The political has to be distinguished from other

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 (25-26).

Schmitt is looking for the final distinctions (*die letzten Unterscheidungen*) in the concept of the political. What constitutes the political is ‘reduced’ to a distinction in the same manner as is done in other domains: beautiful—ugly in aesthetics, good—evil in morality, and so on. “The specific political distinction to which political actions and motives can be reduced is that between friend and enemy [*Freund und Feind*]” (26). Although seemingly simplistic, Schmitt’s reduction to friend and enemy is supposed to encompass all aspects through which political differentiation *could* be made. This is to say that according to Schmitt political differentiation is ultimately constrained to an essential opposition between groups. For instance, in some feminist theories the distinction men—women is reducible to the distinction between friend (woman) and enemy (man);⁹ or in early Marxist theory the distinction between the proletariat (friend) and the bourgeois (enemy).¹⁰ In the 1963 edition, Schmitt adds three “corollaries” with an aim to substantiate his claims in the earlier edition further. It is understood that Schmitt found the concept of the political to be an essential aspect of human endeavour, making it appealing through the simple distinction and its corroboration in political crises.

Schmitt adds that although the political is an independent domain in some sense, it cannot be wholly isolated from other domains. It is independent in the sense that political differentiation cannot be captured exclusively by any other domain – i.e. political differentiation always involves the possibility of conflict through a friend and enemy differentiation. It stands independently of them and cannot “be traced to these” (26). However, the political domain cannot be wholly abstracted from the vast array of human endeavours – political differentiation relies on other domains “for support” (ibid.). The independence of the political domain is thus in the variety of (unknown) antitheses that lead to opposed political groupings and the possibility of conflict. Schmitt’s insight is that by virtue of being different, and regardless of the domain political differentiation stems from, a ‘final distinction’ is made in terms of friend and enemy. This is indeed to say that any form of group discrimination is, at least in principle, the origin of the political domain. Independent of the domain that differentiation is made from, the decision on the enemy is based on “his nature that

⁹ To be clear, the alignment between friend and enemy is not based on sex (male—female) or gender (masculine—feminine), but precisely on the alignment with a specific grouping. The issue is currently best exemplified by numerous events on university campuses across US – most recently, for instance, at the University of Mary Washington in Fredericksburg, Virginia in the spring of 2015 – where relations between the groups intensified to such a degree that potentiality of conflict turned towards its actuality; that is, *threats* of physical violence turning to a *physical* death of a representative of the feminist movement on campus.

¹⁰ Schmitt (2007b) refers to the latter on p. 37 and 74; and again on p. 67 in relation to Marxist adoption in Soviet Union.

he is, in a specially intense way, existentially [*existenziell*] something different and alien, so that in the extreme case conflicts with him are possible” (27).

Furthermore, only the participants in the specific circumstance are able to make the decision on the enemy – and thus also to decide whether conflict will be an option or not. It is only the participants who “can correctly recognize, understand, and judge the concrete situation and settle the extreme case of conflict” (ibid.). Schmitt does not elaborate on this issue any further. It is presumed that he wants to emphasise the intensity that only the actual participants can feel – “The distinction of friend and enemy denotes the utmost degree of intensity of a union or separation, of an association or dissociation” (26-27, 38). Only through actual feeling of enmity can the decision on the enemy be made; reason or expediency are thus only of secondary importance.¹¹ A position external to the potentiality of conflict is thus never fully vested in the opposition between the groups, presumably because the antitheses from which the differentiation stems would always remain unclear on an emotional level.¹²

Schmitt’s short elaboration demands a couple of remarks, which will be dealt with in the remainder of this chapter. Here, it suffices to bring forward two brief objections, which may further clarify the purpose of this research. The first possible direct objection is on the relevance of Schmitt’s treatise to contemporary political theory. Numerous theorists have emphasised the danger of adopting a Schmittian conception of the political, including his early critics such as Richard Thoma, as well as more recently Jürgen Habermas and Günter Figal.¹³ Despite the fact that contemporary political theorists have used parts of CP to propose a different mode of democratic discourse – most notably Chantal Mouffe whose work and its relation to the political is explored in the subsequent chapters¹⁴ – there have also been scholars stipulating the historical context of Schmitt’s treatise, thereby reducing the viability of contemporary applicability of the concept.¹⁵ Emphasising the historical circumstances, the latter group has referred to Schmitt’s adamant opposition to the Nazi party prior to 1933, his continuous efforts to preserve the constitution for the purpose of stability and order in the republic, and the efforts to maintain a strong state that would not succumb to “political dilettantism” (Schmitt, 2000: 4; Schwab, 1970: vi). In this light, they take Schmitt’s work during this period to be a reaction to the circumstances – “a warning and a cry for help” which was met without hearing (Schmitt, 2000: xxxviii; 1958: 345). The concept of the political specifically is understood to declare the internal enemy for the preservation of the constitution (Schmitt, 1958: 349-350; Schwab, 1970: 80-89).¹⁶ It is thus presented as a specifically historical text, which may seem

¹¹ A clear case here would be the Palestine/Israel conflict, where participants on both sides are persuaded by appeal to emotions, rather than reason. Cf. Halperin (2011) and Leep (2010); see also a case study by Shechter and Salomon (2005) on the diverse emotional responses in young Israeli adults after visits to Auschwitz.

¹² As will be shown in Chapter 6, this sense of ‘irrationality’ in Schmitt is also the reason for his attachment to ‘intensity’ as the guiding principle of the potentiality of conflict.

¹³ Cf. among others, Figal (1997), Habermas (1989a), (1989b), Müller (2003), Scheuermann (1999).

¹⁴ Mouffe (2005b), (2000), cf. also Marchart (2007), Rasch (2004), Žižek (2008).

¹⁵ This claim is not always directly made by these scholars, but follows their analysis. Most prominent in this category are: Bendersky (1983), Kennedy (2004), Schwab (1970).

¹⁶ The declaration of an internal enemy remains a deeply problematic issue in Schmitt’s body of work. While, as will become clear, the political is aimed to legitimise conflicts, it is also aimed at minimising

wholly irrelevant to our contemporary political practice; and taking this view as valid would undermine the validity of interpretations for other purposes than that of an historical study. The relevance of Schmitt to contemporary political thought, and indeed the very applicability of the concept of the political, would thus be far from clear. This is indeed to say that a potential refutation of Schmitt's relevance today can be presented if his work is situated strictly as a response to historical circumstances. This objection needs little clarification precisely because the concern of *this* thesis is with the political, and not with the author. Schmitt's intentions certainly play an important and sometimes constitutive role in our understanding of the political; they do not, however, exhaust the importance of the notion entirely.

Another objection rests on the alleged vagueness of Schmitt's exposition. It is unclear what purpose the concept of the political has or how it should be understood. Schmitt states, for instance, that the friend/enemy differentiation "provides a definition in the sense of a criterion and not as an exhaustive definition [*erschöpfende Definition*] or one indicative of substantial content [*Inhaltsangabe*]" (Schmitt, 2007b: 26). The difficulty appears the moment a concept that is stated not to be exhaustive delineates two parties and excludes the possibility of a third. If the definition is not exhaustive, then a neutral – neither friend, nor enemy – party should be possible; and yet, the possibility of neutrality is quickly denounced when Schmitt states that potential conflict "can neither be decided by a previously determined general norm nor by the judgment of a disinterested and therefore neutral third party" (27). Furthermore, Schmitt insists that neutrality itself can be declared an enemy: "As with every political concept, the neutrality concept too is subject to the ultimate pre-supposition of a real possibility of a friend-and-enemy grouping" (35).

The claim that the political is 'not exhaustive' or lacks 'substantial content' thus seemingly stands in direct contrast to Schmitt's later claim of the political as an overarching domain. It is therefore possible to take Schmitt as emphasising the antagonistic relation between friend and enemy as potentially present in every domain – and thus to claim that all human endeavour is reducible to the friend/enemy differentiation. And yet, while Schmitt emphasises the potentiality of conflict, he also rejects the invasion of various social concerns into the political domain – and thus the possibility of all concerns to function according to the friend/enemy differentiation is repudiated by him. This is to say that the alignment according to friend/enemy – i.e. antagonism – is not decisive in all human endeavours. Equally, claiming that the

their ferocity. The declaration of an internal enemy thus directly refers to the possibility of civil war; Schwab reads Schmitt to emphasise the internal enemy by infusing "the friend-enemy criterion into domestic political struggles" of his time. I will return to these issues throughout the thesis; at this stage it is important to emphasise that the notion of civil war never fully disappears from Schmitt's body of work. In CP alone, there are: references to Plato who distinguished between πόλεμος (war) and στάσις (civil war) – where Schmitt makes war, as opposed to civil war, a 'preferred' manner of political conflict (Schmitt, 2007b: 28-29); references to Marxism – "Marxists approach the class struggle seriously and treat the class adversary as a real enemy and fights him either in the form of a war of state against state or in a civil war within a state" (37); and references to religion – "As long as religious-theological matters were the central focus, the maxim *cujus regio ejus religio* had a political meaning", further noting that this maxim "means whoever rules a given territory *decides* on the religion" (87). In its clearest formulation, Schmitt notes that "If one wants to speak of politics in the context of the primacy of internal politics, then this conflict no longer refers to war between organized nations but to civil war" (32).

political lacks ‘substantial content’ indicates that the potentiality of conflict is not to be taken as inherent to all group relations. It is my view that Schmitt’s emphasis on the *potentiality* of the political is misplaced – that conflict is potential could mean that it is immanent, necessary, and perhaps even essential; but it could also mean that conflict is ‘potentially possible’, while an array of other possibilities remain within the political domain. This is especially the case if one accepts that the content according to which the friend/enemy differentiation is made is contingent on historical circumstances.¹⁷

2.1 Friend, enemy, combat

In order to explicate the concept of the political further, one has to deal with the criteria that Schmitt attributes to the concept, namely the differentiation between friend and enemy, and the associated possibility of combat. Schmitt holds a dual claim in defining the political as the differentiation between friend and enemy. There is a normative and a descriptive claim: the former refers to the relation between the groups, and the normative claim is made towards a preferred mode of action – it thus refers specifically to the potentiality of combat and Schmitt’s expectation/desires of the type of combat; while the latter refers to the political domain itself and the way groups are determined. Put differently, the normative claim defines the *raison d’être* of the political differentiation; while the descriptive claim provides the non-exhaustive criterion of the political differentiation.

Regarding the latter, it has already been mentioned that Schmitt explicates the friend/enemy groupings on an existential basis. The term existential, however, has a much ‘simpler’, yet much broader, connotation and application for Schmitt than in contemporary philosophical discourse – it is used in the ordinary sense that the enemy exists or simply *is there*. This is to say that there is no theoretical delimitation of an enemy – i.e. in the form of characteristics, ideologies, etc. – but rather that the enemy is identified as a concrete (historical) agent. Schmitt often uses ‘existential’ alongside the term real throughout CP (for example, 2007b: 27, 33, 38, 49).¹⁸ This is especially clear when we contrast numerous occasions on which the enemy’s existential character is expressed; for example in an already cited remark: “he is, in a specially intense way, existentially something different and alien” (27). Schmitt maintains his position by a continuous display of examples, yet his claim on the existential differentiation remains constant. A clear statement in support of such reading is, for instance, the following:

The friend and enemy concepts are to be understood in their concrete and existential sense, not as metaphors or symbols, not mixed and weakened by economic, moral, and other

¹⁷ See also the roles of neutrality (pp. 34-35, and in relation to liberalism on p. 61 and pp. 69-79) and pacifism (pp. 36-37, and in relation to humanism on pp. 53-58), which are attributed either the end of the political differentiation or get entangled in the political. I return to this issue on numerous occasions. In Chapters 3 and 4, I deal with Chantal Mouffe who prioritises antagonism and potentiality of conflict; while in Chapter 6 the inconsistency itself is explored in more detail. The first objection will be dealt with towards the end of this chapter.

¹⁸ Similar expressions are found in other works, for example: “All essential concepts are not normative but existential” (Schmitt, 2007a: 85); and “The bygone fact has the existential quality of the real. It is concrete and actual, not capricious poetry” (Schmitt, 1985: 69).

conceptions, least of all in a private-individualistic sense as a psychological expression of private emotions and tendencies . . . The concern here is neither with abstractions nor with normative ideals, but with inherent reality and the real possibility of such a distinction (27-28).

This is to say that the enemy is real and concrete – that although we can find meaningful relations in various other domains, our political relations are expressed in distinction-making on a group level. It is specifically groupings that determine the friend/enemy differentiation, and thus not individuals. Schmitt is quite clear that differentiation on an individual level does not reveal the political domain. Schmitt gives the following reason for this claim: “everything that has a relationship to such a collectivity of men, particularly to a whole nation, becomes public by virtue of such a relationship” (28). His intention is to show the publicity of group relations – the political domain is created through the publicness of ‘collectivities of men’.¹⁹

To this end, Schmitt refers to distinctions in Plato between πολέμιος and ἐχθρός. 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, not an Ἕλληνας. Unlike the latter, who can be either Greek or barbarian, he is private. There could be utmost enmity, but no collective is involved in fighting him.²⁰ 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: 29n).

Following this citation, it could be deduced that the publicness of the enemy points towards an understanding of combat in its existential sense. Schmitt contends that combat “is to be understood in its original existential sense . . . The friend, enemy, and combat concepts receive 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” (33).²¹ It should be stressed, however, that resorting to war is

¹⁹ One could go a step further and claim that Schmitt's intention is to emphasise the relationship inherent in the notion enemy; and indeed some scholars have done so by reading the friend/enemy differentiation as an intensely antagonistic relation. They thus hold the intensity of the relationship between friend and enemy in itself as sufficient to result in combat – the presentation of the enemy as existentially something different on a public level would thus make conflict not only possible, but a necessary condition. Retracting from this condition becomes impossible simply because there is no single individual from whom to retract. Cf. (Arditi, 1994) and (Mouffe, 2005b). This reading is unsatisfactory for the reasons given above – the political is not exhaustive and lacks substantive content. For instance, one could easily contrast the enemy notion with another: e.g. Nietzsche's view of an enemy as productive (*Twilight of the Idols*, Morality as Anti-Nature §3); or in reference to Arendt's resistance to Plato discussed in Chapters 2 and 6. Cf. also Arendt (1990b).

²⁰ Waite convincingly argues that for the Greeks πόλεμος “designated ever-welcomed (masculine) war against an external adversary”, while στάσις designated “the ever-dreaded (feminized) civil war” (Waite, 2008: 122). As Schmitt further notes after the War: “Many quote Heraclitus' sentence: war is the father of all things. But few dare to think thereby of civil insurrection” (Schmitt, 1950: 26). However, cf. Derrida (2005: 89-92) on the disputable attribution of this distinction to Plato.

²¹ There is some convergence here with Hobbes's notion of war. According to Hobbes, 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 with 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*

already an exceptional case. Precisely because the political lacks ‘substantial content’, Schmitt allows for warfare as one of the many possibilities to resolve conflicts. Put differently, while the notion of combat is to be understood in its existential sense, conflicts allow for various degrees of intensity between friend and enemy. This is to say that various domains where tensions between groupings are discernible are thereby not immediately political, and thus also immediately resort to warfare. Such a position would be dubious. Instead, Schmitt unmasks the possibility of the political turn of various domains and the illusory attempt to present these domains as free from political differentiation. Combat thus becomes a characteristic that can be found in the wide spectrum of human endeavours – it is existential in the sense that on the decisive moment of its occurrence, it leads to physical killing of the other; while at the same time it allows for other possibilities of resolving conflicts.

Presenting Schmitt’s notion of the political as purely descriptive would be misleading however, and the normative claim is unmistakably present in CP. Schmitt’s starting premise of CP is an ethical one: “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” (49). What Schmitt presents us with here is a lack of motives/reasons that drive men to war. As Schmitt is unable to find any reasons for such justification, he concludes that they must lie in the ‘logic of the political’ – namely, in the political differentiation, the antagonistic relation between friend and enemy; and only in a political sense can taking the life of the other be justified on the basis of his belonging to the enemy grouping: “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” (ibid., my emphasis). 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 precisely because of the lack of normative regulations, warfare does not need justification and functions with the singular goal of defeat of the enemy. His normative claim is thus on the possibility to mitigate the intense warfare, to restrain the singular purpose of the enemy as defeat.

2.2. Decision (and sovereignty)

It should be recalled that the political is defined by a decision. Although Schmitt does not deal with this term in detail in CP, it is still clear that it forms an integral aspect of the concept. Some contemporary scholars have even characterised Schmitt as a ‘decisionist’ (Kennedy, 2004). In order to understand Schmitt’s intentions when formulating the concept as a decision, a closer look is needed into his other works.

thereto, during all the time there is no assurance to the contrary. All other time is peace” (ibid., my emphasis). The existential concepts of friend, enemy and combat follow a similar logic – in that the intensity felt by the participants cannot be overcome through a single battle but lies in the ‘inclination’/‘disposition’ thereto. For Hobbes, this kind of enmity is the result of lack of absolute authority, which creates laws, defends, and enforces them by any means necessary. For covenants “without the sword, are but words” (111). As I will show in Chapter 6, Schmitt’s alternative differs substantially.

Primarily *Political Theology* (PT) is significant in this regard. It should be noted, however, that PT's principal aim is to elaborate on sovereignty, state of exception and law; which, though extraneous to the overall discussion, do exemplify how Schmitt understands the decision on the enemy. It is for this reason that, while the main concern in this section is to extract how the term decision relates to the friend/enemy differentiation, a closer look into Schmitt's notion of sovereignty is warranted.

In *Political Theology*, Schmitt aims to emphasise the view of contemporary sovereignty. He does so through distinguishing normality and exception, law as a norm and its suspension, and thereby also the decision that is required from the sovereign on whether this situation has arisen. Schmitt starts with an often-quoted passage: "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 (for instance, Ardit, 2008; Schwab, 2007; R. Wolin, 1990; Cristi, 1998); the sovereignty of the state does not reside in its authority, rather the state's sovereignty is temporarily revealed in the decision on the exception. Schmitt is concerned with the sovereign as a robust intervention and revision of the accepted norm and the challenge directed towards it. To be sure, normality does not have a normative connotation; it merely indicates what is currently viewed as 'normal'.²² It could be as diverse as a specific law and a systematic oppression of a minority grouping. Sovereignty thus not only reveals the sovereign in the decision on the exception, but also stipulates the necessity of the exception. The sovereign's role is, in other words, dually constituted: he decides on what the exception is, and how to aptly deal with that exception – the first being an intervention in the normal proceedings of the state, 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).²³

What is of interest here is the 'quality' of the decision that Schmitt presents. In the preface to the second edition of PT (1933), he distinguishes between a "genuine decision" and "degenerate decisionism" (3). Although there is no elaboration from Schmitt on the specificity of the two, certain aspects can be deduced from other passages. In the second essay of PT, Schmitt distinguishes "two types of juristic

²² This is of course a very contentious claim, especially with regard to Foucault's exposition of power relations in *Discipline and Punish* (1995), the central theme of which is not panopticism, but precisely "the power of normalization and the formation of knowledge in modern society" (Foucault, 1995: 308).

²³ This notion of sovereignty – the sovereign as someone who decides on the exception/emergency – is the central point of critique by Giorgio Agamben. While for Schmitt the ability to decide on emergency or normality – and by extension also whether the law still applies or must be abandoned – reveals the sovereign. Agamben on the other hand identifies the condition of state of exception as that of *homo sacer*: a figure of Roman law that is "included in the juridical order solely in the form of its exclusion" (Agamben, 1998: 8). He thus extends the condition of constant emergency to virtually all of us – "we are all virtually *homines sacri*" (115). For Agamben, in other words, the state of emergency is 'always-already' the law.

scientific thought” and relates them to the presence of “the legal decision” (33). Here, Schmitt reiterates the Hobbesian formulation that clarifies the difference between genuine and degenerate decisions: *auctoritas, non veritas facit legem*. Law itself, its content, is immaterial for the genuine decision: “What matters for the reality of legal life is who decides. Alongside the question of substantive correctness stands the question of competence” (34). The specificity of the legal jargon is pertinent: ‘substantive correctness’ specifies the content of a law – what is permitted/prohibited in specific articles, treaties, agreements, etc. Schmitt’s position is that a decision on the substantive correctness cannot be detached from the competence of the court – i.e. from the question whether the specific court has the authority and the ability to deal with the specific matter.²⁴ The correctness of a decision thus falls back to the sovereign intervention. That the content of law is immaterial to the decision leads Schmitt to conclude that the sovereign can always intervene on the law. Schmitt’s understanding of a genuine decision thus rests on whom this decision comes from – it is “the concrete decision, one that emanates from a particular authority” (ibid.).²⁵

Schmitt further emphasises that all law is “situational law” (13). The relation of the sovereign decision towards this is the stability and order of the concrete situation; he holds “the monopoly over this last decision. Therein resides the essence of the state’s sovereignty . . . not as the monopoly to coerce or to rule, but as the monopoly to decide” (ibid.).²⁶ Schmitt is of the opinion that the monopoly to decide is prior to monopoly to coerce – what reveals the sovereign is the decision whether to coerce or not. This type of decision Schmitt calls genuine; it stems from the interdependence of the concreteness of the situation, the sovereign intervention and the necessity of the decision. A genuine decision thus presents the sovereign with a situation that demands whether to preserve or suspend the current legal norms, and thus whether to declare a state of exception.²⁷

²⁴ This is indeed the question that has risen time and again at the International Court of Justice – a clear example is the ICJ case *Military and Paramilitary Activities in and against Nicaragua (Nicaragua v. United States of America)*, *Merits, Judgment*. I.C.J. Reports 1986.

²⁵ Note also that legal competence must be present prior to any notion of substantive correctness – the sovereign is necessary to enforce the very notion of law prior to its specific contents (Schmitt, 2005: 29-35). Cf. also Scheuermann (1999).

²⁶ See also CP, where Schmitt refers to challenges to the state’s monopoly on politics: “as long as the state is truly a clear and unequivocal eminent entity confronting nonpolitical groups and affairs—in other words, for as long as the state possesses the monopoly on politics.” (22).

²⁷ Cf. the early cases of the European Court of Justice (ECJ), telling of a political decision and sovereignty that Schmitt had in mind, as opposed to decisionism of the courts in general. In particular, ECJ case No. 26-62, establishing ‘direct effect’, states that in order to “ascertain whether the provisions of an international treaty extend so far in their effects it is necessary to *consider the spirit, the general scheme and the wording of those provisions*” (my emphasis). This ruling went against the objections from the member states, which thought in line with the jurisdictional limits of the Court – specifically, that the Court is supposed to interpret the law; but witnessed instead the ECJ making a decision to consider things outside the law in its judgment. The ECJ found ‘teleology’ of the Treaty to be fundamentally higher than the specific wording. It is in this instance of the ruling that the ECJ revealed the sovereign – namely itself as a singular institution to derive the scope and meaning of the Treaties as well as matters outside of the treaties. Its decision not only revealed the sovereign, but also established a new norm according to which the EU legal order is to function. Most importantly, the ECJ’s decision was a “moment . . . a pure decision not based on reason and discussion and not justifying itself, that is, to an absolute decision created out of nothingness” (Schmitt, 2005: 66). The importance of the moment that establishes the new norm and the relation of personality that determines that

How, then, are we to understand the role of decisions in relation to the concept of the political? Schmitt's conception of the political provides for two decisions to be made: first, the decision on who is the enemy; and second, whether the enemy is to be combated or not – and indeed, the second decision is determined by the first, but only as a conditional circumstance. As noted earlier, the existential character of the enemy on a public level, determines the necessity of conflict. The decision is made by the sovereign/authority and these decisions retain the sovereign characteristics: they are absolute and final; so that the *political* decisions are related to the possibility of conflicts. Schmitt's concern in CP alludes to the same when speaking of decisions. While pointing out that it "is by no means as though the political signifies nothing but devastating war and every political deed a military action", Schmitt continues to show that what makes a decision specifically political is the "ever present possibility of combat" that belongs to the decision on the enemy (2007b: 32-33).²⁸ That is to say, that despite the fact that war "has its own strategic, tactical, and other rules and points of view . . . they all presuppose that the political decision has already been made as to who the enemy is" (34). Schmitt emphasises von Clausewitz's view that war is an instrument of politics – that they are interconnected; or more forcefully that politics without political differentiation loses its own significance, just as war without being part of the political domain is meaningless: "War has its own grammar (i.e., special military-technical laws), but politics remains its brain. It does not have its own logic" (34n).

Furthermore, because, as argued above, there is no extra-political justification for war – that is, because war is accepted only on political grounds – there must be a specific decision to declare war. Lack of moral, rational, economically expedient, etc. reasons, presents wars to be justified only in their political sense – the political grouping along friend/enemy differentiation, together with the decision of the sovereign to determine who the enemy is and whether he is to be combated, is the only justification for wars. Schmitt is unclear how the decision is made, or on what grounds certain situations may lead to wars and others not. However, Schmitt is equally unconcerned with these questions. His interest instead is in the present world order in which "nations continue to group themselves according to the friend and enemy antithesis, that the distinction still remains actual *today*" (28).²⁹ To be sure, Schmitt's emphasis on the actuality of the friend/enemy groupings emerges from his extrapolation of the political to historical events. Such extrapolation is what makes Strauss conclude that for Schmitt "politics . . . is destiny . . . man cannot escape politics" (Strauss, 2007: 110). The

moment – rather than reason or discussion – are also to be deduced in other passages. For instance: "the circumstance that requires a decision remains an independently determining moment" (Schmitt, 2005: 30); and a little further: "The legal interest in the decision . . . is rooted in the character of the normative and is derived from the necessity of judging a concrete fact concretely even though what is given as a standard for the judgment is only a legal principle in its general universality. Thus a transformation takes place every time. That the legal idea cannot translate itself independently is evident from the fact that it says nothing about who should apply it. In every transformation there is present an *auctoritatis interposition*" (31). I will return to Schmitt's conception of sovereignty again in Chapter 4.

²⁸ As will be shown in Chapter 6, what is at stake is the level of intensity between the opposing groups. Schmitt thus leaves the decision on the form of combat, which could range from exceptional legal measures to open warfare, to the sovereign.

²⁹ See similar remarks on pp. 35-37, e.g. "war is still *today* most extreme possibility".

decision on the enemy, in other words, still today remains within the domain of actuality; the normativity of the political remains of acute importance.

3. The state and the political

Schmitt's concern throughout his oeuvre seems to involve the question of the state: its function as an entity ensuring peace and order on the one hand, and as the final arbiter on the decision against an enemy on the other. As briefly mentioned in the previous section, Schmitt's ideal is the state as the sovereign that makes a decision on the exception. The treatise starts with a general statement that "the concept of the state presupposes the concept of the political" (Schmitt, 2007b: 19). Schmitt leaves open what a state is and gives us only a general statement that "in its literal sense and in its historical appearance the state is a specific entity of a people" (ibid.). Nevertheless, if one is to interrogate the "indivisible link" (Schwab, 2007: 6, 12) between state and politics, one has to take recourse to what a state would be in Schmitt's view and what its relation is to the political. Schmitt associates the state with early modernity and the rise of absolute monarchies. He is thus not concerned with ancient city-states or medieval feudal states, but rather with the Hobbesian idea of the state as a sovereign entity: "[The state] is in the decisive case the ultimate authority" (Schmitt, 2007b: 20).³⁰

When dealing with Schmitt's understanding of what constitutes a state, we are led back to the concept of the political. Schmitt states that "this image of entity and people receive their meaning from the further distinctive trait of the political" (ibid.). Schmitt is aware that the concept of the political has to *presuppose* the concept of the state; or in Strauss's words, "the political precedes the state" (Strauss, 2007: 99).³¹ In Schmitt's contemporary literature, however, this presupposition is characterised as identification of one with the other, or "the political as something pertaining to the state—obviously an unsatisfactory circle" (Schmitt, 2007b: 20). Furthermore, the relation between the state and the political were already present prior to Schmitt's analysis, specifically in law. These definitions, Schmitt claims, would suffice "for as long as the state and the public institutions can be assumed as something self-evident and concrete" (22). The general (legal) definitions of the political were sufficient also "as long as the state is truly a clear and unequivocal eminent entity confronting non-

³⁰ Schmitt uses the expression 'absolute state', not 'absolute monarchies. More importantly, Schmitt's view of the state follows the Machiavellian/Hobbesian understanding of the state – the very presupposition of the state is specific to Machiavelli's terminology *stato*, i.e. permanence. The latter's interest was precisely in the identification of the state with its political unit – as a people that would be able to withstand all the turmoil that Italy was undergoing at the time. It is in this moment that the nation-state can be understood as a unit that is able to withstand the endless changes of government (authority) without crumbling; and indeed that Schmitt can still write about 'Volk' pre- and post-1933 without any conceptual difficulties. The permanence of the state is to be juxtaposed to the permanence of the authority – hence also Louis XIV's 'I will perish, but the state will stay'; instead of the often wrongly attributed citation 'I am the state'. One can clearly observe the difference between authority and sovereignty – an especially noteworthy distinction in Hobbes's *Leviathan*. Schmitt's reliance on Hobbes is aimed to point towards the same direction – the sovereign, unlike authority, is identical to the people and does not stand above them. I will return to this issue in Chapter 4.

³¹ It should be noted that this exact phrasing cannot be found in Schmitt's work, and it is likely that Strauss is paraphrasing.

political groups and affairs—in other words, for *as long as the state possesses the monopoly on politics*” (ibid., my emphasis). That is, for as long as the state does not recognise societal interests as force – these are antithetical to the state interest; or if it does recognise these, the state stands above them as a stable and distinct force. The state is then divided according to the political differentiation, because the friend/enemy differentiation is present within it in a transformed way, namely as state—society:

The equation state = politics becomes erroneous and deceptive at exactly the moment when state and society penetrate each other. What had been up to that point affairs of state become thereby social matters, and, vice versa, what had been purely social matters become affairs of state—as must necessarily occur in a democratically organized unit (ibid.).

Accordingly, because the monopoly on politics had been lost, the democratic unit could no longer be identified with the sovereign decision. The relation between friend and enemy was thus recreated in the social body through diverse interests – i.e. because societal interests encompass a variety of positions, political differentiation within the state becomes possible.

That is to say, the problem Schmitt identifies in his contemporary literature is that the state was no longer understood as a concrete institution. He thus aims to characterise the political on its own terms – as a distinct domain. His main concern is the monopoly on what constitutes politics and the political differentiation that is at stake. Once the state embraces all domains to be potentially political, the equation shifts from state = politics to state = society. Schmitt states that “in such a state [where] everything is at least potentially political . . . it is no longer possible to assert for it a specifically political characteristic” (ibid.).³² Because the distinction between society and state become blurred, social concerns will be able to create new forms of political differentiation no longer mediated by the state. The normative worry that Schmitt holds is the immanent possibility of a ‘total state’, one that encompassing all aspects of social life. Referring to Hegel, Schmitt qualifies the difference with his own view of a ‘universal state’:

the state is qualitatively distinct from society and higher than it. A state standing above society could be called universal but not total . . . as the polemical negation of the neutral state, whose economy and law were in themselves nonpolitical . . . the development of German political science . . . follows the historical development toward the democratic identity of state and society (Schmitt, 2007b: 24).³³

A universal state is thus one seeing itself as ‘qualitatively distinct from society’. It stands above the society, and it should not be affected by societal interests. It is different from a total (or totalitarian) state in that it does not subsume the daily matters of life – i.e. society – as part of its controlling function. Schmitt’s worry is in the identification of societal interests with political matters – i.e. political differentiation

³² An analogy could be drawn here with Hannah Arendt’s definition of the social, its rise in the 19th century, and its relation to affairs in the public sphere. The main difference between Schmitt and Arendt is that for the former the social occupies the political domain and creates unwarranted political differentiations; whereas for the latter the social replaces the political domain without itself being transformed into politics. Arendt’s concern, in other words, is less with the state and more with political action – the public sphere of action is being subsumed by private apolitical concerns (Arendt, 1998: 38-78; cf. also Oakeshott, 1991).

³³ Cf. Chapter 4 on Schmitt’s views of democracy as opposed to democratic identity.

being consumed by other domains, whereby conflicts arising from these differentiations are more intense as they are no longer mediated through politics alone.³⁴ His concern is precisely that the monopoly on politics would be lost if all domains pertaining to human endeavour are politicised. Schmitt's mistrust of society therefore implicitly clarifies the relation between the state and the political. As he states, "the state as an organized political entity decides for itself the friend-enemy distinction" (pp. 29-30). His concern is with the state as the final arbiter in all matters relating to political differentiation, and thus the will to reduce the effect that society has on political differentiation.

Nevertheless, entrusting the state with specific functions concerning the political is at its least obscure. If the political is ubiquitous, as Schmitt notes in later chapters of CP (most belligerently in Chapter 6), other domains pertaining to state interest (economics, morality, etc.) would not be less political under the equation 'state = politics' than they would be under the equation 'state = society'. That is to say, specific domains do not become less political by the virtue of all domains being political. Quite the contrary, specific domains get their political character in relation to other domains. After all, Schmitt makes clear that the political domain resorts to other domains for support in the differentiation between friend and enemy – the political gets its distinctions from other domains. Broader politicisation would thus be supportive of the political differentiation – the transformation from state to society may present new political platforms, with additional domains from which differentiation may be drawn for the purpose of the political.³⁵

4. Schmitt's philosophical challenge

Schmitt encounters a substantial philosophical challenge: how to ensure an ontological definition, while maintaining a historical perspective? Where Leo Strauss thought that the political "cannot be meant to express an eternal truth, but only a present truth" (Strauss, 2007: 99) – that is, a specifically historical understanding – Schmitt's view of the political was fundamentally more complex. The shift in equation (state = politics/society) is not only in the sense that there is a change from our previous understanding of the political and the contemporary one. It would be a

³⁴ And this is indeed what contemporary interpreters of Schmitt have recognised. Cf. in particular Slavoj Žižek: "the way the 'militaristic' intervention (in the social struggle) is presented as help to the victims of (ethnic, etc.) hatred and violence, justified directly in depoliticized universal human rights" (Žižek, 2008: 57); and "not a political subject with a clear agenda, but a subject of helpless suffering . . . A subject whose innermost desire is reduced to the almost animal craving to 'feel good again,' . . . beneath this depoliticized, let's-just-protect-human-rights rhetoric, there is an extremely violent gesture of reducing the other to the helpless victim" (Žižek, 1999). Cf. also Mouffe (2007) on politicisation of non-political issues such as art.

³⁵ A clear example of this would be the societal pressure on a traditionally non-political domain – e.g. environmental issues or animal rights, domains of their own differentiation on which the political may rely 'for support', and indeed have become highly political and even militant. In other sections of CP, it becomes clear that indeed all domains hold the potential to be political. It is only in this particular section that Schmitt is troubled by the transformation. The reason for this, it seems, is how Schmitt understands the state, rather than the political. At this point, it suffices to emphasise Schmitt's view that the historical transformation towards state = society would jeopardise the normative equation state = politics. This normative claim is addressed in Chapter 6.

mistake to think that Schmitt longed for the restoration of the modern nation-states of the 16th-17th centuries. More profoundly, Schmitt struggles with presenting the political as a differentiation that can justify conflicts, or at least account for them; while at the same time, presenting political differentiation as historically concrete.

Schmitt's position relates to the traditional debate in philosophy on the theory and practice of an idea – where Schmitt's view is that the theoretical/formal conception sufficiently captures the practical/particular dynamics of historically concrete events. Schmitt's concept of the political is thus meant to capture particular conflicts and emphasise their existentiality and concreteness. Put differently, the concept of the political is used by Schmitt to undermine the liberal claim that political differentiation can be wholly overcome. However, its occurrence under liberalism is only masked by other domains (in particular, the domain of morality) – the result of which is a more intense encounter between the groups.³⁶

In this light, commentators on Schmitt have aligned themselves according to the following two opposing views: 'ontology' readers, and 'contingency' readers. First, the main bulk of the academic tradition has hitherto posited that Schmitt indeed proposes a distinction – 'the political/politics distinction' – according to which the political pertains to human ontology. The political is thus viewed as a domain distinct from politics – it is permanent and dictates the immanent possibility of conflict. Politics, by contrast, is understood as a contemporary manifestation of the political – an institutionalised measure to counter this immanent possibility of conflict.³⁷ The position defended in this thesis deviates considerably and follows the early commentators such as Leo Strauss, who emphasised the contingent character of Schmitt's concept. That is to say, while the concept of the political is ubiquitous, it is filled by historically varied content. In Strauss's own words, the political "can manifest the desire to express not an eternal truth but only a present truth" (Strauss, 2007: 99). The references to historical cases in Schmitt's treatise are aimed at identifying the political in them without imposing any pervasive substantial content.³⁸ This final section aims to interpret Schmitt's otherwise seemingly contradictory statements regarding the permanence of the political and its historicity.

In general terms, social theories necessarily hold certain presuppositions about the nature of the world we inhabit – there is always an assumption that the world functions in a particular way from which the theory derives its meaning, or aims to corroborate its validity. In Schmitt's case, the assumption is that historically conflicts have occurred and that conflicts cannot fail to occur. The question that Schmitt asks himself, however, is not why conflicts occur as such. There are numerous possible answers from various domains, which are not necessarily political. Instead, the question Schmitt asks himself is a normative one concerning the willingness and

³⁶ I return to this issue in Chapters 4 and 6.

³⁷ Cf. among others, Arditi (2008), Bendersky (1983), Cristi (1998), Habermas (1989b), Kennedy (2004), Marchart (2007), McCormick (1999), Meier (2006), Mouffe (2000) and (2005b), Müller (2003), Rae (2013), Rasch (2004), Scheuermann (1999), Schwab (1970).

³⁸ Among others, the "fanatical hatred of Napoleon felt by the German barons Stein and Kleist . . . Lenin's annihilating sentences against bourgeois and western capitalism [and] Cromwell's enmity towards papist Spain" (Schmitt, 2007b: 67).

demand to sacrifice one's life. While I claim that there is no substantial content of the political, it is nevertheless clear that Schmitt initiates his study on the grounds of war.

Nevertheless, the friend/enemy differentiation is intended to pertain to all political matters. Both sacrificing one's life and inherent antagonisms may thus be possible in the analysis of a conflict. The confusion surrounding Schmitt is precisely on the intent of developing a definition demarcating political differentiation. Largely, Schmitt's use of historical events is the source of this confusion, as they aim to corroborate the accuracy of the definition. He is, in other words, not concerned with an abstract intellectual endeavour; rather, his analysis is aimed at guiding judgement on concrete historical determinations – he is not developing an abstract theory of the political, but a concrete study of what constitutes political events. The problem for Schmitt, and the resulting impression of inconsistency, is in his equal insistence that all political events are tied to their own contextual premises, which makes an analysis of each event unique.³⁹ Tying a particular concept to political events thus undermines either the accuracy of the definition – its ubiquity – or the uniqueness of the event.

Despite Schmitt's insistence on the ubiquitous presence of the political, his emphasis on the actuality is more convincing, and this for two reasons.⁴⁰ First, Schmitt's interest is in the justification of conflicts – and this interest explicitly pertains to international law, or *jus publicum europaeum*; Schmitt is concerned with the possibilities of restricting the intensity of conflicts following the First World War. Unlike his followers, his concerns over politics are never fully detached from ethics; he is equally concerned with the worth of a human life as with its political constitution. Additionally, his concerns over the ethics of warfare are quite explicit: “To the extent that wars today have decreased in number and frequency, they have proportionately increased in ferocity” (Schmitt 2007a, p. 35). It is Schmitt's view that liberal ‘politics’ necessitates an outcome of wars for other reasons – moral, etc. – than political ones, and thereby makes them particularly intense.⁴¹ The demand for human sacrifice thus becomes the focal point of his treatise; and this point can only be approached by recognising the actuality, as opposed to ubiquity, of the political.

Second, Schmitt's depiction of historical events follows an hermeneutic approach. He often stresses such notions as ‘actual’ and ‘real’, ‘today’ and ‘nowadays’.⁴² The implication is indeed that other forms of collective organisation are possible, and

³⁹ Schwab agrees that Schmitt found historical events to be unique, but concludes that this is the reason why “Schmitt found it impossible to provide an exhaustive or even a general definition of politics, one that would always hold true” (Schwab, 2007: 7). Although I agree with Schwab on the first point, it is my view that Schmitt does provide a general, though not exhaustive, definition – namely, the friend-enemy grouping.

⁴⁰ Additionally, some of the examples used by Schmitt can be seen as apolitical. Baron vom Stein's actions, it could be argued, were based on personal hatred of Napoleon, rather than group enmity; and although he did wish for a form of national uprising against Napoleon, this can hardly be seen as a political differentiation that Schmitt has in mind. What this example illustrates better than the permanence of the political, is indeed the historical contingency of the political – after all, vom Stein was not revealed as a sovereign to make the decision on the enemy; quite the contrary, he was exiled by the sovereign.

⁴¹ I return to this issue in Chapter 6.

⁴² Perhaps it should be noted that this type of phrasing is to be primarily found in roughly the first half of the treatise – especially between pages 28 and 37. After this point, Schmitt reiterates the ontological argument more forcefully and relates to examples in other authors or historical processes.

Schmitt even mentions a possibility of a world without the friend/enemy differentiation:

A world in which the possibility of war is utterly eliminated, a completely pacified globe, would be a world without the distinction of friend and enemy and hence a world without politics. It is conceivable that such a world might contain many very interesting antitheses and contrasts, competitions and intrigues of every kind, but there would not be a meaningful antithesis whereby men could be required to sacrifice life, authorized to shed blood, and kill other human beings (Schmitt, 2007b: 35).⁴³

Schmitt is quick to add that if we want to consider the political, questions about the relevance of such ‘a world without politics’ are immaterial; and instead he reiterates that the “phenomenon of the political can be understood only in the context of the ever present possibility of the friend-and-enemy grouping” (ibid.). This retreat into ubiquity of the concept, however, is meant exactly in its emphasis on the present – the present world is one with politics, and an enquiry into the possibilities of a different world are not Schmitt’s concern.

It is equally important to note here that directly after this citation, Schmitt questions his own position on the ubiquity of the political: “The sole remaining question then is always whether such a friend-and-enemy grouping is really at hand” (36). To be clear, Schmitt wonders about the relevance of the political in wars that are fought for supposedly other reasons – “purely religious, purely moral, purely juristic, or purely economic motives” – but comes to the conclusion that they all retain “the decisive friend-or-enemy constellation” (ibid.). Unfortunately, he does not give a final answer to this important question anywhere in the treatise. The question whether ‘a friend-and-enemy grouping is really at hand’ presupposes its ubiquity (at least in other events); yet, the possibility of ‘a world without politics’ remains integral to human endeavour.⁴⁴ And even if not, it is at its least possible that conflicts are not a result of an intensity of a relation between friend and enemy groupings.

There is an additional point to emphasise: the historically laden concept of the political. Schmitt’s treatise is intended to overcome a specific situation that he finds himself in – the liberal state. He starts his treatise by first acknowledging a variety of different concepts that stand opposed to his, by acknowledging the changes over the meaning and function of the state and its relation to the political in the last four hundred years, the changes in the role of sovereignty and authority, the social changes following the 1848 ‘revolutions’, and not least of all, the terminological changes and etymology of the original meanings of certain concepts – all of these cannot sustain a particular reading of the concept of the political, but rather demonstrate the fluidity of the concept.

⁴³ A similar view is expressed later in the treatise: “If the different states, religions, classes, and other human groupings on earth should be so unified that a conflict among them is impossible and even inconceivable and if civil war should forever be foreclosed in a realm which embraces the globe, then the distinction of friend and enemy would also cease” (Schmitt, 2007b: 53).

⁴⁴ A similar argument is made by Strauss: “though the abolition of the political may in no way have succeeded *so far*, is not this abolition nevertheless possible in the future? is [sic.] it not possible at all? Schmitt gives the following answer to this question: the political is a basic characteristic of human life; politics in this sense is destiny; therefore man cannot escape politics” (Strauss, 2007: 110). It should be clear that I disagree that Schmitt indeed says politics cannot be escaped as the citation above indicates.

5. Conclusion

I started this chapter by giving a general definition of the political: ‘the political is a decision on the distinction between friend and enemy, which has a potential of erupting into conflict, and whose content only the participants can correctly recognise’. Though Schmitt states that this definition is not exhaustive, he only deals with the concept in this sense and even effectively abandons other possible definitions. In the first section of this chapter, I have primarily presented Schmitt’s view and stressed the importance of the concept in contemporary political theory. Theories of radical democracy heavily borrow from Schmitt’s definition, and although not always in full agreement, they discern the central characteristic of conflict through differentiation.

In the second section, I have elaborated on the specific use of the terms friend, enemy and combat. I have noted that Schmitt wanted to emphasise the original meaning of the terms in order to stress the actuality of the distinction and the necessarily belonging condition of conflict. In doing so, I have primarily paid attention to the use of the term ‘existential’. The existential presence of the enemy is what leads Schmitt to discern the concept of the political from various historical events and to the theoretical foundation of his treatise. The existential presence also leads Schmitt to emphasise the decision on the enemy to be constitutive of the concept of the political. Although Schmitt did not deal with decision in CP, the nature of a decision can be discerned from his other works. Schmitt’s interest lies in what he called genuine decisions as opposed to decisionism. He thought that genuine decisions stem from the sovereign, whose existence is ephemeral and can be understood only in those decisions. Furthermore, the decision of the sovereign is on the exception to the norm. As the often quoted citation states: “Sovereign is he who decides on the exception”.

In the third section, I have shown the role the state plays in Schmitt’s work and the historical changes that affected his ideal. The connection between the state and the political lies in Schmitt’s conviction that the state should have the monopoly on politics. Yet, the social changes during the past four hundred years have brought a new type of entity – i.e. society – to invade what was prior to that the domain of the state. Schmitt laments the loss of sovereignty – sovereignty in its original sense as absolute and final. However, as I have tried to show, these changes need not affect the concept of the political as such. They can equally be seen as new domains from which the political can draw its distinctions.

In the last section, I have explored the confusion that leads to reading Schmitt as presenting the political as an ontology, or relating to our ontological make-up. I have argued that on numerous occasions Schmitt presents the evolution of the political category. For example, he states that political differentiation is possible due to support it draws from other domains, which in themselves, as Schmitt recognised, are contingent on historical processes. In resolving this seemingly contradictory position, I have shown that the motivation for an ontological characterization of the political stems from viewing Schmitt’s work as an abstract intellectual endeavour – instead, I contend that his work aims to provide the categories of a formal notion and applies to

concrete historical events. Schmitt's insistence on the actuality of political events may present a better understanding of the concept and more informed theories.

Having clarified Schmitt's conception of the political, the following two chapters draw parallels with Hannah Arendt, who offers an alternative view of the political, and with Chantal Mouffe, who accepts Schmitt's concept as an 'ontological condition'. These chapters set the groundwork for the subsequent discussions on the relation between the political and associations (Chapter 4 and 5), and the relation with the notion of humanity (Chapter 6).

One should not act or speak as if he were asleep.

– Heraclitus, fragment 73.

Chapter 2, Arendt's conception of politics

Introduction

As is well known among Arendt scholars, Arendt refused to be called a philosopher. In an interview *Zur Person* she protests being classified as such: “My profession . . . is political theory. I neither feel like a philosopher, nor do I believe that I have been accepted in the circle of philosophers” (Arendt, 1994: 1).⁴⁵ For her the philosopher was necessarily detached from the world, engaged with “truths beyond speech, [which] may be of great relevance to man in the singular, that is, to man in so far as he is not a political being” (Arendt, 1998: 4; cf. also Cassin, 1990: 28-29). It is nevertheless abundantly clear to her that “men, not Man, live on the earth and inhabit the world” (Arendt, 1998: 7). In this regard, an enquiry into Arendt's thought in relation to what constitutes ‘the political’ should first acknowledge which field she is concerned with. The difference between political theory and political philosophy is that the former is a realm of action (*Handeln*), whereas the latter is the realm of thinking.⁴⁶

The strictness of the distinction that Arendt wants to show is certainly somewhat oblique, and there certainly is a tension between the two trends in contemporary political thought. Arendt's purpose is to leave behind the tradition of political philosophy as initiated by Plato – a tradition that prioritises reflection and prescription, instead of embracing political action. To create certain classifications and characteristics, or divide politics under certain categories, is to miss what politics *is* – namely, that reflection is to be grounded in practice. For Arendt, politics is a distinct domain of unpredictability and newness; her aim is to revitalise specifically political action – “the only activity that goes on directly between men without the intermediary of things or matter” (ibid.). For even within the boundaries of political philosophy, there is always interference from politics in philosophy. Arendt maintains that there can be no pretence to objectivity in an analysis of politics – as, say, there would be in the analysis of natural philosophy/physics; politics could not be explained through philosophical thinking *alone*, without recourse to humans as political beings – that is, without a recourse to plurality of men. She thus states: “I have said good-bye to philosophy once and for all. As you know, I studied philosophy, but that does not mean that I stayed with it.” Her aim, she claims, is “to look at politics . . . with eyes unclouded by philosophy” (1994: 2).

⁴⁵ The interview has been reprinted in Arendt (1994), *What Remains? The Language Remains': A conversation with Günter Gaus*. The references and translation are from that edition.

⁴⁶ She also differentiates the two more generally as *vita activa* and *vita contemplativa*.

Arendt refers to this move from politics to political philosophy as an “escape” (1998: 222). The theme of escaping one’s condition frequently recurs in Arendt’s work. *The Human Condition* starts with this theme by an example of the contemporary events:

“In 1957, an earth-born object made by man was launched into the universe . . . The immediate reaction, expressed on the spur of the moment, was relief about the first ‘step toward escape from men’s imprisonment to the earth.’ . . . ‘Mankind will not remain bound to the earth forever’” (1).

Arendt also refers to this sense of escape in her analysis of the ancient Greek polis (13). The household was a harsh and brutal private space of necessity; whereas the public space was one of political life – of action in the company of equals. It should come as no surprise that in such a realisation or belief, escape from necessity of the private sphere formed the basis of freedom in the public one. A similar analogy is presented by Arendt in her analysis of Hobbes: “men could escape only by establishing a government that, through a monopoly of power and of violence, would abolish the ‘war of all against all’ by ‘keeping them all in awe’” – that is, by establishing an entity which intermediates and thereby diminishes the intersubjectivity of politics (32). Most important for the considerations on the concept of the political is her view of philosophy in general:

Escape from the frailty of human affairs into the solidity of quiet and order has in fact so much to recommend it that the greater part of political philosophy since Plato could easily be interpreted as various attempts to find theoretical foundations and practical ways for *an escape from politics altogether* (222, my emphasis).

It is in this movement of escape from politics that Arendt’s main contentions against political philosophy become clear.⁴⁷ For her, political philosophy has grappled with the wrong question of political and social order. What political philosophers since Plato all have in common is a prescriptive inclination towards the creation of systems designed to guarantee order. Not surprisingly, for Arendt, this guarantee has always failed; and it has done so precisely because it has missed the essence of politics as an affair of men in the plural. What political philosophers have in common is the concept of rule, “the notion that men can lawfully and politically live together only when some are entitled to command and the others forced to obey” (ibid.). The suspicions towards action as that which creates newness, and in effect is unpredictable to a greater degree, and sometimes with catastrophic results, is misrecognition of ‘true’ politics. Arendt thus claims that politics cannot be bypassed by ‘escaping’ into various rules and regulations – into command-and-obey systems; pluralistic action will always remain as the characteristic of politics. In this light, and more forcefully, she views politics

⁴⁷ It should be noted that in the preface to the collection of essay in *Between Past and Future*, Arendt’s notion of escape is given a sense of endless circularity. Describing a hypothetical 20th century person’s mind, she states: “to turn full circle not once but twice, first when he escaped from thought into action, and then again when action, or rather having acted, forced him back into thought” (Arendt, 1961: 9). Her position is thus, to a degree, ambiguous: political thought remains a necessary component of political action; though both cannot exist simultaneously, their co-existence is characteristic of political change. Thus also, Marx’s last thesis on Feuerbach – “The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it” – can be understood as only one part of the whole process; keeping with the ‘endless circularity’, no change of the world can be initiated without the interpretation of that world.

as synonymous with action – as a particular aspect of human existence linked to freedom.⁴⁸

This chapter aims to clarify Arendt's view of action while situating it in the foregoing discussion on the political. As will be shown below, it is certainly the case that Arendt held a notion of the political as an autonomous domain. The aim of this chapter is to indicate what Arendt's conception of the political is and to what extent it deviates from Schmitt's conception discussed in Chapter 1. Thus, after a brief overview of Arendt's phenomenology in Section 1, this chapter primarily focuses on Arendt's theory of action in Section 2. The aim is to clarify the categories that Arendt employs in her analysis of action that are pertinent to the political, but also to study the influence Arendt's categories have on the political domain. The claim put forward, in Section 3, is that Arendt's theory of action unduly ignores the effects of political action, and if those effects are to be taken into account, her conception of the political does not deviate significantly from that of Schmitt.

1. Arendt's phenomenology of human activity

In order to elucidate what action is, Arendt resorts to a number of distinctions. Human activity, as Arendt perceives it, is fundamentally threefold⁴⁹ – these are labour, work and action. Each of these three aspects of *vita activa* relates to a corresponding condition, respectively: life, worldliness, and plurality. Arendt ascribes an equal importance to each activity; she observes an interplay between the three 'distinct' activities and implies that quite often some activities can be both simultaneously.

Labour is an activity in relation to toil; it has "an unequivocal connotation of pain and trouble" (Arendt, 1998: 80). Relying on the Greeks, Arendt understands labour to be an activity that arises out of necessity. She sees a necessity of labour – and thus also of slavery – in Ancient Greece as a means to unburden oneself from the slavish nature of all occupations whose sole purpose was maintenance of life.⁵⁰ To be sure, Arendt

⁴⁸ I will return to this point briefly.

⁴⁹ "They are fundamental because each corresponds to one of the basic conditions under which life on earth has been given to man" (Arendt, 1998: 7).

⁵⁰ The common attack on Arendt's analysis as an over-romantic depiction of Ancient Greece is of little importance for my considerations. It is certainly possible that Arendt aimed to restore something lost in the "prephilosophical traditions" of antiquity; including the by today's norms contemptible slavery and racism associated with antiquity (Arendt, 1961: 165-171). It is equally possible that, as Villa notes, "Arendt is hardly expressing approval for the way the Greeks structured their private realm. Rather, she is underlining the difference between the political sphere . . . and the economic or household realm" (Villa, 2000: 10). And yet, underlining this difference is not a sufficient justification, for even if Arendt does not advocate slavery, the implication of a labouring substratum to cater for the political elite remains intact within her view of politics (Arendt, 1990a: 279-280). Even the more sympathetic readers of Arendt struggle with her 'Hellenism'. As Euben notes, for instance, "I want to rescue Arendt from her Hellenism . . . Arendt certainly got important things 'wrong' about 'the Greeks' and 'the Athenians'" (Euben, 2000: 152). At best, Arendt is indifferent to this problem because it is a social problem, and not a *political* one. My concern with Arendt is not with what she got 'right' or 'wrong' about 'the Greeks' and 'the Athenians' – rather, I am interested specifically in her conception of the political, and not the historical accuracy of her views. For a general overview, cf. Villa (2000: 151-198); for a related discussion, cf. Pitkin (1981) and Vollrath (1977); For the notion 'prephilosophical', cf. Arendt (1978: 129-141).

does stress the “prejudice of the modern historians” that labour was despised in antiquity and that only slaves were engaged in it (83). To labour “meant to be enslaved by necessity, and this enslavement was inherent in the conditions of human life” (83-84). Labour is furthermore a consumable, unending process. The products of labour are not lasting and as such need to be remade/redone continuously, leading to a sense of meaninglessness and futility of this activity – hence, the pain and trouble and the resulting ‘enslavement by necessity’. Labour, thus, corresponds to the human condition of “life itself” (7).

Work is an artificial creation of ‘things’ in the world, which are directly distinct from nature. In a sense, work is a creation of an artificial world within the natural world; it is a creation of material artefacts, which leave an imprint upon the natural world. The variety of material artefacts that humankind has been able to make is the starting point of Arendt’s depiction of a worker as *homo faber*, in opposition to a labourer as *animal laborans*. Unlike labour, however, artefacts produced by work are lasting to a certain degree – they are ‘used’ over time. This “durability” gives the ‘things’ of the world their “relative independence from men who produce and use them, their ‘objectivity’” (137). By objectivity Arendt means a “function of stabilising human life”, in the fact that men “can retrieve their sameness, that is, their identity, by being related to” a worldly object (ibid.). More explicitly, “against the subjectivity of men stands the objectivity of the man-made world” (ibid.). Unlike labour, work does not arise from the immediate biological needs. Nevertheless, work too is an endless process, as fabrication of goods continues once the durability of those goods ‘expires’. Accordingly, work corresponds to the human condition of “worldliness”, or being immersed in a material world.

Action, in contrast to labour and work, is the only activity that does not directly produce ‘things’ but is interpersonal. It is manifested through speech in which individuals, based on the recognition of each other’s equal status, interact and present themselves. For Arendt, action is the fundamental expression of politics – that is, the foremost condition for any possibility of political life. One could add, though Arendt does not do so directly, that action is also the condition for the possibility of a conception of ‘the political’.⁵¹ Precisely because it is the condition for politics, literally silencing a group or an individual is a relapse towards a pre-political order – “violence begins where speech ends” (1994: 308). Without speech there is no action because there is no longer an actor, as any action one begins “is humanly disclosed by the word” (1998: 179).

Furthermore, unlike labour and work, action is not repetitive or predictable – action implies novelty, which is guaranteed by the mere fact of our birth or “natality”; for “each man is unique, so that with each birth something uniquely new comes into the world” (178). Unlike the previous two conditions, action is not a process, but a momentous and disruptive eruption, interfering with other activities and establishing

⁵¹ This claim is in particular brought forward by Ernst Vollrath: “political philosophy is not, or rather not immediately, concerned with ‘politics,’ but with the ‘political’”. It is the task of political philosophy to elaborate theoretically *the authentic characteristics of the political modality*, to form a concept of the political” (Vollrath, 1987: 27, my emphasis). Arendt’s oeuvre, as will be shown throughout the thesis, deals specifically with the loss of this authentic experience.

a new ‘state of affairs’.⁵² Here too Arendt resorts to the Ancient Greeks and their views of a meaningful life. Freed from necessity, men were able to move freely within the polis in order to distinguish themselves, “to show in deed and word who [they were] in [their] unique distinctness” (197). The polis was where one’s deeds were seen and words heard, it would be a place where a chance existed that they would not be forgotten, that they would become “immortal”. With this reliance on novelty – ‘bringing something new into the world’ – Arendt’s depiction of action portrays what she qualifies as a specifically *political* community.

Maintaining the threefold distinction in *vita activa* would result in distinct ‘spaces’ where these activities would take place. The first two activities – labour and work – belong to the private realm. The private is dark and invisible to others. It marks a distinct, restrictive, clearly demarcated space ‘to be hidden’ and presupposes a certain feeling of “shame” (73). As such, the Greeks withheld their private household for primarily such activities, proverbially announcing ‘that which belongs at home, does not belong in public’. Here, too, belong “emotions and private feelings” (50). The private realm is a realm where plurality is not pertinent to interactions between its members.

Unlike the private, the public realm of action is intended to be fully visible to others. As action is directly interpersonal, the public realm distinguishes itself from the private by not having a fixed space.⁵³ Instead it is based on the presence of others and otherness.⁵⁴ Plurality has a “twofold character of equality and distinction” (175). On the one hand, man is to recognise the others as equals in order to act with them. Without equality, they would not be able to “understand each other” or their past, neither to foresee their future needs nor the needs of the future generations. On the other hand, without being distinct there would be no need to make oneself understood in the first place. It is through speech and action that men distinguish themselves instead of being simply distinct. While one can completely avoid labour and work – by enslaving another or by using things – “life without speech and action . . . is literally dead to the world; it has ceased to be a human life because it is no longer lived among men” (176). It is, in other words, only through action that the identity of individual men can be disclosed to their equals.

⁵² State of affairs is used by Arendt in a technical sense; however, given that Arendt wrote in English, the precise meaning of her account of state of affairs is difficult to discern. I take her to refer to a Heideggerian distinction between *Sachverhalt* and *Tatsache* – where the latter is meant as a fact, the former is subject to scrutiny and discussion. *Sachverhalt* thus takes the *Tatsache* into account, yet does not ascribe a permanence to them. In this regard, state of affairs also relates to Arendt’s conception of history as event, which will be discussed below. Cf. also Vasterling (2011: 141-142) and Nietzsche (2006), §7[60].

⁵³ There are nevertheless specific spaces built for the purpose of public discourse. I will return to the possible inconsistency of this later in this chapter and in Chapter 5.

⁵⁴ Arendt distinguishes the term ‘distinctness’ from otherness – “Otherness in its most abstract form is found only in the sheer multiplication of inorganic objects, whereas all organic life already shows variations and distinctions” (Arendt, 1998: 176).

2.1 Arendt's theory of action – power and violence

Among many notions Arendt uses, that of freedom poses the greatest challenge to our intuitive application of it in political theory. Contemporary literature, inspired by the dominant Anglo-American liberal ideology, generally takes freedom in a minimal sense resorting to freedom of choice and free will – that is, freedom receives a connotation primarily in possibilities to choose between various alternatives; or a freedom from various forms of oppression – as guaranteed in most liberal states by promoting freedom of speech, religion, press, etc. Arendt contends that our understanding of freedom originates “in the horizon of Christian” and in the “originally anti-political philosophic” traditions (1961: 165). It is for this reason that “we find it difficult to realize that there may exist a freedom which is not an attribute of the will but an accessory of doing and acting” (ibid.). Arendt's conception of freedom is not only different from those of contemporary theorists; it also informs her understanding of politics as an act that is only possible through freedom. She thus posits an important distinction between her view of freedom and our more familiar liberal view: “the freedom to call something into being which did not exist before, which was not given, not even as an object of cognition or imagination, and which therefore, strictly speaking, could not be known” (151).⁵⁵ She terms the ‘calling something into being’ “natality”, which is “guaranteed by each new birth” – which also, being subject to the human condition of plurality, denotes a continuous possibility of new and unpredictable beginnings. Given this continuous possibility, it should not be surprising for Arendt to use such a term as ‘miracle’ to describe natality – “the new therefore always appears in the guise of a miracle” (1998: 178). It is not only a miracle of birth, a new beginning of biological life; but, as Arendt claims early in HC, a beginning of a political life by virtue of newness that is brought about through birth – “since action is the political activity par excellence, natality . . . may be the central category of political . . . thought” (9, 177). With this in mind, Arendt can safely conclude that “the *raison d'être* of politics is freedom, and its field of experience is action” (1961: 146, 151).⁵⁶

Given this view of freedom, how does Arendt conceive of the political? The view of the political that Arendt presents, relies on various forms of ‘rule’ presented by her in *On Violence*. There, Arendt famously lists various terms conventionally taken to be synonymous with power: strength, force, authority and violence.⁵⁷ The differentiation itself is only noteworthy insofar as Arendt's overall project is meant to dismantle the

⁵⁵ A similar statement is made towards the end of *The Origins of Totalitarianism*: “Beginning . . . is the supreme capacity of man; politically, it is identical with man's freedom” (Arendt, 1979: 478-479). As Brunkhorst notes, Arendt's conception of freedom has two, not necessarily compatible, sources: “the first being the Greek *polis* and the Roman *res publica*; the second St. Augustine and the Christian idea of a spontaneous new beginning” (Brunkhorst, 2000: 178).

⁵⁶ Arendt further posits that it is “thought itself, in its pre-scientific and pre-philosophical understanding, that seems to dissolve freedom” (Arendt, 1961: 144); “thought itself, in its theoretical as well as its pre-theoretical form, makes freedom disappear” (145). Cf. also Brunkhorst (2000: 181).

⁵⁷ A brief overview of the concepts is given by Arendt (1970: 143-145); she further notes: “It is perhaps not superfluous to add that these distinctions, though by no means arbitrary, hardly ever correspond to watertight compartments in the real world, from which nevertheless they are drawn. Thus institutionalized power in organized communities often appears in the guise of authority, demanding instant, unquestioning recognition; no society could function without it” (145).

age-old question of political science: “Who rule whom?” Taking the above terms synonymously is dependent on this question of domination – they “are but words to indicate the means by which man rules over man; they are held to be synonyms because they have the same function” (1970: 142). Yet, the apparent terminological confusion brings Arendt to form a conception of power as action in concert, rather than another form of command-and-obey system.

For the purposes of this chapter, it suffices to delve into the distinction between power and violence. Insofar the notions of power and violence are deemed to be different is dependent on Arendt’s conception of action in concert. Power “corresponds to the human ability not just to act but to act in concert” (143). By Arendt’s definition, power can never be the property of individuals; it is only within groups that power is discernible. She illustrates her view by differentiating between the Hobbesian covenant and the American republic. Where the former “claims for the government a monopoly of power for the benefit of all subjects, who themselves have neither rights nor powers as long as their physical safety is guaranteed”; the latter, by contrast, “rests on the power of the people – the old Roman *potestas in populo* – and power granted to the authorities is delegated power, which can be revoked” (1972: 86).

Violence, by contrast, is always defined by its “instrumental character” (1970: 145). Arendt distinguishes violence not only as a ‘means to’ (a goal or an end), but also in terms of teleology. Because the end of violence needs justification (150), violence cannot be an end in itself; and the further in time the end is, the lesser its likelihood of justification (151). Arendt thus does not fully condemn the use of violence – “no one questions the use of violence in self-defense, because the danger is not only clear but also present, and the end justifying the means is immediate” (ibid.).⁵⁸

Nevertheless, even though according to Arendt violence may be justifiable, it is never legitimate; unlike power, which relies on legitimacy and does not need justification. In her view, legitimacy “bases itself on an appeal to the past, while justification relates to an end that lies in the future” (ibid.). Power and violence, though often used synonymously, lose the synonymy often attributed to them. Power carries on after the end envisioned has been reached; violence remains an instrument to an end precisely because it recedes once that end has been realised. There is another point on means-ends that has to be made here. The resort to teleology also points towards power being an end in itself rather than a means to an end: power is “the very condition enabling a group of people to think and act” (150).⁵⁹ In stark contrast to Hobbes’s coming of the Leviathan, which, through instrumental reason, enables a society devoid of concerted action; power as action in concert is aimed to defy instrumental thinking altogether.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Arendt uses similar terminology in her discussion of work, thus equating the instrumental character of violence and work: “the end justifies the violence done to nature to win the material” (1998: 153).

⁵⁹ A similar point is made by Giorgio Agamben: “Politics is the sphere neither of an end in itself nor of means subordinated to an end; rather, it is the sphere of a pure mediality without end intended as the field of human action and of human thought “ (Agamben, 1996: 116).

⁶⁰ “Seventy years ago Pareto recognized that ‘freedom ... by which I mean the power to act shrinks every day, save for criminals, in the so-called free and democratic countries’” (Arendt, 1970: 179), or a little further “we are confronted not merely with the disintegration of power structures, but with power, seemingly still intact and free to manifest itself, losing its grip and becoming ineffective” (182). However, the general tone of *On Violence* is that power cannot be substituted for anything else but

These distinctions notwithstanding, the relation between power and violence remains problematic. Arendt ends the first essay in *On Violence* with the following passage:

Since we are concerned here primarily with violence, I must warn against a tempting misunderstanding. If we look on history in terms of a continuous chronological process, whose progress, moreover, is inevitable, violence in the shape of war and revolution may appear to constitute *the only possible* interruption . . . It is the function, however, of *all* action, as distinguished from mere behavior, to interrupt what otherwise would have proceeded automatically and therefore predictably (132-133, my emphasis).

The particularity of this passage is precisely in the confusion that may arise by equating violence and action. Arendt asserts a forceful departure from violence as a vehicle for change – and yet she does not fully detach violence from action. The way she structures her argument in this passage clearly aims to show that violence is part of action – though not a central or a principal one. She points to the problematic position that historians have taken while noting violence as ‘the only possible interruption’, thus wholly ignoring action upon which violence is organised.

Put differently, Arendt opposes the traditional view that what we learn from history is that violence is regularly recurring. Critiquing the scholars on violence, who see in it the historical norm (135-136), she points towards their misunderstanding of what constitutes an event as such. Violence and action interrupt the automatism of historical progress; they interrupt order precisely through an interruption of predictability. It is, after all, predictability of the future events that guarantees order. Yet, at the same time, predictability is also “never anything but projections of present automatic processes and procedures” (109); it may help us cope with the openness of the future, but it equally cannot guarantee order because action, as we have seen above, is necessarily a new beginning. In this light, she can also announce that any historical event must be one that incorporates action, whether that event is violent or not. It is through understanding of events – which “by definition, are occurrences that interrupt routine processes and routine procedures” (ibid.; cf. also 1998: 42, 300) – that the concept of action can be distinguished from mere behaviour.

Because action disturbs the predictable, calculable historical processes – indeed, because it is through events and not ideas that history can be understood⁶¹ – the unpredictability of action cannot preclude violence. Despite Arendt’s supposition that “left to its own course it [violence] ends in power’s disappearance” or that “violence appears where power is in jeopardy” (1970: 154), it is not necessarily clear why this would be the case. One can assume that this has to do with legitimacy and justification – that while power does not need justification it needs to be legitimate; and so, the lack of legitimate power would be unable to justify violence; or, that power would not spring spontaneously when the end is violence. However, as mentioned previously,

violence, which in turn incites power. It suffices to say here that Arendt follows the predominant reading of *Leviathan*, which sees the people as detached from the monster they created. In my view, this conclusion can be avoided by following a different reading that I discuss in Chapter 4.

⁶¹ “Neither the speculations of philosophers nor the imaginings of astronomers has ever constituted an event. Prior to the telescopic discoveries of Galileo, Giordano Bruno’s philosophy attracted little attention even among learned men . . . What Galileo did and what nobody had done before was to use the telescope in such a way that the secrets of the universe were delivered to human cognition ‘with the certainty of sense-perception’; that is, he put within the grasp of an earth-bound creature and its body-bound senses what had seemed forever beyond his reach” (Arendt, 1998: 259-260, 275).

and in Arendt's own admission, power "needs" legitimacy and not justification; precisely because power is an end in itself Arendt runs the risk of equating lack of justifications for particular political actions of a group as self-legitimising. Put differently, because the legitimacy of the group rests on a spontaneous coming together, the legitimacy of the group is not questioned from within that group and its outward actions are deemed justifiable. Arendt thus ignores the dynamics between groups by focusing entirely on their internal legitimacy. This is of great importance in particular because, as will be shown below, the way groups relate to one another does not rest solely on legitimacy but requires a view of justifiable actions.

The lack of justifications in political action of a group is problematic on the account of the group's external relations.⁶² Arendt does not account for the 'form' concerted action may take. It is plausible, for instance, to infer from concerted action as its end the destruction of an enemy grouping; both in the minimal sense of overpowering the authority that is perceived as an enemy, as well as in a violent way of killing. This would certainly be justifiable if the enemy grouping poses a direct threat – 'no one questions the use of violence in self-defence' – but self-defence is rarely clear when dealing with groups; and there remain numerous instances where the form of action may seem unjustifiable while the legitimacy of the group would not be questioned.⁶³ Arendt's discussion of the Mayflower Compact in *On Revolution*, for example, is based on an internal renunciation of violence; however, at the same time, the legitimacy of the groups that arises from this internal renunciation of violence opens itself to violent intervention against the natives. Moreover, this violent act, which has its roots in power, in the coming together of people, will not be abolished once that end has been achieved either – because within Arendt's analysis the event that took place in the past may become the referential point on which the group's legitimacy is based and through which it sustains itself. Her discussion of the relevance of the Mayflower Compact is precisely aimed to show this endurance of historical events through speech⁶⁴ – a referential point that sustains power (Arendt, 1990a: 167-169, 172-174, cf. also the footnote on p. 308).

⁶² Not surprisingly, many commentators have pointed out that her theory of action does not entail justice – and so does Arendt, at least implicitly in her attack of Plato. Cf. Peeters (2008) and Pitkin (1981). For large part, Arendt scholarship on this issue is directly or indirectly concerned with her *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, the phrase 'banality of evil', or concerns over particularities of events – neither of which are telling of Arendt's concerns over justice in public space (cf. in particular the exchange between Seyla Benhabib and Richard Wolin as a response to the publication of Bettina Stangneth's *Eichmann before Jerusalem*). Arendt's understanding of justice is 'less' problematic if such issues are left aside, and follows the Aristotelian view of contest, rather than the Platonic view of unity, as the function of the state – a theme, to be sure, which is at the heart of Rawls's *Political Liberalism* and has to be adequately answered prior to dealing with justice. Cf. also Arendt's discussion on the relation between equality and justice: "Equality, therefore, far from being connected with justice, as in modern times, was the very essence of freedom: to be free meant to be free from the inequality present in rulership and to move in a sphere where neither rule nor being ruled existed" (Arendt, 1998: 32-33). This movement to a sphere 'without rule' is precisely why she cannot account for political relations external to the group.

⁶³ Practically any war fought in the last three decades involves legitimate groupings with unjustifiable actions – most poignant is the invasion of Iraq in 2003, which, regardless of aims and outcomes, lacked justification.

⁶⁴ "That it is an event rather than a theory or a tradition we are confronted with, an event of the greatest magnitude and the greatest import for the future" (Arendt, 1990a: 172-173). The concluding pages in *On Revolution* equally aim to establish a lasting institutional framework: "This, and probably much

A brief digression into Thucydides

In order to illustrate the problematic relation between legitimacy and justification, a historical case may be useful.⁶⁵ A brief digression into Thucydides's account of Athenian hegemony is pertinent precisely for the reason that Arendt relies on Athens as the archetypal sphere of action – but as the case shows, the following dialogue also posits several complications to Arendt's point of view. In Thucydides's Melian dialogue, as many realist international theorists would claim, legitimacy and justification are rendered as synonymous:

But that it is for the benefit of our empire that we are here, and also the safety of your city that we now propose to speak . . . as to the kindness of the divine favour, neither do we expect to fall short of you therein. For in no respect are we departing from men's observances regarding that which pertains to the divine or from their desires regarding that which pertains to themselves, in aught that we demand or do. For of the gods we hold the belief, and of men we know, that by a necessity of their nature wherever they have power they always rule. And so in our case since we neither enacted this law nor when it was enacted were the first to use it, but found it in existence and expect to leave it in existence for all time, so we make use of it, well aware that both you and others, if clothed with the same power as we are, would do the same thing (5.91, 5.105).⁶⁶

Most 'realist' literature on this dialogue has focused on the 'laws of nature' – envisaging an anarchic worldview driven by maximising power for the sake of security. Whether these laws of nature are empirical (realism) or constructed (social constructivism) is beside our interests; it suffices to say that Thucydides was quite critical of Athenian hegemony – "it has ever been an established rule that the weaker is kept down by the stronger" (1.76) – and indeed considered the Athenian defeat to be due to this very premise: the Melian warning about future events goes unnoticed, and proves to be the very reason for Athenian defeat.⁶⁷ Nevertheless, even if one were to disregard the so-called laws of nature, and focus on the Arendtian concepts instead, the same problematic ensues: legitimacy of Athens is not in jeopardy, neither before the ensuing violence, nor after it – and indeed remains intact after their defeat at Syracuse. As Thucydides observes, Athenian legitimacy of power is also its

more, was lost when the spirit of revolution – a new spirit and the spirit of beginning something new – failed to find its appropriate institution" (280); as well as, "If the world is to contain a public space, it cannot be erected for one generation and planned for the living only; it must transcend the life-span of mortal men" (1998: 55).

⁶⁵ I will return to this issue in greater detail in Chapters 5 and 6. At this stage, the intention is to outline how Arendt's distinction between legitimacy and justification may be problematic.

⁶⁶ The citations are from the Loeb Classical Library editions of Thucydides's *History of Peloponnesian War*.

⁶⁷ Mel. 'But do you not think there is security in the other course? For here also it is necessary, just as you force us to abandon all pleas of justice and seek to persuade us to give ear to what is to your own interests, that we, too, tell you what is to our advantage and try to persuade you to adopt it, if that happens to be to your advantage also. How, we say, shall you not make enemies of all who are now neutral, as soon as they look at our case and conclude that some day you will come against them also? And in this what else are you doing but strengthening the enemies you already have, and bringing upon you, against their inclination, others who would never have thought of becoming your enemies.'

Ath. 'Not so, for we do not reckon those as the more dangerous to us who, dwelling somewhere on the mainland and being free men, will defer for a long time taking any precautions against us, but rather those who dwell in some of the islands, both those like you, are subject to no control, and those who are already exasperated by the necessity of submission to our rule. For it is these who are most likely to give way to recklessness and bring both themselves and us into danger which they cannot but foresee.' (5.98-5.99).

justification for violence. Just as there is no need for ‘elaborate formulations’ in order to unite the revolutionaries in the Hungarian Revolution or the drafters of the Mayflower Compact, the Athenians equally do not rely on any formulation but what they find in ‘nature’ itself – i.e. they claim it in the interest of their strength to defeat the weaker; this doctrine is sufficient for Athenian coming-together, and therefore legitimate, and it is sufficient justification for violence. It is noteworthy that despite the ensuing violence, the Athenian power did not scatter, nor did their power dissolve after defeat at Syracuse, as one would expect Arendtian analysis to predict. Quite the contrary, after the news of their defeat – and their ‘anger’ and ‘rage’ with ‘the orators’, ‘the soothsayers’, ‘the oracle-mongers’ – “it was their opinion that, as far as their present circumstances permitted, they should not give up” (8.1).

The digression into Athenian hegemony shows two interrelated problematics in Arendt’s theory of action: (1) one group’s action is not easily isolated from other groups; (2) legitimacy and justification are not a sufficient conceptual tool to distinguish between power and violence. The first point requires little elaboration. Not only was Athenian hegemony directed towards other groups; the same attitude is present in Arendt’s examples in Hungary and the Americas – Hungarian revolutionaries were acting against Russian troops, the drafters of the Mayflower Compact against the native populations. By focusing on the inner dynamics of the groups, Arendt wholly neglects the results of action towards other groups and treats the political experience insulated from its effects; she treats group action as if it happens in a void. As will be shown below, Arendt cannot treat the political domain as an isolated sphere free of interaction with other political groupings – Arendt may not be interested in this issue, but the relations between the groups have a(n) (political) influence on one another. To put it bluntly, Arendt wholly ignores that often enough groups act *against* each other.

The second point is implicitly acknowledged by Arendt and, to some extent, she seems to prefer this outcome to other solutions in the form of command-and-obey systems. By treating groups as isolated from one another, Arendt focuses solely on the internal dynamics of a group. This is the reason why Arendt can ignore the need for justification for violence towards other groups and focus on the legitimacy of the acting group instead. She can thus also ignore that just as Athenian hegemony led to the Peloponnesian War, so did the colonial legitimacy in the Americas that she discusses in *On Revolution* lead to a vast ‘imperial’ expansion. As will be shown in the last section of this chapter, Arendt’s categories of legitimacy and justification are insufficient to explain the atrocities committed by the colonists. While the inner dynamics of a group are sufficiently treated by her categories of legitimacy and justification, the effects of concerted action cannot be assessed by the same conceptual tools – and it seems that while Arendt is explicitly not concerned with the question of domination, she must nevertheless acknowledge that the Schmittian categories of friend and enemy remain decisive when groups interact.

2.2 Arendt's theory of action – speech and the Greek *agon*

Arendt often equates action and speech; in *The Human Condition*, for instance, the two terms are typically written alongside one another – to the extent that one could replace one term for the other, or even ignore one of the terms altogether, without losing the meaning or context that Arendt is presenting. Indeed, she claims as much by pointing out that action without speech is of little value politically – both to the actor as well as the audience. Strictly speaking, any new beginning must be accompanied by speech – although action may precede speech, without speech, action remains an apolitical act. It is in this context that scholars have taken Arendt's action to be 'speech acts':⁶⁸

The action he begins is humanly disclosed by the word, and though his deed can be perceived in its brute physical appearance without verbal accompaniment, it becomes relevant only through the spoken word in which he identifies himself as the actor, announcing what he does, has done, and intends to do (Arendt, 1998: 179).

Moreover, the equation of speech and action indicates the distinction Arendt aims to present between political theory and political philosophy. The latter, in its concerns with predictability and order, ignores the aspect of newness that is central to Arendt. Action, as Arendt reminds us, "in its most general sense, means to take an initiative, to begin . . . [and/or] to set something into motion" (177). It is especially in the latter formulation that an understanding of action becomes possible – 'setting something into motion' implies that there are 'things' already present to be set into motion. She thus does not aim at a completely new beginning, a new creation of the world⁶⁹ – or in political terms, a revolution that takes a leap *beyond* the present world; on the contrary, this beginning "is not the beginning of *something* but of *somebody*, who is a beginner himself" (ibid., my emphasis). It is in this sense that Arendt can confidently claim that "many, and even most acts, are performed in the manner of speech" (178).

With this in mind, for Arendt there can be no one person whom one can regard as a political actor on his or her own. Their 'words and deeds' must be performed in the presence of their peers. Quite remarkably, Arendt emphasises that speech itself needs an audience: the human condition of 'plurality' is thus set apart from 'life' and 'world' – the latter could be maintained and carried out in the absence of peers, without interaction with the other. It is, in other words, in our capacity of speech that our intersubjectivity becomes apparent – and this speech cannot be enunciated without the presence of others; there would be no reason to do so in the first place. Speech thus takes for granted that someone other is present, that a space of equality surrounds the speaker.

In this sense, it is crucial once again to emphasise the intersubjective aspect of politics in Arendt. Only men can express and distinguish themselves, "and only he can

⁶⁸ The notion 'speech act' is not directly discernible in Arendt, and is closer associated to Habermas's (1994, 1996) reading of Arendt. Cf. also Benhabib (2003) and Honig (1993). Furthermore, there is a distinction to be made between the claim that speech and action are synonymous, and that speech is a necessary component of action – Arendt seems to conflate the two throughout *The Human Condition*, and it is the latter aspect that is largely ignored when utilising the notion 'speech act'.

⁶⁹ However, cf. Brunkhorst (2000) for an 'Augustinian' Arendt who aims towards completely new beginnings – the *creatio ex nihilo*.

communicate himself and not merely something—thirst or hunger, affection or hostility or fear” (176).⁷⁰ And he does that through speech and action; through the seemingly simplistic trait that man possesses, he does not only distinguish between physical objects and desires, but reveals his uniqueness in the presence of his equals. Through speech and action “men distinguish themselves instead of being merely distinct; they are the modes in which human beings appear to each other, not indeed as physical objects, but *qua* men” (ibid.). No matter how many others there are, their distinctiveness is only affirmed through their speech – their presence as subjects, as opposed to mere objects, is only revealed through ‘speech acts’.

In line with Arendt’s ‘phenomenological’ background, the presence of another can amount to a mere presence in the ‘world’ as a physical appearance – as a product or object; as well as a distinct subject in the political space of ‘plurality’ who distinguishes himself through speech. We are led to a curious relation between the human condition of the world and plurality – for while ‘plurality’ is separate from the ‘world’, it nevertheless relies on the ‘world’. We can thus observe a dual usage of the term public sphere, while both relate to the space where politics ‘happens’. It is used both as a strictly boundless space of relation between the equal peers (plurality), as well as a restricted space built for the purpose of public interaction (world). At least partially due to this ambiguity, the public sphere itself is not evident at all times; it is thus not surprising to ask “When we talk of public and private, do we know what we are talking about?” (Pitkin, 1981: 328).⁷¹

Arendt’s attempts to posit what the public sphere is ends in a pseudo-paradoxical position of a space without a space. Both the world and plurality of men can be ‘escaped’ from by not engaging in them, and even altogether retracted from by focusing on the internal thought. The result is certainly an abject, and even “inhuman” life; but the possibility of ‘escape’ nevertheless remains (Arendt, 1968: 24). For Arendt, it seems, there is only a possibility of politics as long as there are boundaries on plurality, even though these are not set in spatial terms, but are discernible from a linguistic differentiation in Ancient Greece on which she relies – a differentiation

⁷⁰ To be sure, Arendt distinguishes between communication and speech: “speech and action were considered to be coeval and coequal, of the same rank and the same kind; and this originally meant not only that most political action . . . is indeed transacted in words, but more fundamentally that finding the right words at the right moment, quite apart from the information or communication they may convey, is action” (Arendt, 1998: 25); and later in that work: “No other human performance requires speech to the same extent as action. In all other performances speech plays a subordinate role, as a means of communication or a mere accompaniment to something that could also be achieved in silence” (179).

⁷¹ This question, though directed towards Arendt specifically, equally applies to contemporary scholars emphasising the importance of the public sphere. As we saw in the previous chapter, Schmitt’s concern too is with the public sphere: what belongs to the political domain, and specifically who makes the decision on the friend and enemy, is something pertaining to the public and not the private – the enemy is a public enemy. Similarly, for Chantal Mouffe discussed in the following chapter, the concern over the public sphere is with the space of contestation. The point is precisely that the public sphere itself is not clearly or necessarily evident or even in existence at all times. Cf. also Marchart (1999), for an overview of spatiality and ‘temporality’ of the public sphere. I will return to the issue of space in relation to plurality and world in detail in Chapter 5. At this stage, it is necessary to briefly point out that spatial limits are not entirely excluded by Arendt.

between polis (πόλις) and asty (ἄστυ).⁷² Asty referred to the city or town in a material sense, it is also used in the sense of walls that would surround the space; whereas polis would refer to a specific space, as a citadel, or to a general sense of space without denoting specific boundaries, such as a whole country. Polis also refers to community and citizenship, as well as referring to displaying one's public duties. In this sense, the latter (polis) is part of the former (asty), without which the latter has no space to be confined to. Most important in this is that polis refers to the civic body (Latin *civitas*) of asty. Similarly, for Arendt there is no reason to assume that everything within the asty is necessarily political.⁷³

This linguistic differentiation points to, unlike the arguments of contemporary multiculturalist or cosmopolitan thinkers, an understanding of the public sphere is a restriction within the world, which transforms a factual plurality into a particular political experience. Only the polis has the political connotation, because only here can one reframe the spatial metaphor as a relational one – from a boundless space, the community is created through a demarcation of the civic body from the rest. Quite paradoxically, the world can be viewed as all-encompassing; whereas Arendt's conception of plurality is by definition restricted to those belonging to the community. A concept of equality is thus created to mean only those who are partaking in the matters of the polis, unrestricted by the burdens of necessity, free from subordination to a ruler. Intersubjectivity can only take place under these conditions of limiting the world, of creating boundaries within which the recognition of the others as equals becomes possible; it becomes the stage where individuals take on one another in differentiating their positions and setting forth their narratives.

The individual in concerted action

A note has to be made on the mode of differentiation, specifically because a seemingly paradoxical relation is present between individuation and action in concert. As mentioned previously, for Arendt equality denotes a condition of possibility for action – it is through recognition of the others as equals that action in an Arendtian sense is possible. And yet, Arendt also claims that the purpose of action in Greece was to distinguish oneself in the public sphere and to strive for “immortality” (Arendt, 1998: 17-21) – the polis “was permeated by a fiercely agonal spirit, where everybody had constantly to distinguish himself from all others” (41). One can observe an interplay between the need for action that stems from the will to distinguish oneself and its

⁷² See for instance the opening lines of Plato's *Symposium* – καὶ γὰρ ἐτύγχανον πρόην εἰς ἄστυ οἴκοθεν ἀνιὼν Φαληρόθεν (172A) – where going to town only refers to a spatial metaphor, as opposed to gathering together in the polis to perform acts pertaining to community or civil duties. As a contrast, compare with *Iliad* – φράζεο νῦν ὅπως κε πόλιν καὶ ἄστυ σάωσῃς οἷος σὺν λαοῖς τοῖ Ἰλίῳ ἐγγεγάσιν (17.144) – presenting both polis and asty as separate ‘entities’ to be saved. Arendt alludes to this distinction without explicitly stating it: “the lawmaker was like the builder of the city wall, someone who had to do and finish his work before political activity could begin . . . Before men began to act, a definite space had to be secured and a structure built where all subsequent actions could take place” (Arendt, 1998: 194).

⁷³ I rely on Babiniotis's *Etymological Dictionary of Modern Greek* and Liddell & Scott's *Greek-English Lexicon* for this distinction.

condition that is the result of recognising equality – speech presupposes the Greek *agon*, and *agon* presupposes speech as action.⁷⁴

Arendt is not entirely clear on what the Greek *agon* is. The only thing she mentions about this spirit, and even that almost in passing, is that it was not moral (unlike the Roman-Christian spirit), and was based on one consideration: “unceasing effort always to be the best of all” (1961: 67; 1998: 41, 194). It is nevertheless clear that the Greek *agon* for Arendt is meant as an endless contest; her view follows the Nietzschean insight into the historical development of morality, through which a new way of philosophizing also emerges:

there could never have been a Platonic philosophy without such beautiful young men in Athens: the sight of them is what first puts the philosopher’s soul in an erotic rapture and won’t let it rest until it has sunk the seed of all high things into such beautiful soil [reference to *Symposium* 206a-207b] . . . At the very least, you have to think that people in Athens had a *different* way of philosophizing, *especially in public* [my emphasis]. Nothing is less Greek than the hermit’s conceptual cobweb-weaving, the *amor intellectualis dei à la* Spinoza. Philosophy *à la* Plato is more accurately defined as an erotic contest, as the further development and internalization of the ancient agonistic gymnastics and its *presuppositions* . . . – I still remember, *against* Schopenhauer and in Plato’s honour, that the whole higher culture and literature of *classical* France also grew on the ground of sexual interest. You can search through it for gallantry, sensuousness, sexual competition, ‘woman’, – you will never look in vain (*Twilight of the Idols*, Skirmishes of an Untimely Man §23).

What does this mean for Arendt’s conception of *agon*? In the first instance, what we find is a historical development of contest as nothing more than a sublimated approach towards the other. Sublimated in the sense that it was not directly sexual, the ‘erotic rapture’ creates the moment of approaching the other in a variety of modes. Furthermore, the other is not equal in an Arendtian sense; rather the equality is generated between those who approach the youth. In this, the ‘erotic contest’ becomes the *modus operandi* of philosophers: the public sphere, as opposed to the ‘hermit’s conceptual cobweb-weaving’, becomes a terrain for contest. To put it somewhat more schematically, Nietzsche’s depiction of contest organises the otherwise disconnected individual philosophers into a group whose purpose is to persuade the youth. They must regard each other as equals for as long as they desire the same end – insofar as the desired end itself is not meant to be gained through instrumentally collaborating towards it, but generates the interaction between the philosophers. The agonal spirit in this sense differentiates between the members of the group, but also generates the group itself.⁷⁵ The Greek agonal spirit, with its emphasis to strive for higher grounds, to overcome the others and the self, is thus not a position of contest (or what Schmitt

⁷⁴ In this regard, Arendt differs considerably from contemporary views on agonism and speech in political theory. For scholars like Mouffe communication is posterior to antagonism – the political is in the first place an antagonistic conflict, which can be resolved through creation of spaces for ‘communication’. For scholars like Habermas communication is prior to antagonism – language is prior to any possible articulation of antagonism. For Arendt, the interdependence between communication and agonism explicates that communication as speech requires antagonism in an equal measure as antagonism requires speech in order to form spaces for action.

⁷⁵ In this light, the Arendtian conception of agonism is more than antagonism: not only does it resist the Mouffeian ascription of sublimation of antagonism, as will be discussed in Chapters 3 and 4; on the contrary, it is itself ‘sublimated’ into physical contest; what we witness is in fact the reversal – antagonism (and in particular internal antagonism) as a sublimation of agonism.

calls real combat); instead, it is a position through which the other is understood as an equal because he too strives for higher grounds and struggles with others and the self.

So far, the philosophers, though already a group, act entirely on an individual basis. There remains a question of how this agonal spirit can unite its individuating effects with concerted action. One way to solve this dilemma is to disregard it; concerted action does not necessarily contradict individuation. One can imagine striving for distinction to be a communal act, which by itself creates the conditions for concerted action – for instance, during athletic competitions where individual agonal spirit does not stand in opposition to the communal activity of participating in the games. This solution, however, is somewhat problematic for analysis of political action. Certainly, within the polis the act of distinguishing oneself from others already created the conditions for public affairs – the effected strife between different individuals was nothing less than concerted action. This may indeed partially contribute to our understanding of Arendt's line of thought. However, it does not fully absolve us from questioning the dichotomy between Greek *agon* and speech further. How does Arendt account for the individuality within concerted action, how is individual *distinction* to be achieved politically, if politics means spontaneous *concerted* action? For as Arendt herself emphasises, “what carried the [Hungarian] revolution was the sheer momentum of acting-together of the whole people whose demands were so obvious that they hardly needed elaborate formulation” (Arendt, 1958: 26). There was, as such, no individuating moment through which individual distinction would become clear to the other; quite the contrary took place, the spontaneous coming-together only grew larger, without any distinctive agonal spirit that would announce one's ‘immortality’ or show how he/she is ‘the best of all’ (cf. also Birmingham, 2011). Given the problematic nature of Arendt's insistence on individuation of the actors, the role the Greek *agon* plays in her theory of action can be reduced to the necessity of contest in politics.

The role speech plays is significantly more imperative to Arendt's theory of action. For if we consider Arendt's depiction of the events during the Hungarian Revolution (1958), the Greek agonal spirit is absent not only in wording, but also in the implications Arendt draws from the events. Instead, the reader is reminded that it is through speech – and thus not contest – that the revolution gained momentum. The Hungarian Revolution quickly spread among various groups, from students, workers, passers-by to police and army. The students' view to overturn “Stalin's statue in one of the public squares in Budapest”, which must have been followed by more students, and so on (Arendt, 1958: 26). Moreover, it was their action *as speech* that resulted in larger crowds, as “some students went to the Radio Building to persuade the station to broadcast the sixteen points of their manifesto” (ibid.).

However, where all this may be taken to constitute speech acts, as speech and action being used synonymously, speech becomes supplementary to these actions during the following events. “The point is that the impact of factual reality, like all other human experiences [such as the Hungarian Revolution], needs speech if it is to survive the moment of experience, needs talk and communication with others to remain sure of

itself” (25).⁷⁶ While spontaneous actions may indeed be fruitful and purposeful, their instances are fleeting without speech. When speech is seen as supplementary to action and not only accompanying it, action is manifested as politically meaningful, rather than a mere historical curiosity or amusement – it becomes an event. Through speech, the event plays a role in our future actions, it takes part in our historical narratives, and to an extent creates a sense of community through which spontaneity may rise again.⁷⁷

3. Action in concert – against whom?

The distinction between political philosophy and political theory that this chapter was started with – a distinction between the realm of thinking and that of action – seems to imply a fundamental break with such preoccupations as defining categories of the political along the lines of Schmitt. Numerous scholars have emphasised that Arendt’s conception of the political strongly deviates from Schmitt’s;⁷⁸ my aim in this section is, next to elucidating the differences between Schmitt and Arendt, to point to the similarities that are more often than not neglected. While many considerations can be drawn from the preceding analysis of Arendt, one stands out with regard to this thesis: to what extent does concerted action take into account the (irreducible presence of) antagonistic relations between groups? To raise this question somewhat differently: to what extent can the Schmittian dynamics of the political antagonisms be identified in an Arendtian context? The pertinence of these questions should not be taken too lightly, for Arendt’s theory of action almost exclusively focuses on the inner dynamics of a group; by doing so, Arendt neglects the bearing of that dynamic towards other groups. To elucidate this with a clear example, Arendt scholars have often pointed to

⁷⁶ Arendt in this citation refers to the “breakdown of Nazi indoctrination” – the citation, however, is applicable to all historical events.

⁷⁷ In the case of the Hungarian Revolution, a statue was built in Budapest in 2006 to commemorate its 50th anniversary and another one was erected in Cleveland in 2007. It should be noted that although speech is integral to action, Arendt also recognises political action without speech. Her *Reflections on the Hungarian Revolution* starts with a remark on silence as a “political gesture”: a “silent procession of black-clad women in the streets of Russian occupied Budapest, mourning their dead in public” (Arendt, 1958: 5). It should be clear from this example, and many like it – in Argentina Mothers of the Disappeared, in Greece Dance of Zalongo, and so on – that although Arendt emphasises action without speech being meaningless and lost to the world, there is a possibility to achieve meaningful political action without speech as a direct medium. Certainly, silent processions display phenomena, which remain memorable and are spread through speech by others. The Mothers of the Disappeared display names and hold up photographs of their children/partners – this display is only effective because from the beginning it took place within the public realm: a personal and individual act that penetrates the public sphere; the Dance of Zalongo displayed a traditional artistic form, without music or chorus (both added later) – this display, though not in the public realm, nevertheless penetrates it. What we have, in short, is a display that is meant to remain within the private realm, yet penetrates the public one through storytelling – a memory or fantasy that creates a sense of commonality or unity through which equality can establish itself: aren’t we all mothers, children, dancers? Arendt’s aim, it seems, is exactly that all actions become meaningful through speech, even if that speech is not directly accompanying the act: “Although everybody started his life by inserting himself into the human world through action and speech, nobody is the author or producer of his own life story. In other words, the stories, the results of action and speech, reveal an agent, but this agent is not an author or producer. Somebody began it and is its subject in the twofold sense of the word, namely, its actor and sufferer, but nobody is its author” (1998: 184). Cf. also Kristeva (2001).

⁷⁸ Cf. among other, Marchart (2007), Villa (1996, 2009), Vollrath (1977, 1987).

the fall of Berlin Wall as a paradigmatic concerted action – a spontaneous coming together to overthrow totalitarian suppression (Vasterling, 2003). This is notably also the case with the Hungarian Revolution.

And yet, in both of these historical examples, Arendt's theory of action only explains the formation of the acting group; her theory is unable to address the Schmittian worry about defining an enemy grouping against whom one acts, which in its fundament problematizes our understanding of legitimate conflicts. To put it differently, where for Schmitt the political is intended to create 'acceptable' forms of antagonisms, Arendt's resistance towards antagonism as defining of politics is only sensible if the focus is placed solely on the inner dynamics of a given group. How that group acts in relation to other groups is not an object of Arendt's attention, nor has it been given the necessary attention by contemporary Arendt scholars. Thus, contra the associative trait that has been ascribed to Arendt by contemporary scholars, I claim that (1) some form of antagonistic relation can be inferred from Arendt's associative political theory – despite her resistance towards antagonism, her focus on the internal dynamics of a group creates a void in the associative account by neglecting the external group interaction; and (2) the antagonistic relation is also based on groups, rather than individuals – concerted action may stem from individual *agon*, yet action can only be considered 'in concert' once that individuality ceases to penetrate the group.

With these difficulties in mind, it is necessary to clarify some key problems with Arendt's views. On the first point, two examples in Arendt's body of work stand out: the Hungarian Revolution and the Mayflower Compact. It is in her analysis of the former that we find the initial applications of her political theory to a concrete and contemporary issue. Although Arendt's thoughts on the applicability of her theory are not final, and indeed she proposes further examples in *On Revolution* and in *On Violence*, unlike these texts, her essay on the Hungarian Revolution deals with the issue of conflict between different groups directly. Equally, the Mayflower Compact receives particular attention in Arendt's analysis of the American Revolution; and in all aspects, the proceedings leading to this event are different from the Hungarian Revolution, which makes the conclusions drawn from them all the more significant. To be sure, Arendt's depiction of these events is of theoretical significance and not merely a portrayal of isolated, historically contingent events. Both aim to clarify the central place of action in our political experience, both emphasise the importance of political life; that is, Arendt emphasises the utter meaninglessness of existence without an active involvement in political life.

Of the Hungarian Revolution, it is clear that the Russian occupants and their Hungarian cohorts were the reason to act – "Russian troops should leave the territory" (Arendt, 1958: 26) – and their 'existential' presence necessitated a conflict. It is not surprising that Arendt is "not convinced" that Russia provoked the outbreak of the Revolution; even if that were the case, the result, she states, "was certainly unexpected and went far beyond the original intentions" (7).⁷⁹ After all, placing Russia at the

⁷⁹ Provocation, it should be added, came from both sides, or at least was seen as such by the USSR, which is perhaps why Arendt was 'not convinced': "The subversive broadcasts of Radio Free Europe – backed by dollars, directed from America, and functioning on the territory of West Germany – played an essential role in the ideological preparation and practical direction of the counter-revolution, in provoking the armed struggle, in the non-observance of the cease fire, and in arousing the mass hysteria

centre of political action would undermine the role of the revolutionaries in Hungary. Arendt's interest is precisely to show how different the two groups were – spontaneously united Hungarian revolutionaries whose action signified the properly political experience as opposed to mechanistic/bureaucratic machinery of the Russian state. Of the Mayflower Compact, the incentive to act was present in an abstract sense. The compact and the emergence of a group, Arendt emphasises, is spontaneous on the one hand – the group assembles and grows spontaneously, without a need for elaborate political/philosophical theories (1958: 26; 1990a: 173); and requires trust/promises on the other – through which alone foundations of any socio-political institutions are possible (1990a: 175). This foundational act through which alone any laws, etc. can come about – as the Mayflower Compact indicates: “[to] covenant and combine ourselves together into a civil Body Politick . . . by *Virtue hereof* do enact, constitute, and frame, such just and equal Laws, Ordinances, Acts, Constitutions, and Officers” – is also at the centre of the spontaneous concerted action:

they obviously feared the so-called state of nature, the untrod wilderness, unlimited by any boundary, as well as *the unlimited initiative of men bound by no law*. This fear is not surprising; it is the justified fear of civilized men who, for whatever reasons, have decided to leave civilization behind them and strike out on their own. (167, my emphasis).

Fear of ‘men bound by no law’ may not be surprising for social contract theorists. It is crucial to point out, however, that the covenant described by the signers of the Mayflower Compact is more elementary than the subsequent social contract theories of Hobbes, Rousseau or Locke; even though it could be argued that the Mayflower Compact is literally a social contract signed by 41 individuals in light of the state of nature. Arendt explicitly notes that her view of contract is fundamentally different from the early modern philosophers and aims at creation of a community based on “reciprocity and presupposes equality”, rather than “a surrender of rights and powers” (169-170). Arendt's aim is to point to something elementary and ‘pre-theoretical’ – something already existent, rather than a scholarly formulated doctrine. What is of importance is simply the capacity to come together and make promises; and indeed the fear of men bound by no law does not detract from having made the promise, as it need not be kept.

An association is thus a necessary outcome from the sheer human capacity to make a promise. Arendt is thus not concerned with, and is highly critical of, such conceptions as the state of nature and other hypothetical situations; what matters to her is precisely the historical appearances of specific events, through which an association is created. It is not surprising to her, that the very creation of the US constitution has at its origin an understanding of this simple human capacity to make promises: “they [the Founding Fathers] knew that whatever men might be in their singularity, they could *bind* themselves into a community which, even though it was composed of ‘sinners’, need not necessarily reflect this ‘sinful’ side of human nature” (174). That human beings are not to be trusted, or have some form of wickedness in them, is quite literally irrelevant. For despite that being the case or not, human beings come together – and this coming-together has little to do with ‘what’ human beings are.

which led to the lynching of innocent men and women loyal to their people and their country” (United Nations General Assembly, 1957: 36).

More importantly, the fear of men indicates a separateness the created association makes between those who do belong to the association and those who do not – who are either to be feared, ignored, ostracised, or even annihilated. The creation of an association, in other words, does not proceed without first acknowledging the existence of another group; a political foundation does not happen in an empty void – the ‘untrod wilderness’ quite literally was not a correct description of America; and, furthermore, the possibility of conflict that stems from the fear of men may exercise very definite pressures on the development of the foundation. The men of the Mayflower Compact, as well as those of the Hungarian Revolution, spontaneously unite *against* something – be that the ‘unlimited initiative of men bound by no law’ or ‘the Russian troops’.

The appropriate question to be asked at this stage is to what extent this fear may be translated into enmity; an ‘intense enmity’ that defines political differentiation according to Schmitt. Although it seems that Arendt would find such a classification problematic – she claims political philosophy to wrongly appropriate enmity as its starting position – the possibility of enmity is not precluded by her political theory. Especially in the case of the Hungarian Revolution, the force uniting the revolutionaries was their *opposition* to the occupants; it was spontaneous because those involved knew exactly who the enemy was, and it is for this reason that “they hardly needed elaborate formulation” (1958: 26). Similarly in the case of the Mayflower Compact, there was no need for ‘elaborate formulations’ precisely because the colonists knew whom to unite against:

No theory, theological or political or philosophical, but their own decision to leave the Old World behind and to venture forth into an enterprise entirely of their own led into a sequence of acts and occurrences in which they would have perished, had they not turned their minds to the matter long and intensely enough to discover . . . the elementary grammar of political action and its more complicated syntax (1990a: 173).

The second point, that Arendt’s political theory holds antagonistic relations between groups and not individuals – the agonal spirit of individuation and action-in-concert – problematizes Arendt’s earlier depiction of legitimacy and justification of power and violence; after all, defining an enemy grouping through which the group’s identity is created as an opposition to another group raises concerns over the legitimacy of power and justification for conflict. Unlike Schmitt, for whom both legitimacy and justification arise from a political differentiation (as opposed to distinctions stemming from other fields, such as morality or economics); for Arendt, legitimacy is based on the group itself, its appeal to a past event (such as the Mayflower Compact), in effect creating an equality amongst the members and from which action originates. Even though Arendt is quite clear that her concern with violence is about lack of justifications – a group’s legitimacy does not necessarily procure justification for violence – the relation between legitimacy and justification becomes problematic in light of the previous discussion: the creation of the group already indicates a delimitation, a turning away from other groups or individuals out of fear or otherwise. Arendt’s distinction between the political activity and its instrumental orientation – the distinction between power and violence – is questionable once group action is no longer self-contained and is instead directed towards other groups. In other words, one could ask, does not a group’s understanding of its own legitimacy also lead to justifications for whichever ends?

This question is not meant in a trivial manner, as it remains questionable whether action in concert is sufficiently worthy to be accepted given the possibility of violence that accompanies it. In this regard, both Arendt and Schmitt share a similar worry: to what extent is violence justified? Nevertheless, there is a vast difference between their methodologies in attempting to resolve the issue. It has already been noted that for Schmitt such concepts as enemy and combat have an existential (i.e. real, actual) meaning, and that he resorts to a decision by the sovereign to define an enemy or not. For Arendt, this decision is ideally made by the group; yet, the spontaneous coming-together presupposes such terms as enemy and combat to be considered similar to Schmitt. The enemy is certainly existential in Arendt – Russian troops were clearly present, Stalin’s statue was in the public square; and it is from this existential presence of the enemy that a possibility of conflict turned into an actual combat. In other words, even though Arendt is not concerned with this theoretical background, even though violence remains outside the scope of Arendt’s discussion of politics, it nevertheless penetrates her analysis of the events during the Hungarian Revolution, and in her speculative views regarding the Mayflower Compact.

4. Conclusion

Given these two points of critique, Arendt’s insistence on dissociating herself from traditional political philosophy following Plato, the theme of escape that characterises Arendt’s endeavour in political theory that this chapter started with – i.e. concerns of prescription and order, as a domain of reflection, and a lack of acknowledgement of politics as an unpredictable domain – warrant questioning. It is certainly true that on these particular points Arendt’s theory of action is fundamentally different from other political philosophers. However, it is also true that despite this insistence, and at least at face value, Arendt would agree with Schmitt that the concept of the political could, though perhaps should not, be articulated as friend/enemy differentiation; and indeed that political differentiation is at the root of politics. Building on her analysis of the Hungarian Revolution and the Mayflower Compact, the third section has shown that Arendt’s theory of action cannot be viewed solely in terms of associative political theory, and that it retains the dissociative elements that are typically ascribed to the Schmittian trait of the concept of the political. The alleged differences in the positions of Arendt and Schmitt are thus at least questionable, and should be borne in mind for the second part of this thesis.

The first section of this chapter has given a brief account of Arendt’s ‘phenomenology of human activity’. I have presented and clarified the concepts that are central to her theory of action. Even though many commentators find these distinctions problematic or unnecessary, the purpose of clarifying these distinct phenomena of *vita activa* is deemed necessary in order to show why certain interpretations of Arendt need not run into any complications. Viewing phenomena as distinct from historic reality, Arendt overcomes most critiques directed towards her. The distinctions between labour, work and action – and the corresponding conditions life, world and plurality – are thus meant to present the conditions through which a ‘true’ form of politics can be discerned.

In the second section, Arendt's insistence on politics as freedom, as an initiation of something new, was presented. For her, political action is synonymous with an expression of freedom. As the basis of all political action, however, I showed that Arendt could not sufficiently distinguish between power and violence as both rely on the spontaneity and unpredictability of politics. Furthermore, this section has elucidated Arendt's views on speech as a fundamental human capacity that makes politics possible. It is through speech that human beings disclose their uniqueness and differentiate themselves from others. The importance of the Greek *agon* in particular argues for political differentiation being constitutive of our political being. Arendt's reliance on Ancient Greece may be problematic in some respects; it nevertheless shows her understanding of politics as contest. Although some parts of this section precede the discussion on Chantal Mouffe in Chapter 3, it is nevertheless clear that Arendt's attachment to plurality and agonism are indicative of the public space's being a space for contest between various positions. Despite the vast difference between the two, both agree on the fundamental aspect of strife being constitutive of political action.

Even though it would seem that Arendt's insistence on pre-theoretical conceptions of the political would avoid a concrete conception of the political, she nevertheless holds a particular view of the political as an authentic experience. She thus emphasises politics as a field of freedom. Arendt may not have been explicit in her views; however, her theory of action is construed as redefining the field of politics. She envisions an autonomous field in which action and speech are at the centre, where her phenomenological background aims to establish a different relation between subjects of these realms. In other words, and similar to Schmitt, Arendt still distinguishes between meaningful political action and routine bureaucracy that underlies the distinction between the political and politics. It is certainly the case that the relation between the political and politics differs in each scholar, nevertheless, there is an underlying presupposition of this relation in both Schmitt and Arendt; and an explicit formulation of the relation between the political and politics in Mouffe, who is the subject of the next chapter.

Opposition brings concord. Out of discord comes the fairest harmony.
– Heraclitus, fragment 8.

Chapter 3, Mouffe and the political

Introduction

Contemporary scholars working on Schmitt have variously interpreted his treatise for democratic theory. Among the most prominent contemporary views is Chantal Mouffe's agonistic model of democracy – what she on occasion terms 'agonistic pluralism'.⁸⁰ What is striking in her critical adoption of Schmitt's category of 'the political' for democratic theory is the acceptance of the premises of the political as incontestable. It is the denial of the political dimension in contemporary liberal hegemony, Mouffe claims, that is at the heart of most contemporary ills.⁸¹ The 'remedy' that Mouffe thus proposes, although in no specific terms, is an acknowledgement of the political dimension in order to create frontiers against the liberal hegemony. It is the claim that liberal hegemony defuses the political dimension, and thus recreates conflicts on other grounds (i.e. moral, economic, etc.), that her model of democratic theory aims to overcome. Fascinating

Mouffe alludes to the practicality of agonistic pluralism in her *On the Political*, where she claims that her "field of enquiry" is in "the current practices of democratic politics" (Mouffe, 2005b: 9). She makes a distinction between an ontological and an ontic dimension in the political domain, and claims that we are unable "to think in a political way" because of our "lack of understanding of 'the political' in its ontological dimension" (ibid.). The precision of the distinction between ontology and ontics in the political domain is not fully explained by Mouffe – she only mentions that she follows Heidegger's ontological difference.⁸² Mouffe's brief remark that "the ontic

⁸⁰ Next to Mouffe, another prominent scholar is Giorgio Agamben. Just as Mouffe, Agamben has a significant corpus of work directly dealing with Schmitt. In *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, Agamben engages with Schmitt's notion of sovereignty. As Agamben argues there, Schmitt's conception of sovereignty misrepresents the state of exception precisely as an exception. While Schmitt argued for the state of exception to reveal the sovereign, Agamben, in turn, observes the exception itself to the norm. For him, the state of exception is a condition where a law is *de facto* in force, but lacks substantive meaning. While Agamben's engagement with Schmitt is captivating, his reliance on Ancient Greeks – Aristotelian distinction between ζῶν, ἐν ζῆν, βίος in particular – and Roman law do not directly deal with the research aims of this thesis. Furthermore, even though his exposition does bear on it, Agamben does not develop a conception of the political.

⁸¹ It should be stressed at the outset that although one may agree with Mouffe's insistence on 'the political' as a neglected dimension through which 'politics' can be understood, perhaps even as the root cause of our contemporary political ills, this agreement with Mouffe would be based on reasons that are independent of the soundness of her theory.

⁸² To avoid any confusions, the claim made here is that Mouffe's distinction between ontological and ontic levels (the political and politics) cannot be founded on Schmitt. The claim presented here is that if we are to follow Schmitt, as Mouffe claims to be doing in numerous interviews, cf. for instance Mouffe (2013), then a number of significant issues arise regarding her views on associations and humanity, which are the subject of the second part the thesis. In this regard, the main issues with Mouffe is the reliance on Heidegger to accentuate the difference between the ontological and ontic levels of respectively the political and politics. There are frequent references to Heidegger by Mouffe (e.g.

Mouffe (2005b) and Mouffe (2002)); these do not elaborate on the distinction and the relation between the ontological and the ontic, or the political and politics, sufficiently. The particular interest of this thesis, which is the first aim, is precisely what the relation between the two concepts is, and thus not only what they might suggest individually. So while it is undeniable that there is merit in advancing a view of the political as ontological antagonisms, and this is indeed the subject of the first section of this Chapter, what is lacking in Mouffe is precisely what the *relation* is between her view of the political and politics.

Furthermore, it should be emphasised that Mouffe's presentation of the political as an ontological condition is thoroughly philosophical and is not meant in a sense of ordinary language. Together with Laclau, she articulates the political antagonisms as an attempt to give order to being: "ontological question asks how entities have to be, so that the objectivity of a particular field is possible" (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001: x). The complication is precisely in what the relation of these ontological questions is to ontics. In *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, Laclau and Mouffe claim that "any substantial change in the *ontic* content of a field of research leads also to a new *ontological* paradigm" (ibid.). As shown in the introduction to this thesis, this is also Heidegger's view of the relation between ontology and ontics – there is as such no disagreement with this reading. However, the claim presented in this thesis is that Mouffe is not sufficiently clear on this relation in any of her subsequent work; and that when it does become clear, it is viewed as the ontological antagonism being drawn into the ontic field of politics. This unsatisfactory explanation is, moreover, at odds with the position put forward in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*. Particularly in *On the Political* the political antagonisms are presented as "ever present" and "ineradicable" (2005b: 3, 10, 15, 16, 17, 19, 24, 30, 119). This does not conform the previously understood relation between ontology and ontics in HSS – that changes on the ontic level are the ones that lead to new ontological paradigms, and not that the ontological level conditions the practices on the ontic level. Cf. further Ibrahimy (2014).

In anticipation of disagreement on this reading, cf. the following passage by Mouffe:

For instance to make this distinction suggests a difference between two types of approach: political science which deals with the empirical field of 'politics', and political theory which is the domain of philosophers who enquire not about facts of 'politics' but about the essence of 'the political'. If we wanted to express such a distinction in a philosophical way, we could, borrowing the vocabulary of Heidegger, say that politics refers to the 'ontic' level while 'the political' has to do with the 'ontological' one. This means that the ontic has to do with the manifold practices of conventional politics, while the ontological concerns the very way in which society is instituted.

But this still leaves the possibility of considerable disagreement about what constitutes 'the political'. Some theorists such as Hannah Arendt envisage the political as a space of freedom and public deliberation, while others see it as a space of power, conflict and antagonism. My understanding of 'the political' clearly belongs to the second perspective. More precisely this is how I distinguish between 'the political' and 'politics': by 'the political' I mean the dimension of antagonism which I take to be constitutive of human societies, while by 'politics' I mean the set of practices and institutions through which an order is created, organizing human coexistence in the context of conflictuality provided by the political (8-9).

What is meant by the political is set under the framework, 'borrowing the vocabulary of', Heidegger – that is, the political is an ontological level, and politics is an ontic level. This is not problematic, as long as Mouffe means that the field of ontology is always tainted by the ontic level, because that is what it is for Heidegger. However, Mouffe reverses this process – for her it is the political that taints politics, not vice versa. She states that ontology/the political is how the society is instituted, while ontics/politics is a set of manifold practices to deal with the way it is instituted – i.e. to deal with the ontological antagonisms (later she speaks of politics to be 'sublimation' of the ontological antagonisms). In the second paragraph, the political is the antagonistic dimension that is *constitutive* of societies, while politics is how that antagonistic dimension is dealt with – i.e. how order is created given that antagonism is constitutive. As should become clear this citation cannot be reconciled with the previous one from HSS or indeed with Heidegger's view of the relation between ontology and ontics. In a very reductionist form, Mouffe reverses the direction between ontology and ontics in later publications; which in turn, while creating a novel conception of the political, also leads to theoretical complications.

has to do with the manifold practices of conventional politics, while the ontological concerns the very way in which society is instituted” is not sufficiently clear (2005b: 8-9; 2002: 7).

The way the term ontology is treated in this chapter is in its loose formulation as an anthropological relation between beings that carries with it a dimension of conflict. In this sense, several alternative terms may be applicable: ‘existential’ or ‘meta-historical’, referring to an inherent trait in ‘human nature’. The preference of the term ‘ontology’ is due to Mouffe’s articulation of the political as “our ontological condition” (2005b: 16). Thus, on the ontological level stand the purely antagonistic relations, which are sublimated in politics by an appeal to other domains. Nevertheless, the ontological dimension is never fully realisable or even articulable. Quite the contrary is the case following the reliance on Heidegger’s ontological difference. As Marchart points out, the “ontological level cannot be accessed immediately, for this would require envisaging it as solid ground . . . the ontological level is irremediably separated from the ontic level” (Marchart, 2007: 24). Envisaging the political as a solid ground would in fact disrupt Mouffe’s efforts as such, as the various hegemonic practices rely on the lack of any solid grounds.

As discussed in the first section of this chapter, Mouffe’s theoretical alternative to contemporary liberal democratic theory should be treated as a political decision on the primacy of antagonism. In most ways it follows a particular reading of Schmitt as emphasising the political as ineradicable antagonisms; for, as a political decision, it remains “an intervention from the ontic side of politics into the depoliticised field of [theory]” (171). As we saw with both Schmitt and Arendt, a conception of the political is always a position of disrupting contemporary political practice – it is an appeal to ‘true’ or ‘real’ politics. In this sense, Mouffe certainly conforms to Schmitt’s framework of the concept of the political. However, the reliance on Schmitt is not fully justifiable, and the adaptation of his views demands a closer inspection of the agonistic model of democracy as an alternative to the prevailing liberal democracy. Thus, sections 2 and 3 explore Mouffe’s agonistic model by articulating the shortcomings of liberal democracy and deliberative democracy in particular. My concern is with the viability of an ‘alternative strategy’ that Mouffe proposes in the form of agonistic politics. It is my view that even though Mouffe’s alternative strategy is appealing, it is theoretically unsound and falls short on a number of issues. These shortcomings are discussed in the final section, together with Mouffe’s problematic appeal to the ideas of Wittgenstein.

1. Primacy of antagonism and hegemony

Mouffe’s analysis of democracies is based on two closely related presuppositions: (1) the grounding of politics as first philosophy and (2) Lefort’s thesis of democracy as an empty place. The first presupposition motivates Mouffe’s emphasis on antagonism, and the second directs us towards her conception of hegemony. Both presuppositions are essential to agonistic pluralism as well as to our understanding of her transformation of Schmitt’s conception of the political; it is therefore essential to clarify these conceptions in detail.

Politics as first philosophy

Starting with the grounding of politics as first philosophy, together with Laclau in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, Mouffe asserts that all distinctions between groups are subject to political discourses and cannot be based on an objective material reality. To be sure, Laclau and Mouffe do not assert that there is no reality external or independent from human endeavours, but rather that any reality is given through an interpretation in discourse:⁸³

The fact that every object is constituted as an object of discourse has nothing to do with whether there is a world external to thought . . . An earthquake or the falling of a brick is an event that certainly exists, in the sense that it occurs here and now, independently of my will. But whether their specificity as objects is constructed in terms of ‘natural phenomena’ or ‘expressions of the wrath of God’, depends upon the structuring of a discursive field (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001: 108).

In other words, what Laclau and Mouffe deny is not that certain phenomena “exist externally to our thought”; but rather the assertion that these phenomena could constitute themselves wholly “outside any discursive conditions” (ibid.). Their aim is, therefore, to regard political discourse as the primary discursive possibility. In a Schmittian idiom, this would mean that these phenomena could later be constituted as religious, economic, moral, etc. discourses, but their interpretation/understanding would ultimately depend on the constitution of the political field or political decision. In this sense, the ontology presented by Laclau and Mouffe assigns politics – as a field of practice *and* theory – the role of *prima filosofia* (first philosophy); whereas for liberal theorists that role is reserved for law – as something standing above and beyond political dispute or independent of power relations (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001: xiii; Mouffe, 2005b: 33). First philosophy, according to Laclau and Mouffe, refers to political discourse as grounding all other discourses.⁸⁴

As Marchart notes, however, granting politics the role of first philosophy is not without problem: this move “will necessarily be haunted by the spectre of its own eventual impossibility” (Marchart, 2007: 9, 163). Grounding a field as first philosophy is impossible because the act of grounding remains within the discursive field.⁸⁵ Mouffe and Laclau’s position on the lack of objective material reality captures the latter point succinctly. The act of grounding by and of itself is impossible outside of the discursive field and therefore lacks the objectivity that is desired in finding an independent basis. That is to say, in order to accept politics as first philosophy, one has to acknowledge its necessary limit as a ground without abandoning the search for

⁸³ This is, furthermore, their point of critique towards Marx, and the reason why they call themselves *post-Marxists*: that there is no reality prior to discourse is a direct critique of Marx’ reliance on sub- / superstructure. As Laclau and Mouffe would probably posit, such a reliance is already dependent on a political discourse. This is notably also their critique towards contemporary Marxists’ ‘economism’.

⁸⁴ In order to avoid confusion, Laclau and Mouffe do not refer to the Aristotelian view of metaphysics as first philosophy, as a study of ‘being qua being’, nor do they have Aristotle’s ‘first causes’ in mind. Instead, as I will show below, their conviction seems to stem as a counter to the contemporary hegemony of liberal discourse that altogether disposes of group politics. In this regard, such notions as ‘individuality’ in the political domain already function according to political discourse with an aim to dispel the notion of groups. An example of this tendency is displayed in the 1990s emphasis on the import of personal preferences that have political effects, e.g. in consumer goods or cultural activities – from buying ‘sweatshop’ clothing to visiting the British Museum or the Louvre.

⁸⁵ It is also impossible because no ground can maintain the condition of grounding. Cf. fn. 119.

a ground, which is understood as “both impossible and indispensable” (ibid.). For this reason, as Marchart points out, the post-foundationalist view that Laclau and Mouffe uphold is that the impossibility of a first philosophy, “in the sense of a foundational discourse”, should not impede “the task of philosophically reflecting upon the very dimension of grounding – even as no philosophy will ever find, or found, an ultimate ground” (9).

In practical terms, this amounts to what Slavoj Žižek points out as an objection to contemporary neo-liberal hegemony. If grounding is an impossible act, then the liberal point of reference to law (in its many guises) cannot be maintained: “even when we do not mention the ‘end of history’, do we not convey the same message when we claim that we are entering a ‘post-ideological’ pragmatic era, which is another way of claiming that we are entering a post-political order in which the only legitimate conflicts are ethnic/cultural conflicts” (Žižek, 2008: 7). That is to say, the liberal hegemony proclaims its superiority by assuming a “‘natural’ social regime; we still implicitly conceive of conflicts in Third World countries as a subspecies of natural catastrophes,⁸⁶ as outbursts of quasi-natural violent passions, or as conflicts based on fanatical identification with ethnic roots (and what is ‘ethnic’ here again if not a code word for nature?)” (ibid.). Interestingly, the very point of reference to the Third World countries maintains the proclamation of superiority of the neo-liberal hegemony, rather than viewing the matters politically.⁸⁷

According to Mouffe, a proclamation of a ‘post-ideological’ era thus remains a futile and insincere statement, and it is from this position that her view on politics as first philosophy can be understood. “What defines the post-political perspective is the claim that we have entered a new era where . . . antagonism has disappeared. And this is why it can put in jeopardy the future of democratic politics” (Mouffe, 2005b: 7). That there is no objective material reality without a political mediation is itself a political decision to discredit the liberal hegemony. Her aim is not to reinstate a version of what Nietzsche discredited as Platonic dual world or Kantian ‘thing-in-itself’;⁸⁸ Mouffe does not aim at the ‘truth’ of things, but rather at how the discursive field produces such ‘truths’. Again, in Schmittian idiom, her aim is not to identify

⁸⁶ Note the similarity between relief ‘quests’ on the media after the grand natural catastrophes (earthquakes, hurricanes, etc.) and after the so-called ‘new wars’ (Darfur, Rwanda, Somalia, etc.) espoused by Mary Kaldor (2010), cf. also Berdal (2003), S. N. Kalyvas (2001), Münkler (2005), Newman (2004).

⁸⁷ A good contemporary example of this is the EU strategy to impose conditions on aid. The claim is that only by accommodating certain political conditions (i.e. ‘political conditionality’ or a ‘good governance’ clause – summarised by Zanger as “respect for human rights, popular participation in the political process, observation of the rule of law, market-friendly approach to economic development and the recipient government’s commitment to development, including low military expenditure” (Zanger, 2000: 294)) that EU states will provide aid to Third World countries. Although most of the relevant literature points to the lack of control on conditionality and prevalence to power politics – i.e. resort to the realist paradigm of ‘interest’ – what the same literature on political conditionality also shows is the acceptance of these criteria as immutable. It is not surprising that post-Cold War discourse focuses on economic reconstruction and displaces the legitimacy of intervention as something of the past.

⁸⁸ For instance, fragment §10[202] from the *Late Notebooks*: “The ‘thing-in-itself’ [is] absurd. If I think away all the relationships, all the ‘qualities’, all the ‘activities’ of a thing, then the thing does *not* remain behind: because thingness was only a *fiction added* by us”; but also and especially Nietzsche’s *On Truth and Lying in a Non-Moral Sense* (§1).

various groups in society and point out their characteristics, but rather to point out the antagonistic relation that their multiplicity creates. With this in mind, Mouffe can interpret the Schmittian paradigm in the following terms: “antagonism . . . is an ever present possibility; the political belongs to our ontological condition” (16).

The ontological condition of antagonism was recognised by Mouffe prior to treating Schmitt’s work in any detail.⁸⁹ Her emphasis on antagonism follows from granting politics the role of first philosophy, while its roots are to be found in an appreciation of Machiavelli. Machiavelli is understood as someone who initiated a new political discourse. Prior to him, the classical texts on ‘politics’ only reflected “on the essence of a good regime or the art of government”, characteristically following a commentary on Plato or Aristotle (Erfani, 2008: 202). For Machiavelli discourse “aims at politics as such, circumscribing its domain and detaching politics from metaphysics and theology” (ibid.). Mouffe’s reliance on Machiavelli posits a society of persistent antagonistic relations: “In each city are found these two different desires [umori] . . . the man of the people hates being ordered and oppressed by those greater than he. And the great like to order and oppress the people” (Mouffe, 2005b: 7; Machiavelli, 1882: 33). Mouffe’s interest is not in the relationship of oppression, but specifically in the antagonism itself; she is not interested in “the description of antagonisms and their original causes”, but in the “type of relation among objects” that antagonism supposes (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001: 122). In other words, her interest departs from the Marxist notion of class struggle and imposes on the struggle an already present political differentiation, the roots of which cannot be reduced to a particular cause.⁹⁰ The Machiavellian notion of politics presents us with an ‘ineradicable antagonism’ that Mouffe would later ascribe to Schmitt’s notion of the political.

Mouffe thus stresses a view of society that is based on antagonism rather than agreement – a view that rejects the Aristotelian unity of politics and ethics, and emphasises instead “the central role of conflict in the preservation of liberty” (Mouffe, 1993: 36, 57). Together with Laclau, she posits that our understanding of society as a form of ‘general will’ or ‘sense of commonality’ (as a fixity of its identity) has to be repudiated. Instead, as the citation of Machiavelli above shows, society is necessarily fragmented; what Laclau and Mouffe add is that this fragmentation is not reconcilable and that it should be preserved.⁹¹ Furthermore, the fragmentation of society is not a mere fact but relies on the relation between the groups. This relation is antagonistic – that is, it does not simply rely on a relationship of oppression, but relies on discourse that is inherent to political groupings. As Lefort observes with reference to

⁸⁹ Prior to her publication of *The Return of the Political* (1993) there is, to my knowledge, no mention of Schmitt while antagonism already plays a dominant role in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (1985).

⁹⁰ Laclau and Mouffe rely on the notion of ‘overdetermination’ in its “original Althusserian formulation . . . a break with orthodox essentialism not through the logical disaggregation of its categories – with a resultant fixing of the identity of the disaggregated elements – but through the critique of every type of fixity, through an affirmation of the incomplete, open and politically negotiable character of every identity” (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001: 104); cf. further Lewis (2005).

⁹¹ Lefort, to whom I will turn briefly, posits a similar claim in that reconciling the fragmentation leads to totalitarianism.

Machiavelli, “at the origin of the power of the Prince . . . is class struggle” (Lefort in Erfani, 2008: 205).⁹²

The fragmentation of society thus leads to the view that there is no objectively given ‘society’ – rather, the social belongs to discursive practices through which various identities, or subjectivities, are created. What Mouffe means is that the social is the hegemonic order in which agents interact and through which their identities are formed. In this sense, the political is where identities eventually and necessarily clash. To defend the plausibility of this view, Mouffe utilises her conception of hegemony as an articulation of “the dimension of undecidability . . . that every society is the product of a series of practices attempting to establish order in a context of contingency” (Mouffe, 2005b: 17). Citing Laclau, she states that “The two central features of a hegemonic intervention are, in this sense, the ‘contingent’ character of the hegemonic articulations and their ‘constitutive’ character, in the sense that they institute social relations in a primary sense, not depending on any a priori social rationality” (Laclau in Mouffe, 2005b: 17). The social is thus a realm of “sedimented practices” – that is, a realm that conceals the contingency of actions and obscures the conceptions upon which these actions are based. In simple terms, the social is non-calculable, non-dialectical, unpredictable and lacks any fixity or ground.

Lefort and democracy as an empty place

Mouffe’s understanding of democracies closely follows Claude Lefort’s, and it is now time to address the second presupposition in Mouffe’s analysis: democracy as an empty place. The irreconcilability of the fragmentation of society discussed above points towards the superiority of democracy in one way – newness. That is, Lefort’s point with the famed phrase democracy as an ‘empty place’ is exactly that the struggles must be renewed continuously. Where in the ‘classical age’ – to use Foucault’s terminology⁹³ – the political logic relied on theology, on a sense of unity of power being incorporated in the sovereign who was also the direct representative of God, this logic of reliance disappears with the ‘democratic invention’. The locus of power can no longer be located in a specific person or their respective office/institution. The seat of power, quite literally, becomes an empty place precisely because there is no longer a seat. The consequence of this is not that there is no longer a representative who ‘possesses’ power, or from whom laws are generated – even in democratic societies the locus of power is occupied, however temporarily and contestably, “otherwise you would not have a political order” (Mouffe in Decreus & Lievens, 2011: 2) – rather, sovereignty is no longer an object permanently exposed to the public view. There is, as a result, no absolute foundation for power, knowledge, or law; social relations lose foundational meaning precisely because the discourse of the sovereign disappears. The result, in short, is that with the democratic invention

⁹² Note here the implicit critique of Marx; for what Lefort in fact observes is that political fragmentation is prior to the economic one, class struggle is prior to the relations of production. This is precisely why Laclau and Mouffe stress on ‘the type of relation’ over ‘descriptions and original causes of antagonism’.

⁹³ For Foucault, and in France more generally, the Classical Age is the period from Descartes until Kant; Foucault uses this terminology in almost every one of his publications, e.g. Foucault (1995).

“the possibility is opened up of an unending process of questioning” (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001: 186):⁹⁴

no law which can be fixed, whose dictates are not subject to contest, or whose foundations cannot be called into question; in sum, no representation of a centre of society: unity is no longer able to erase social division (Lefort in Laclau & Mouffe, 2001: 186-187).

Lefort emphasises the continuity of the struggle in democracy to ensure the emptiness of the space – the moment that space is filled, we are no longer in a democratic state. As mentioned previously, Laclau and Mouffe equally emphasise the fragmentation of society. Fragmentation is to be preserved in order to maintain the democratic characteristic of society, while attempts to reconcile differences fully end in a totalitarian unity. In this sense, democracy as an empty place – what Lefort calls ‘democratic invention’ – is equated with the fragmentation of society. “The reference to a transcendent guarantor disappears, and with it the representation of the substantial unity of society” (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001: 186). What we have to understand from Lefort’s position, therefore, is the fragility of the democratic invention and especially its contingency in a specific time and space. Here, Machiavelli’s insight is of great importance: the way Lefort and Mouffe approach the two humours (*umori*) is by capturing the notion of antagonism prior to a political discourse that gives it a meaning. In this sense, antagonisms may indeed be present in all societies, and to some extent antagonism could be differentiated from class struggle, relations of oppression, etc.

However, there is a certain level of deviation from Lefort’s analysis in Laclau and Mouffe’s work. While the former presents a particular analysis of democracies, the latter attribute that analysis to the hegemonic struggles. Notably, the continuous renewal of struggles suggests Laclau and Mouffe’s ‘strategy’ for the left to counter the ‘post-ideological’ era of liberalism. They thus apply Lefort’s thesis of democracy as an empty place to the global hegemonic struggles. Laclau and Mouffe assume that the hegemonic struggle follows a similar logic as the internal fragmentation of societies. In their view, collective struggles are possible due to the “external discourse which impedes the stabilization” of the contemporary hegemonic articulation (159). However, this is not necessarily the case; the symbolic order⁹⁵ through which

⁹⁴ Lefort’s analysis here is in fact an extension of the Nietzschean ‘death of god’ onto the political field. Nietzsche’s main focus with the famed aphorisms §125 of *The Gay Science* (The Madman), despite its mocking style of Diogenes, is precisely the lack of fixity, ‘an unending process of questioning’: “But how did we do this? How were we able to drink up the sea? Who gave us the sponge to wipe away the entire horizon? What were we doing when we unchained this earth from its sun? Where is it moving to now? Where are we moving to? Away from all suns? Are we not continually falling? And backwards, sideways, forwards, in all directions? Is there still an up and a down? Aren’t we straying as though through an infinite nothing? Isn’t empty space breathing at us? Hasn’t it got colder? Isn’t night and more night coming again and again? Don’t lanterns have to be lit in the morning? Do we still hear nothing of the noise of the grave-diggers who are burying God? Do we still smell nothing of the divine decomposition?”

⁹⁵ Mouffe is not clear on what the symbolic order is. The ‘clearest’ formulation appears in an interview: “You cannot really distinguish between what is within the symbolic order and the symbolic order itself. The symbolic order, which is always a hegemonic order, is a specific articulation of practices around certain nodal points. These nodal points structure the conflicts within the symbolic order. There are no struggles that fall ‘inside’ or ‘outside’ the symbolic order. What hegemonic struggles try to do is to disarticulate and rearticulate those practices and to establish different nodal points” (Deceus &

identities are formed is substantially different from global politics. That is to say, the global hegemonic struggle cannot be reduced to the symbolic order. The assumption that global struggles are democratically instituted – i.e. that the spaces of power are not occupied – is dangerously naïve. It is certainly the case that these positions are not permanent, and indeed that institutions occupying those positions change over time; it is nevertheless implausible to take Lefort’s democracy as ‘an empty place’ to apply to global struggles.⁹⁶ As mentioned before, “the empty place of power is always occupied” (Mouffe in Decreus & Lievens, 2011: 2), otherwise we cannot speak of a political order. Conflating the hegemonic struggles with democracy as an empty place disregards the lack of possibilities to confront the global adversaries.⁹⁷

In this regard, the relation between the Machiavellian ‘humours’ is not necessarily antagonistic, or at least, not simplistically antagonistic. Laclau and Mouffe present the antagonistic relation as the necessary presence of a discourse that is entangled with the identity of a group – “the presence of the ‘Other’ prevents me from being totally me” (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001: 125); and that precisely for the reason that the ‘Other’s’ discourse imposes itself on my being. The presence of the discourse, however, is not simply a presence imposed by the Other. As Žižek notes:

every assertion of a class position is thoroughly differential/dialogical: not only in the sense that each position asserts itself through the contrast to the opposite position, but also – and even primarily – in the sense that the assertion of position A always-already functions in a minimally reflexive way . . . it answers the possible reproach of B (its opposite) in advance by displacing/blurring the gap that separates it from B (Žižek, 2008: 95).

What we observe here is not only a necessarily antagonistic relation between the two groupings, but an addition of reflexivity to discourse. The identity of a group is certainly entangled with the discourse of the Other, but unlike Laclau and Mouffe posit, the conditions for antagonism are not set within the parameters of the Other’s discourse; rather, discourse is already present in the antagonistic relation – it thus presents the conditions of antagonisms and is not only its result. What Laclau and Mouffe fail to recognise is that the hegemonic struggle is mediated by a sovereign entity; and indeed, that this mediation was recognised by Machiavelli to be in the position of the Prince. The prince ‘always-already’ occupies the empty place; and especially so, because it is in his role as the mediator that conditions of antagonism arise. Identification of the symbolic order with the hegemonic struggle obstructs the recognition of a Prince as a mediator – a sovereign who decides whether the Other is an enemy. In Mouffe’s earlier terminology, it is not antagonism that belongs to our

Lievens, 2011: 5). I use ‘symbolic order’ as an expression that designates the meaning of social relations and that it is constituted by social interactions.

⁹⁶ In the terminology of Laclau and Mouffe, these struggles are not simply antagonistic but constitute a ‘real opposition’ – i.e. they are determinable, definable and reducible to particular instances. The distinction is between ‘real opposition’, ‘contradiction’ and ‘antagonism’: unlike real opposition (“an *objective* relation . . . among things”) and contradiction (“an equally definable relation among concepts”) antagonism reveals the limits of objectivity – precisely because the presence of the ‘Other’ prevents an identity that is closed-off from discursive practices; in this sense antagonism also reveals the limits of objectivity. Cf. further Laclau and Mouffe (2001: 125-127). The reason I call Laclau and Mouffe’s position ‘implausible’ is precisely because, at least in global struggles, the ‘empty place’ has been occupied for over half a century by the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council.

⁹⁷ Cf. further Rummens (2009), in particular pp. 382-385.

ontological condition; rather, it is the role of the sovereign as he who decides on antagonism that is the ontological condition of conflictual politics.

With a reference to the sovereign who decides on antagonisms, we are necessarily led into Schmitt's notion of the state of exception. Schmitt's position vis-à-vis the prince is exactly that the prince decides on whether there are two *umori* or not – and thus also whether a conflict is to ensue or not. The sovereign decides whether it is time for an intervention – a displacement of the fragmentation of the society for a unity under the sovereign rule, or a recourse to a 'democratic' struggle, which is nevertheless mediated by his presence.⁹⁸ It is certainly the case that Mouffe would not accept mediation of antagonisms by a sovereign entity; her analysis, however, should acknowledge that placing antagonisms at the foreground of political differentiation cannot escape the notion of conflict that in contemporary global struggles is mediated by an 'occupied place'. For the fragmentation of the society to take shape through various discourses, the position of the prince needs to be taken into account and not left beside them. To put it differently, democratic discourse entails a certain undemocratic starting point – a point from which the *decision* on democracy is made; and furthermore this decision is made continuously within democratic states. Neglecting the presence of such decisions stands in the way of recognising the hegemonic struggles.

Sovereign decision in liberalism

Even though Laclau and Mouffe exclude the presence of sovereign decision in their model, they nevertheless expose a similar problematic in liberalism. We saw previously that the ontology presented by Laclau and Mouffe assigns politics the role of *prima filosofia*; whereas for liberal theorists that role is reserved for law. For the latter, law stands above and beyond political dispute and is independent of power relations (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001: xiii; Mouffe, 2005b: 33). Law is, therefore, the primary guise to which liberal institutions appeal in their consumption of 'nature'. This approach is already discernible in Hobbes – "the founder of liberalism" (Strauss, 1965: 182; 2007: 107) – but is equally applicable to later liberals. Briefly expanding on the function of law and the role of the sovereign in Hobbes will capture the reasons why Laclau and Mouffe turn to politics as first philosophy, and why they rely on democratic theory.

Hobbes's 'state of nature' thought-experiment already provides the initial suspicions concerning the lack of foundations. It should not be forgotten that the 'state of nature' is a derivative attributed to Hobbes for "the natural condition of mankind" – that is, "the time [when] men live without a common power to keep them all in awe"; or the more common citation of state of nature being characterised as "continual fear, and danger of violent death; and the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short"

⁹⁸ Incidentally, this is also Marx's position when questioning the king of Prussia for attributing the political role to religion – where the king "explains [pauperism] in terms of the *unchristian feelings of the rich*" (Marx, 1844). Marx claims that the decision to ascribe a social role to politics is indeed problematic, for it was the decision of the prince, literally, to make political matters social, and social matters political. And thus indeed, the need for a revolution is not only an economic 'adjustment', but a thorough *political* disruption.

(Hobbes, 1998: 82, 84). However, on a different occasion Hobbes delineates the ‘state of nature’ as a “dissolute condition of masterless men, without subjection to laws” (122). It is certainly the case that Hobbes draws the same conclusion from each of the formulations of the state of nature – the need for a sovereign entity. Nevertheless, the former two formulations indicate the fear of men that leads to ‘subjecting’ themselves to the sovereign, whereas in the latter formulation Hobbes lays a definite stress on law and order, the dominant sphere contributing to the relationship between authority and peace. The latter formulation thus forms an integral part of the liberal tradition by way of emphasising law as derived from nature; while the former formulations indicate an enactment of law by a sovereign decision.⁹⁹

It is this latter formulation – of law as derived from nature – that is of interest to Laclau and Mouffe’s critique of liberalism, which furthermore consists of a “double movement”: law no longer presents itself as a division between the sovereign and the society; and law presents itself in the manner that no internal division of society is discernible. They thus join Lefort’s critique of liberalism by stipulating that the ‘democratic invention’ has brought an end to law as the starting position of social interactions. “There are no longer ultimate criteria of the law . . . which are separate from power” (Lefort in Laclau & Mouffe, 2001: 187). That is to say, the ground upon which the liberal tradition bases laws – i.e. nature – does not stand separately from the inherently political struggles of society. By postulating laws as ‘metaphysically’ present, an inherently divided political society is denied its own logical explication.

Lefort’s emphasis on democracy as an empty place thus points out that in the ‘classical age’ the sovereign was identified with the source of law by being identical to nature. The empty place of power in a democratic state should preclude a permanent sovereign imposition; democracy thus coincides with the collapse of a transcendent justification of sovereignty.¹⁰⁰ Furthermore, in democratic states, the sovereign not only enacts the law, but the very impossibility of social cohesion establishes the guarantee of the empty place. The fragmentation of society precludes the occupation of the place on grounds of unity; it thus also leads to continuous contest over the place of power (and the law). The crucial difference with the liberal tradition is that the latter cannot give an answer to how metaphysical laws are to be guaranteed without already occupying the place of power. Liberalism must resort either to sovereign imposition that stands above the law, or to a metaphysical presence – both of which are accepted as beyond political struggles.¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ In principle, the sovereign would stand above the law and would thus be enacting two laws, one for the people and one for himself. It is not surprising that recent critique of Hobbes’s natural laws is that it would seem that “people have never really exited the fearsome state of nature” (Lloyd & Sreedhar, 2014).

¹⁰⁰ The occupation of the place thus poses a problem not only for a democratic theory (in the form of totalitarianism), but for the concept of the political as a friend/enemy differentiation as well. Schmitt’s emphasis on a decision of the sovereign (and his legal points on interpretation of the law) captures the problem. His resort to decisionism is thus not at all surprising because within this paradigm there is no possibility of law without imposition by a sovereign occupation of the place of power.

¹⁰¹ It is important to note that Lefort, and Laclau and Mouffe, find sovereign imposition to accentuate the problem of totalitarianism. For them, occupation of the ‘empty place’ is totalitarian. However, what they overlook is that the problem is not that the place is occupied, and thereby a unity of the people, or the people and the sovereign, is reached. The fundamental problematic is that *defence* of the empty

2. Limits of liberalism and agonistic pluralism

With the preceding analysis in mind, and prior to addressing the specificities of Mouffe's model, her views should be contextualised in the contemporary debates in democratic theory. Mouffe's oeuvre can be characterised, as should become clear, as a resistance towards the contemporary domination of the liberal ideology; but specifically towards models of democracy based on solutions through consensus – in short, models of deliberative democracy.¹⁰² She is not against deliberation as a practice within the political arena, however, but only seeks acknowledgement of the limits of deliberation as well as dangers of exclusively relying on deliberation. Mouffe's objection is twofold: deliberation presupposes an element of agreement, a consensus that could potentially be reached; and deliberation as *the* practice, as the only viable solution to political discourse and political activity in democratic states. She thus acknowledges deliberation and consensus as one among many ways to subvert violence and wishes to propose another way. But Mouffe also seeks to establish that next to occasionally subverting violence, deliberation also undermines itself through closing off the possibilities of final distinctions – the *politically* meaningful distinctions – which cannot and do not rely on rationality, but rather on passions.¹⁰³ In doing so, deliberative democracy reproduces and even exacerbates the antagonistic relations by displacing the political dimension and substituting it with moral or other categories. She thus emphasises that “The antagonistic dimension is always present, it is a real confrontation” (Mouffe, 2005b: 21). Her proposal to view democracies through an agonistic perspective is meant to remedy this crucial shortcoming of deliberation and consensus.

In this light, while studying proponents of the ‘third way’ – Anthony Giddens or Ulrich Beck in particular – she correctly observes that they overlook Schmitt's conception of the political, which is at the root of the recent waves of xenophobia and terrorism. By not acknowledging antagonisms as results of political differentiation, and instead emphasising the ever-present possibility of consensus, disregarding

place is already a totalitarian defence. They overlook specifically that the guarantor of the emptiness of the place already assumes a role of unity – specifically, the unity against the occupation of the place of power. Mouffe's view that “the reference to a transcendent guarantor disappears” would be factually incorrect if we were to accept that the preservation of the place as empty already presupposes a (transcendent) guarantor/protector – and indeed, it does so through a reliance on law. The “*dissolution of the markers of certainty*” in Lefort leads to an experience of “fundamental indeterminacy as to the basis of power, law and knowledge” and to the indeterminacy of “the basis of relations between *self* and *other*, at every level of social life” (Lefort, 1988: 19). It is outside the scope of this thesis to develop this position in detail, but I am of the opinion that the guarantee of the emptiness of the place and its totalitarian pretext to unity is precisely in this relation between the self and the other – at every level of social life, the other not only guarantees that my totalitarian tendencies are not realised, but also that the place remains empty and thus reproduces the relations of power by assuming to be the representative of a unity against the occupation of the place. It is this relation that is sovereign; and indeed, the same kind of sovereign that sets the conditions of antagonism discussed above.

¹⁰² There are, naturally, fundamental differences between various models; however, in their treatment, Mouffe's critique is not altogether different to for instance Rawls's or Habermas's. Indeed, her critique is of consensus and deliberation as the key components in contemporary democratic theory, rather than specific scholars/theorists.

¹⁰³ It should be noted that Mouffe distinguishes between passions and emotions, of which the latter is “attached to individuals” while the former deals with collective identities that Mouffe takes to be constitutive of politics (Mouffe, 2014: 149).

varieties of positions, and accepting the fixity of identities – these sociologists only further overshadow the understanding of what is at the root of these dangers. Mouffe's view is that consensus-driven politics does not and cannot solve most of these problems. She is thus not arguing against consensus-driven politics as such; on the contrary, she accepts consensus subject to a recognition of its limits: consensus cannot resolve all the perils of the world, and should not be treated as if it can (3-4). In particular, Rummens detects three levels where, according to Mouffe, consensual practice falls short: 1) "because of its *individualistic* framework . . . consensualism lacks the conceptual means to understand politics as a power struggle between collective identities"; 2) "as a result of its *rationalistic* premises", it fails to acknowledge that "political oppositions cannot be resolved by rational means"; and 3) "because of its *universalistic* aspirations, consensualism is unwilling to recognize that our social order is not organized on the basis of universal rational or moral principles" (Rummens, 2009: 377).

Mouffe's critique of consensus-driven politics is informed by her understanding of democracy as described in the previous section. The 'democratic invention' brings with it a conception of society as necessarily fragmented: "The crucial difference resides in the acceptance of *pluralism*" (Mouffe, 2000: 18). By pluralism Mouffe means the dissolution of fixity – what Lefort calls 'dissolution of the markers of certainty' – which in turn continuously reshapes "the symbolic ordering of social relations" (ibid.). Mouffe thus claims that pluralism is not merely a fact (as it is for Rawls), but that the symbolic order is itself a question of power relations: "In coming to terms with pluralism, what is really at stake is power and antagonism and their ineradicable character" (18-19, 21). It is through this view of liberalism that Mouffe asserts that contemporary political theory has greatly misunderstood what is truly at stake in the debate on democratic theory. In her view, contemporary democratic theory is still dominated by claims to "objectivism and essentialism" (21). These categories fail to acknowledge "that any social objectivity is ultimately political and has to show the traces of the acts of exclusion which govern its constitution" – i.e. that every objective reality is constituted through acts of power (ibid.).

It is on this understanding that Mouffe turns towards Schmitt's conception of the political, because his conception is able to acknowledge the 'acts of exclusion' – i.e. because for Schmitt the categories of the political are friend and enemy. Mouffe's alternative to consensus-driven politics 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" (2005b: 3, 20). She argues that when we are constrained 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" (5).

The adversarial model thus replaces the antagonistic mode (i.e. the Schmittian paradigm) in a one significant way. Mouffe proposes to transform the 'friend/enemy differentiation' into the 'we/they opposition' – that is, a transformation from antagonistic combat to agonist conflict (1999b: 5; 2005b: 19-21). "Conflict, in order to be accepted as legitimate, 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” (2005b: 20). However, in order to remain political, this bond cannot be too strong and Mouffe continuously stresses the possibility of antagonism. Announcing that she will work ‘with Schmitt against Schmitt’ (1993: 2; 2005b: 14), she claims 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” (1993: 7; 2005b: 18). She thus upholds the aspect of the political as antagonistic – as “a real confrontation” (2005b: 52) – but rejects Schmitt’s insistence on the homogeneity of the demos.¹⁰⁴ In a way, she proposes a middle ground between the Schmittian paradigm of antagonism, and the liberal opposition to that paradigm: “taming” (ibid.). 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” (ibid.). The adversarial model, in this regard, is a strategy between the two extremes; and it is the task of democracy to accommodate this strategy.

Antagonism/agonism

This transformation of Schmitt calls for a closer inspection. In particular, two aspects of the transformation directly related to the concept of the political are decisive: (1) Mouffe insists that associations are fragmented, whereas Schmitt emphasises homogeneity, and (2) the nature of ‘conflict’ as a result of the agonistic model is different from the conflict in an antagonistic mode.¹⁰⁵ It is Mouffe’s view that the democratic adversaries belong to the same association and are in agreement on the ethico-political values – “freedom and equality for all” (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001; Mouffe, 1993, 2000, 2002, 2005b); the conflict concerns the interpretation and the specificity of the content of these values, and on the various ways to implement these values more or less fully in the society. Following the post-structuralist tradition, Mouffe asserts, in contrast to the liberal insistence on the immutability of these values as laws, that our attention to freedom and equality is contingent – a theme that characterizes Mouffe’s work since the publication of *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (1985). There are as such no metaphysical/transcendental justifications, but only a hegemonic articulation based on historical processes – they are not universal principles, but only particular ‘instances’. The problem that Mouffe identifies with the liberal tradition is, therefore, the lack of recognition that our contemporary ethico-political values may only constitute a thin layer of agreement on the association that can be shared by the adversaries. The agonistic form of democracy that she proposes thus also advocates a continuous transformation of power relations, because adversaries change their identification with the content of these values.

The type of association Mouffe seems to have in mind can be found in her earlier essay *Democratic Citizenship and the Political Community* (1993). In agreement with Michael Oakeshott, Mouffe claims that a political association “does not postulate the existence of a substantive common good, nevertheless [it] implies the idea of

¹⁰⁴ As clarified above the homogeneity of the demos (society) is empirically impossible: the demos is the result of a political struggle, which depends on the logic of friend/enemy differentiation.

¹⁰⁵ I explore the implications of the transformation to the concept of the political in detail in Chapter 4. It is at this moment necessary to present Mouffe’s view of a political association.

commonality, of an ethico-political bond that creates a linkage among the participants in the association” (1993: 66). An association is thus characterised by Mouffe as an open-ended and repeated struggle where adversaries propose conflicting and irreconcilable views on these core values of a liberal democracy – at best reaching a “conflictual consensus” (2005b: 52). Mouffe thus stipulates that an association is not defined by the common actions towards the same good, but in the relation of the participants to one another “in the acknowledgement of the authority of certain conditions of acting” (1993: 66). To relate this to the terminology used above, an association is defined by an understanding of pluralism not merely as a fact, but also and especially pluralism as a result of the symbolic order.

The reliance on Oakeshott is noteworthy, because Mouffe partially endorses his views on individual liberty and ethico-political bond. In this connection, she claims that a political association is

a mode of human association that recognizes the disappearance of a single substantive idea of the common good and makes room for individual liberty . . . To belong to the political community what is required is that we accept a specific language of civil intercourse, the *respublica*. Those rules prescribe norms of conduct to be subscribed to in seeking self-chosen satisfactions and in performing self-chosen actions (67).

Mouffe departs from Oakeshott on account of his “flawed idea of politics. For his conception of politics as a shared language of civility is only adequate for one aspect of politics: the point of view of the ‘we’, the friend’s side.” (68). Drawing on Schmitt’s conception of the political as differentiation between friend and enemy, Mouffe thus takes an association as a fundamental form of demarcation, an establishment of “a frontier, defining an ‘enemy’” (69). She asserts that a fully inclusive political community cannot be realised, as there will always be a need for an exterior to that community, as something defining and giving that community an identity – the so-called ‘constitutive outside’.

The question one should ask here is whether the *practical* outcome of such a community, or indeed a *political* community as such, would be markedly different from the consensus-driven politics advocated by the ‘third way’ theorists. Mouffe only acknowledges an association between those who share basic liberal-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 (2005b: 120-121, my emphasis; cf. also 2013: 13-15).

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

reassert the old certainties of tradition. Those traditionalists or fundamentalists, by their very rejection of the advances of reflexive modernization, 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 (2005b: 49-50).

It is surprising how close the two passages are in content, which raises several complications with regard to her view. Demarcating between ‘legitimate and illegitimate adversaries’ on the basis that one puts in danger the democratic institutions (Mouffe’s position) does not sufficiently differ from excluding ‘traditionalists who reject the advances of reflexive modernization’ (third way theorists’ position). Both positions exclude on the basis of legitimacy of the adversary; and yet, the legitimacy of the adversary is contained within the notion of the democratic institutions. Indeed, what is legitimate depends on the ethico-political bond that characterises the democratic institution. Certainly, Mouffe claims that this exclusion is political and not moral; it is, however, insufficiently clear how a challenge to contemporary political practice is to proceed without a challenge of the democratic institutions.

It is therefore not surprising that several objections have been raised against Mouffe: “distorting antagonism” and “lack of theoretical originality” (Beckstein, 2011). Although Beckstein defends Mouffe against these points of critique, he does not fully succeed in absolving her in his defence. The first argument – ‘distorting antagonism’ – relates to Mouffe’s transformation of Schmitt’s paradigm. The argument is that the transformation from antagonism to agonism is not without problems. In particular, two facets of the argument can be discerned: (1) there is no reason for groups not to resort to violence and (2) Mouffe insufficiently clarifies how her position would differ from the theorists she analyses.¹⁰⁶ First, one could claim that an association with specific ethico-political grounds does not conceal the possibility of violence towards, or from, those outside that association. After all, Mouffe herself stipulates that “this type of opponent is not an adversary but an enemy . . . who must be excluded from the democratic debate” (Mouffe, 2005b: 50; cf. also pp. 120-123; 1999b: 46-49). Second, even a contingent and continuously shifting specification of ethico-political grounds remains within the traditional liberal values of freedom and equality. Mouffe rejects consensus, but is unable to provide an alternative through which decisions in the political arena can include agonism whilst excluding its degeneration into antagonism.

Beckstein’s defence consists in envisaging three layers of Mouffe’s model: next to the Schmittian friend/enemy differentiation, Mouffe’s we/they differentiation envisages a political community as a friend/adversary differentiation. Beckstein assumes that a possibility of adversary/enemy differentiation would follow if the enemy becomes too strong or too problematic within an association (Beckstein, 2011: 38); as indeed Mouffe claims this to be the relation between those belonging to the democratic association (adversaries) and those who question its basic institutions (enemies). This defence does not fully shield Mouffe from the first objection of distorting antagonism,

¹⁰⁶ These points of critique are explored in detail in Chapter 4 and are only schematically introduced here for the purpose of understanding Mouffe’s adversarial model.

however, as it leaves open the possibilities of antagonism in a similar fashion as in Schmitt. The adversary/enemy differentiation is not substantially different from the friend/enemy differentiation. Her initial model thus falls short by maintaining a view of an association that retains the distinction of those who do and those who do not belong to the said association without signifying why the excluded group would not resort to violence. At best, violence is displaced towards the outer limits of the democratic association.

Beckstein acknowledges that his proposed defence cannot be fully maintained, unless we look at another critique directed towards Mouffe, namely: “that political collectives within a democratic community can oppose each other in non-violent terms insofar as they acknowledge the existence of a common and comparatively greater enemy, then doubts arise whether this is a significant theoretical innovation” (39). Let us, therefore, turn to the second critique – lack of theoretical originality. It is questionable whether Schmitt’s original view did not already introduce the possibilities of conflict within an association as well as that association opposing/being opposed by an external enemy – i.e. whether Schmitt acknowledged pluralism or maintained state politics. Schmitt’s treatise can be ambiguous on this point. On the one hand, Schmitt speaks of the possibility of civil war as a result of the political: “If one wants to speak of politics in the context of the primacy of internal politics, then this conflict no longer refers to war between organized nations but to civil war” (Schmitt, 2007b: 32). On the other hand, his terminological reliance on Greek and Latin usage of ‘enemy’ – i.e. *πολέμιος/εχθρός* and *hostis/inimicus* – clearly shows that the enemy is external to the association.

Mouffe’s transformation allows for the dividing line between groups belonging to/excluded from the association to be continuously changed. For her, associations are not homogenous and thus lack fixity in terms of the groups that would belong to them. Beckstein thus holds Mouffe’s clarification fundamental to the alleged inconsistency in Schmitt: she “spells out more clearly than Schmitt that the friend/enemy-distinction can be differentiated as types of primary and secondary (if not tertiary, etc.) levels” (Beckstein, 2011: 41). It is, however, questionable that Schmitt was indeed inconsistent on the matter or whether the terminological reliance was not to serve a different aim. Schmitt’s use of distinctions present in the classical languages points towards a dual role of our understanding of an enemy: first, the political enemy is a group and not an individual; and second, the distinction is made according to the intensity that is felt by groups. In fact, the remainder of Schmitt’s treatise is consistent in its treatment of the enemy.¹⁰⁷ Equally, the scholarly tradition points out that Schmitt’s treatise was in fact written to expose the internal enemy (Schwab, 1970; Bendersky, 1983). It is thus not the case that Schmitt’s view of an association remains static in terms of its identity. Here too Beckstein fails to shield Mouffe from the ‘lack of theoretical originality’ critique.

¹⁰⁷ That Schmitt is consistent on the issue does not mean that he is also unequivocally clear. Especially taking his later work into account deeply problematizes the mode of action towards enemies. I return to this issue in Chapter 6.

3. Against deliberative democracy?

Given Mouffe's critique of the liberal theorists, and Habermas's deliberative model of democracy in particular, it is interesting to view the incompatibility in more detail. More specifically, Mouffe takes issue with Habermas's model with regard to several shortcomings that she believes are inherent to deliberation. Outlining the position of 'agonistic pluralism' in *Deliberative Democracy or Agonistic Pluralism?*, Mouffe first proposes a 'Wittgensteinian' approach that would "challenge the very idea of a neutral or rational dialogue" pertinent to deliberative democracy (Mouffe, 1999a: 749; 2000: 12, 60-79). She thus states that "distinctions between 'procedural' and 'substantial' or between 'moral' and 'ethical' that are central to the Habermasian approach cannot be maintained and one must acknowledge that procedures always involve substantial ethical commitments" (1999a: 749).¹⁰⁸

At the core of Habermas's deliberative model of democracy is the concern with citizen participation in decision-making processes; in which, furthermore, their rational character comes to the fore – that is to say, citizens' positions are not merely aggregated together, but the centrality of *forming* positions is emphasised. Deliberation is thus aimed at citizens developing opinions through interaction, of creating better arguments for their particular positions. Habermas thus emphasises the transformation from 'mere agreement' that is the result of the voting process into a 'rational consensus' that results from deliberation (Kapoor, 2002: 463). In this sense, Habermas's prioritisation of morality over ethics argues for impartial procedures (morality) and against personal/individual conceptions of the good (ethics). His position thus also prioritises the neutrality of procedures that legitimate the outcomes of decision-making. It would be a mistake, however, to consider Habermas as a 'proceduralist'; just outcomes remain central to the procedures. Impartial procedures are certainly dominant in deliberative democracy; they cannot, however, be abstracted from outcomes of public deliberation and aim to the good of the association.

Mouffe's critique of Habermas is specifically targeted at the position that procedures can be abstracted from ethical conceptions. In her view, ethical conceptions are rooted in the political domain; procedures cannot be neutral precisely because they are always the result of political contest. Because the political is a differentiation between friend and enemy, as Mouffe holds, ethical commitments are already present in the procedures. In order to substantiate this claim, Mouffe relies on Wittgenstein:

For Wittgenstein to have agreement in opinions there must first be agreement on the language used and this, as he points out, implies agreement in forms of life . . . It is because they are inscribed in shared forms of life and agreements in judgments that procedures can

¹⁰⁸ A note should be made here that Mouffe's critique is of *unequivocal* neutrality, which does not differentiate between substance and procedure. As she acknowledges of Rawls, for instance, in his later work he distances himself from unequivocal neutrality by pointing out that "justice as fairness is not procedurally neutral. Clearly its principles of justice are substantive and express far more than procedural values" (Rawls in Mouffe, 1993: 135-136). What Mouffe fails to note is that there is no unequivocal neutrality in Habermas either: "on the more careful interpretations of their theories, neither Habermas nor Rawls defends a purely procedural or purely substantive conception of democracy. As Habermas writes: '... private and public autonomy mutually presuppose each other in such a way that neither human rights nor popular sovereignty can claim primacy over its counterparts'" (Gutmann & Thompson, 2004: 26).

be accepted and followed . . . Rules for Wittgenstein are always abridgments of practices, they are inseparable of specific forms of life (Mouffe, 1999a: 749).

Mouffe's claim is that the underlying practices that are abridged into procedures are derived from what Wittgenstein calls 'forms of life'. These practices thus already carry in them the ethical characteristics; the procedures are not neutral precisely because the form of life is inscribed in them. While Mouffe is correct to critique Habermas on these grounds, Wittgenstein also exposes her own position to a similar critique. Her emphasis that procedures *must* 'always involve substantial ethical commitments' – i.e. that ethical commitments are already inscribed in the procedures themselves – cannot be supported with an argument that there must be an agreement on the language, or the implication thereof, in the forms of life.

The complication that Mouffe runs into is twofold. On the one hand, her insistence on the importance of the ethico-political bond in an association is very similar to the type of procedure that she finds objectionable in Habermas's deliberative model. The agonistic model may not pretend to have the institutions for impartiality in place (as does Habermas's model), but it does have the overarching institution of agonism which by itself must acknowledge the critique directed against Habermas: specifically, agonistic pluralism must acknowledge that its procedures – inscribed in the maxim 'freedom and equality for all' – must involve ethical commitments stemming from an agreement on the forms of life and the subsequent agreement on the language. However, Mouffe claims that she is not concerned with ethics.¹⁰⁹ Her descriptions of inherent antagonisms, of the impossibility of the social, of hegemonic articulation, etc. are supposed to resist any normative queries. And yet, as Mouffe reveals in her critique of Habermas, ethical commitments are necessarily inscribed in the institutions and their procedures – as must also be the case with the particular commitment held by Mouffe, namely 'freedom and equality for all'.

On the other hand, if the political is taken to capture an antagonistic ontology, as implied by Mouffe, then institutionalisation of ethical commitments presents us with a different problem: what is the role of the ethical commitment (or what is its value?) to a shared form of life? The role of ethical commitments – the value of moral principles – belongs to the ontic level, not the ontological one. As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, by ontology Mouffe understands the autonomy of the political domain, while politics mediates between interests of various (economics, moral, etc.) domains and the political. However, the 'way in which society is instituted' as an ontological dimension of the political is never realisable or articulable. By putting forward a critique of Habermas's deliberative democracy, Mouffe thus also inadvertently exposes agonistic pluralism to a similar critique. Values and commitments do not have an ontological presupposition, which can be abstracted from the procedures, and belong to the ontic level of contestation. While Mouffe acknowledges that this is the case with 'liberty and equality for all', she resists, as shown above, contestation of the democratic institutions upon which agonistic pluralism rests.

¹⁰⁹ It is only in her latest publication, *Agonistics*, that she openly juxtaposes ethics with politics, and claims to be interested in the latter exclusively. Cf. Mouffe (2013: 15-18).

There is an important implication this point of critique has on the political/politics distinction: in our concern with the political in the sense of Schmitt – as a negation of “his opponent’s way of life” or preservation of “one’s own form of existence” (Schmitt, 2007b: 27) – we necessarily speak of substantial ethical commitments in *this* or *that* way of life or form of existence. Otherwise, naturally, the presence of the enemy would not produce the potential of conflict – hence, negation of the other and preservation of ‘one’s own’. Yet, this should also imply that a way of life is shared to a degree within the political association. Mouffe’s point on the political association thus should permit that a way of life is also permissible to different forms of differentiation in Habermas: in other words, that *politically* Habermas’s position is a valid agonistic point on the validity of agonistic association.

More problematic for Mouffe is the assertion on the foundations of the political, equally based on a ‘Wittgensteinian’ critique of Habermas. She approvingly cites Wittgenstein: “Giving grounds, however, justifying the evidence, comes to an end; but the end is not certain [sic.] propositions striking us immediately as true, i.e., it is not a kind of *seeing* on our part; it is our *acting* that is at the bottom of the language-game” (Mouffe, 1999a: 749; Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, §204).¹¹⁰ Mouffe continues with an assertion that for Wittgenstein “agreement is established not on significations (Meinungen) but on a form of life (Lebensform). It is . . . an *Einstimmung* fusion of voices made possible by a common form of life, not *Einverstand* product of reason—like in Habermas” (1999a: 749). Although Mouffe’s point is seemingly unquestionable – that Habermas overstates rationality and consensus – the same passage proves problematic to Mouffe. Her endorsement of Wittgenstein generates problem for her own model of democracy on three accounts.

First, that giving grounds ‘comes to an end’ is evident if we observe the ground of the agonistic model to be the political as an antagonism.¹¹¹ The main point of Wittgenstein here is that justifying propositions must stop at some point, and that point is not simply the moment that we *see* the proposition as true *immediately* – i.e. without doubt as pointed out in §196: “Sure evidence is what we accept as sure, it is evidence that we go by in acting surely, acting without any doubt”. His point is that the justification of the proposition does not have the endpoint in this sense; rather it is action that brings ‘justifying’ to an end. For our purpose, justifying is brought to an end *politically* – what Schmitt calls decision in contrast to decisionism.

Second, while there certainly are differences between Meinung/Einstimmung and Lebensform/Einverstand, these differences are of little consequence if we are going to ascribe one of the views to deliberative democracy and another to agonistic pluralism. Each model of democracy comprises both elements. Literally, *Einstimmung* (agreement with another or holding their position to be true) is not that different from *Einverstand* (to understand with another, where *Verstand* relates to intellectual capacity). Rather than focusing on the differences between ‘Stimmung’

¹¹⁰ In German: “Die Begründung aber, die Rechtfertigung der Evidenz kommt zu einem Ende;—das Ende aber ist nicht dass uns gewisse Sätze unmittelbar als wahr einleuchten, also eine Art *Sehen* unsrerseits, sondern unser *Handeln*, welches am Grunde das Sprachspiels liegt”. Unless otherwise noted, references to Wittgenstein are from *On Certainty*.

¹¹¹ Cf. Marchart (2007), especially Introduction and Chapter 1.

and ‘Verstand’, the emphasis in these words is, of course, on ‘Ein’ – one, in the sense of togetherness, one with the other. Similarly in Greek, in the term συμφωνία the emphasis is on συμ-, without it -φωνία is mere sound/noise; it is through the togetherness, through συμ-, that we reach an agreement or accord.¹¹²

Even if we were to accept that the ‘fusion of voices’ is possible by ‘a common form of life’, this does not yet tell us something about *what* this commonality means: commonality, once again, is only a possibility due to the sense of togetherness; thus, the fusion of voices (Stimmung) as well as the product of reason (Verstand) get their meaning through the prefix ‘Ein’. As McGinn points out, “giving orders, making reports, describing a scene, telling a story, etc. represent particular forms of life; when we cannot discern this form, then we cannot say that people are using a language” (McGinn, 2002: 109). In Wittgenstein’s words, “What is true or false is what human beings *say*; and it is in their *language* that human beings agree. This is agreement not in opinions, but rather in form of life” (*Philosophical Investigations*, §241); and further on “It is not only agreement in definitions, but also (odd as it may sound) agreement in judgements that is required for communication by means of language” (*Philosophical Investigations*, §242). Mouffe cites these passages (Mouffe, 2000: 67-68) in order to point out that for Wittgenstein rules “are always abridgements of practices” (ibid.).¹¹³ Wittgenstein’s point, however, is not whether there is an agreement on language that results in an agreement of procedures, or that rules are created from already established ethical practices and thus lack neutrality. Rather, in order to have an analysis on the nature of democracy, no matter how different that analysis is, there must already be an agreement on language and form of life. The level of agreement, the concreteness of the analyses, already presupposes a much deeper agreement on the form of life.

Nevertheless, even if one were to differentiate between forms of life and emphasise that what is at stake is the type of agreement – the ‘what’ of togetherness – in such a situation Stimmung would precede Verstand. Mouffe’s point could thus be taken to mean that prior to having Einverstand, one is already assuming Einstimmung which guides the former. Such a position could be upheld: that any type of agreement must first pass through an agreement on the form of life; yet, this would not mean that Einverstand is excluded from Einstimmung, only that the former is impossible without the latter and that it depends on it. Mouffe’s aim could be to rid ourselves from as many ethical commitments as possible in order to have a radical pluralism – in this sense, both ‘radicality’ and ‘pluralism’ are further enriched. We are, nevertheless, left questioning whether the type of togetherness that Mouffe has in mind by itself is not already an ethical commitment which necessitates other commitments. Indeed, her

¹¹² Indeed, this is why music as symphony is a composition of different sounds that together make music – individual notes (and even instruments) do not yet have ἁρμονία (again literally meaning agreement).

¹¹³ Mouffe’s point of critique is valid insofar the liberal emphasis on procedures does not take into account that any procedure “already presupposes acceptance of certain values” (Mouffe, 2000: 67-68); the case in point is procedural or substantive justice; that is, procedures that are followed in order to ensure rights, as Rawls’s original position/veil of ignorance, or Habermas’s ideal speech situation.

view can easily lead to that of Habermas: the *Einstimmung* that Mouffe has in mind, as a form of life, *could* have the *Einverstand* of Habermas as a consequence.¹¹⁴

Third, while the political is certainly meant as *Lebensformen*, as Schmitt's notion explicitly aims to defend a specific "way of life" (Schmitt, 2007b: 27), maintaining a strict distinction between *Lebensformen* and *Meinungen* leads to a further problem. The agonistic model does not differentiate between these two to an extent that would mark it as starkly different from a deliberative democratic model of Habermas. For Habermas certain opinions are valid whereas others are to be excluded – indeed, reaching a consensus is only possible because certain opinions have been deemed acceptable within the association. To put it differently, the acceptability of an opinion would correspond to *Lebensformen*, while an exchange of these opinions that would lead to consensus would correspond to *Meinungen*. Mouffe, in this regard, has not shown how 'conflictual consensus' is a substantially different position – adversaries accept the validity of their opposition due to the forms of life, but reject the content of opinions; indeed, as has been shown above, Mouffe rejects the all-together different forms of life.

4. Wittgenstein on foundations and way of life

As shown above, Mouffe's reliance on Wittgenstein does not serve her aim in undermining Habermas. By accepting Wittgenstein, however, she also exposes the problems inherent to agonistic pluralism concerning the *ground* of antagonism. A closer examination of Wittgenstein on foundations is fruitful in our evaluation of Mouffe's conception of the political. In order to make sense of his position, it is helpful to look at the train of thought that surrounds the above-quoted passages; and thus not to treat them as isolated remarks on the grounds/foundations. It is my view that Mouffe unjustifiably treats individual passages in isolation, and that a more holistic approach would suggest a different understanding of foundations in Wittgenstein; which, moreover, would prove highly problematic to Mouffe's critique of Habermas. It should also be noted that Mouffe's reliance on Wittgenstein is not simply a casual one – she frequently relies on his views in order to support her claims.¹¹⁵

For instance, at §200 Wittgenstein states: "Really 'The proposition is either true or false' only means that it must be possible to decide for or against it. But this does not say what the ground for such a decision is like". Using this passage the ontological reading of the political can be scrutinised. At the very least, the passage would question why antagonism as *the* ground is more fruitful or has higher explanatory

¹¹⁴ Cf. Knops (2007), who claims that agonism is dependent on consensus and deliberation. While I agree with Knops, his reading of Wittgenstein is based on Pitkin and Tully, while my approach is 'independent'. Cf. also Erman (2009) who claims that deliberative presuppositions are inherent to antagonisms.

¹¹⁵ References to Wittgenstein are present in almost every work of Mouffe's. What justifies a closer examination is her *The Democratic Paradox*, where she devotes a whole chapter on how Wittgenstein can help "reveal the limitations of the rationalistic framework [and] to overcome them" (Mouffe, 2000). My argument here is not that Wittgenstein cannot help with this aim, but rather that his views also undermine Mouffe's position.

value than a Habermasian possibility of reaching a consensus. Mouffe's critique is only acceptable if we know 'what the ground for such a decision is like' – e.g. we may decide on the truth or falsity of a reason for, say, invasion of Iraq in 2003 – but there would be no possibility of stating what the ground is without resorting to numerous domains for differentiation. The truth or falsity of a statement thus depends on ontically 'filling the ground' with our judgements on political economy, aesthetics, morality, etc.¹¹⁶ What constitutes such decisions is an ontic understanding of politics. To put it differently, Mouffe's position has to be viewed as a *political* decision from an ontic side onto the 'neutral'/depoliticised ground precisely because antagonism is only one of the many possibilities of 'filling the ground'.

At §205-206 Wittgenstein continues to explore the possibilities of grounds for certainty: "If the true is what is grounded, then the ground is not *true*, nor yet false. If someone asked us 'but is that *true*?' we might say 'yes' to him; and if he demanded grounds we might say 'I can't give you any grounds, but if you learn more you too will think the same'. If this didn't come about, that would mean that he couldn't for example learn history". Wittgenstein's point is that it is a statement on truth of a ground that is grounded, but this does not mean that the ground itself is thereby also true. That is to say, that Mouffe's ascription of antagonism to our ontological condition could be grounded, but this ground could not be shown to be either true or false – precisely because the ground itself is not a proposition and thus cannot be true/false. As with Heidegger at the beginning of this chapter, the problematic is on the grounding of politics as first philosophy and thus also on the relation between ontological and ontic domains of the political/politics distinction. What we can observe here is that the problematic between Habermas and Mouffe on the ground of the political cannot be articulated in terms of truth or falsity – the political domain, antagonism as an ontological condition, requires a *political* commitment.¹¹⁷ This is notably also the reason why Wittgenstein turns to learning. Both Mouffe's and Habermas's points of view depend on what constitutes 'learning': for Habermas, we are rational and we can reach a rational consensus because we can learn; while for Mouffe the ethical commitments – that is, the constantly shifting ethico-political values – are what is learnt. When Wittgenstein turns to 'learning', therefore, the discrepancy between ontology and ontics becomes clearest: stating that grounds are learnt distorts the very notion of ontological foundations.

Wittgenstein and Mouffe

If we are to look at the outer limits of an association, as stated earlier, we are confronted with a different problem – specifically, we find that according to Mouffe the association itself is to stand against the enemy in an extra-moral sense. On this point, too, Mouffe invokes a citation of Wittgenstein against deliberative democracy:

¹¹⁶ To stay with invasion of Iraq in 2003, the numerous justifications prior to and after the invasion exemplify this very clearly. The point is not simplistically that US was not justified in invading a sovereign state – quite the contrary, in its lack of justifications, it found many reasons for its desired end. These reasons ultimately depend on 'what the ground for such a decision is like'.

¹¹⁷ This is, I submit, the reason why Wittgenstein emphasizes action (*Handeln*) rather than seeing (*Sehen*) – while grounds can be observed/seen, their manifestation is meaningful only through action, which in and of itself cannot be reduced to grounds.

It also implies that the limits of consensus are brought to the fore: ‘Where two principles really do meet which cannot be reconciled with one another, then each man declares the other a fool and an heretic. I said I would ‘combat’ the other man, but wouldn’t I give him reasons? certainly; but how far do they go? At the end of reasons comes *persuasion*’ (Mouffe, 1999a: 749-750; Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, §612).

This position could be used against Habermas; yet it remains equally problematic for Mouffe’s position. First, a point that needs little elaboration, the reconciliation of two principles (as *Lebensformen*) does not lead to the same type of meaning of combat as understood by Wittgenstein and Mouffe. It has already been noted that Mouffe attaches immense importance to ‘ineradicability of antagonism’ and thereby the ever present potentiality of physical violence; this is certainly not Wittgenstein’s view of combat in this passage and only forms an extension of that view to the political domain. Second, the meaning of ‘persuasion’ differs considerably between Wittgenstein and Mouffe. For Mouffe, we are no longer speaking of persuasion the moment we have accepted the adversary ‘as someone we do not agree with’. Her position is that agreement has a limit – we are confronted with her reiteration of Elias Canetti: “not because he has ceased to believe in his own case, but simply because he admits defeat” (Mouffe, 2005b: 23) – that is, the adversaries cannot be persuaded but can only be defeated; they will not be persuaded, or rather, they *cannot* be persuaded because they have already given up on consensus as a possibility. Some positions, Mouffe would claim, do not allow for consensus.¹¹⁸

In order to exemplify this further, it is convenient to look at the following sections in *On Certainty* – §613-§614:

If I now say ‘I know that the water in the kettle on the gas-flame will not freeze but boil’, I seem to be as justified in this ‘I know’ as I am in *any*. ‘If I know anything I know *this*’.— Or do I know with still *greater* certainty that the person opposite me is my old friend so-and-so? And how does that compare with the proposition that I am seeing with two *eyes* and shall see them if I look in the glass?—I don’t know confidently what I am to answer here.— But still there is a difference between the cases. If the water over the gas freezes, of course I shall be as astonished as can be, but I shall assume some factor I don’t know of, and perhaps leave the matter to physicists to judge. But what could make me doubt whether this person here is N. N., whom I have known for years? Here a doubt would seem to drag everything with it and plunge it into chaos. That is to say: If I were contradicted on all sides and told that this person’s name was not what I had always known it was (and I use ‘know’ here intentionally), then in that case the foundation of all judging would be taken away from me.

The two cases are, as Wittgenstein notes, not interchangeable – they are not so because in the second case doubt creeps in. As we have seen previously, it becomes impossible through this case to act without doubt – and not only because there is no sure evidence, but precisely because sure evidence has been taken aback. Perhaps it is exactly because persuasion was not possible that in the second case – i.e. knowing an old friend’s name – the action itself became paralysed; that is, not only are there no reasons, but persuasion too has no place. For the problematic between Habermas and Mouffe persuasion thus takes yet another form: from a deliberative democracy point

¹¹⁸ It should be noted that Mouffe abridges §612 in a revealing way. After ‘persuasion’, Wittgenstein adds the following: “(Think what happens when missionaries convert natives.)”. The parentheses are by Wittgenstein. The abridgement is quite curious, as the meaning of ‘persuasion’ in relation to missionaries can be interpreted in a variety of ways. Wittgenstein invites the reader to think of all the different possibilities that constitute persuasion – ranging from gradual conversion through enticing Church music and its imposing architecture, casting certain members out of their own communities by introduction of new moral paradigms, massacres of indigenous populations, etc.

of view, and Mouffe would agree, there would be no possibility of reaching a consensus as there would be no reasons; but this must also apply to agonistic pluralism, as the adversaries having given up on the persuasion (and reason), can only end up in a paralysis. At the suspension of ‘the foundation of *all* judging’, there is no possibility of any type of action because there is no ultimate will to persuade the other: there is either eradication (one is inclined to say antagonism in what Mouffe ascribes to Schmitt), or lack of action altogether (as Schmitt would say ‘a world without politics’).

Finally, there is an interesting point at §609, which further illuminates the problematic between Mouffe and Habermas: “... Is it wrong for them to consult an oracle and be guided by it?—If we call this ‘wrong’ aren’t we using our language-game as a base from which to combat theirs?” This view is quite illuminating on the shortcomings of both Habermas and Mouffe (and may perhaps be extended even as far back as political philosophy goes). Wittgenstein’s point with this case is meant to highlight the fact that the ground through which an action proceeds tells us something about the position that it started from.¹¹⁹ In light of the current discussion, a liberal democratic theory would emphasise the tolerance of differences and thus would accept that we may not call consulting an oracle ‘wrong’. However, such a liberal-democratic position or ground is only legitimate by virtue of it being a *different* ground. For instance at §199 Wittgenstein notes that “The reason why the use of the expression ‘true or false’ has something misleading about it is that it is like saying ‘it tallies with the facts or it doesn’t’, and the very thing that is in question is what ‘tallying’ is here.” The problematic between Habermas and Mouffe is that we are left with this precise question of what ‘tallying’ is? Although they are not concerned with ‘true or false’ propositions, they do posit a view in *political* terms which demands a decision on one *or* the other position. What type of facts are presented to justify their position is, at least to an extent, irrelevant. Nevertheless, one is left with the question what decision there is to be taken concerning these facts and that is done precisely on the decision what ‘tallying’ of these facts is – or to put this in the idiom of political theory: it depends on a political decision.

In sum, for Wittgenstein tallying with the facts – but also, speaking the same language, agreement on the forms of life, etc. – presents a different problem from that with which Mouffe is dealing. Where for Mouffe Wittgenstein seems to invoke a relation

¹¹⁹ We could apply this insight (though in an adapted form) into various debates in political philosophy/theory that rely on two ‘structures’ imposing themselves one over the another (e.g. Marx’s sub-/superstructure, or feminist masculine/feminine). For if the substructure guides the superstructure, then any action proceeding to change that substructure cannot be retrospectively legitimate – though perhaps justifiable – precisely because legitimacy of that action no longer has the substructure as its legitimating ground in the newly realised state of affairs. Applied to democratic theory: what posits constituent power (say, people) cannot simultaneously posit constitutive power (say, government) – if they were to conflate or fully correspond to/coincide with one another, the constituency (and thus also the legitimacy) of that power would dissolve simply by the fact that the moment of correspondence would mean that the ground upon which that constituency was demanded has disappeared. Similarly, in relation to Mouffe’s version of the political/politics distinction: if the political is taken as an ontological antagonism that needs sublimation ontically, the legitimacy of the realised agonism disappears with the dissolution of antagonism. Mouffe’s insistence that antagonism is always present cannot be sustained the moment she accepts the realisation of agonism (while keeping to a possibility of sublimation of antagonism into agonism perpetuates the suspension of the foundation).

between forms of life that are in conflict; Wittgenstein's position would be that in order for there to be a conflict on the forms of life, there must already be a language in place through which conflict can be understood as conflict. Agonistic pluralism that Mouffe is defending *against* deliberative democracy, therefore, already expresses that both Mouffe and Habermas are speaking the same language and not a different one. Wittgenstein's point is that forms of life establish language games, and not that through different language games a differentiation between different forms of life can be made. To reiterate Wittgenstein: "What is true or false is what human beings *say*; and it is in their *language* that human beings agree . . . [and it is] agreement in judgements that is required for communication by means of language" (*Philosophical Investigations*, §241-242).

5. Conclusion

This chapter aimed at presenting an application of the political to democratic theory. Chantal Mouffe's agonistic pluralism aims at the creation of spaces where inherent antagonisms can be transformed into an agonistic contest. On many points, Mouffe follows the Schmittian paradigm of the political, but also stipulates the necessary transformation for contemporary liberal-democratic states. This transformation, however, is not without problems, and while the political intent of her views can be discerned and perhaps even viewed as plausible, there remain theoretical inadequacies which need to be resolved. Not least of these is the pending answer to the question how specifically agonism would be shaped given the proper creation of the spaces for contest; or to put it differently, Mouffe's transformation of the friend/enemy differentiation into we/they opposition brings with it a number of complications which are theoretically unsustainable. I will return to this issue in the next chapter on associations; it suffices to say here that Mouffe's reliance on Schmitt is problematic precisely because his view of an association as a homogenous whole leads to a specific kind of 'the political', which cannot be easily appropriated by Mouffe's political project.

The first section of this chapter has shown the theoretical background on which Mouffe relies by emphasising the importance of the concepts hegemony and antagonism. The critical discussion of the use of Mouffe's work with Ernesto Laclau on hegemony has established why a conception of a society as a homogenous whole is problematic; while Lefort's notion of an 'empty place' has shown how democratic processes maintain the fragmentation of society in place. This, Mouffe claims, is necessary for a vibrant democracy. This section also reflected on the use of Machiavelli's notion of antagonism and called into question the notion of antagonism that Mouffe maintains. While an antagonism may indeed be present, I have argued, it is not necessarily ontological and is to be found in the role of 'the prince'. Such view of antagonism, I have argued, problematizes Mouffe's proposed transformation from antagonism to agonism, and thus remains closer to Schmitt's decisionism.

The second section has examined Mouffe's views in the context of contemporary debates on democratic theory, submitting that her view is intended to overcome the difficulties pertinent to deliberative democracy. In the third section, an analysis of

Mouffe's critique of deliberative democracy has been applied to her own position. I have thus shown that while Mouffe indeed conveys good points of critique towards, in particular, the Habermasian deliberative model, her position remains susceptible to similar points of criticism. Relying on Wittgenstein for support, I have shown how the distinction between *Einstimmung* and *Einverstand* that Mouffe holds against Habermas is unsustainable because agonistic pluralism, like the deliberative democratic theory of Habermas, holds to the togetherness of the association. In other words, her view still holds to the kinds of deliberation and consensus that she finds problematic within current liberal hegemony. Mouffe thus wrongly emphasises the difference between *Stimmung* and *Verstand*, because the *modus operandi* of both terms lies in the togetherness – i.e. in the ethico-political bond that is alluded to by the prefix 'Ein'. This is so in particular because Mouffe's association is based on exclusion of all-together different forms of life.

The problematic reliance on Wittgenstein has led to a deeper analysis of the foundation of the political in the last section. I have shown how looking at other passages in Wittgenstein may elucidate how holding to antagonism as an ultimate ground/foundation can only be viewed as a political decision, and thus not a descriptive analysis. Connecting the discussion to the introduction of this chapter, I have thus shown that Mouffe's 'alternative strategy' to contemporary liberal-democratic societies can only be maintained from the standpoint of a political decision, and not from a theoretical/philosophical reflection. Admittedly, Mouffe proposes to look at the ontic side of the political/politics distinction; nevertheless, she claims our contemporary ills to be the result of the liberal lack of acknowledging the political as ontological. This claim remains unsubstantiated and requires stronger motivations in order to select a model of political interaction.

Part II – Associations and humanity

Introduction

While the first part of the thesis aimed at giving a critical discussion of Arendt, Mouffe and Schmitt, the second part offers an analysis of their views in relation to their understanding of political associations. The underlying hypothesis of the following chapters is that each scholar has in mind a conception of an association that is of direct relevance to their conception of the political. That is to say, an assertion of ‘true’ politics must in the first instance frame the ensuing discussion according to an understanding of an association that would be able to incorporate that notion of ‘true’ politics. An appeal to a particular conception of the political as a ‘corrective’ to contemporary state of (political) affairs thus presupposes a particular kind of association.¹²⁰ Put differently, the concept of the political is specified by identifying the form of association that it entails. This is indeed to say that each scholar frames a conception of the political that supersedes contemporary political categories, or enforces them if they are absent.

In the first chapter, the argument was made that Schmitt’s main concern is with the state and with the unsatisfactory contemporary assumption that ‘the political pertains to the state’. His interest to differentiate between the state and the political has thus led to an investigation of the latter as an autonomous concept. An argument along similar lines was made regarding Chantal Mouffe’s conception of the political in Chapter 3. There, I proposed that Mouffe’s emphasis on the political was in order to present the possibilities of alternative hegemonic articulations. Mouffe’s conception of the political thus presents opportunities to critique the liberal hegemony in a specifically political way. The aim of the following chapter is to bring together these findings on the political and to integrate them with the type of association that Schmitt and Mouffe have in mind. It is my view that once we have an understanding of the type of association and the relevance of the political to that association specifically, the political as a differentiating principle would become clearer.

Similarly, in Chapter 2 an argument was made that Arendt can avoid a dissociative connotation of the political only by an artificial restriction that she places on the internal dynamics of group interaction, as opposed to the external consequences and effects that are the outcome of these actions. I have argued that secondary literature has largely neglected the inherent possibilities of antagonisms between groups, which become apparent in light of Arendt’s analysis of the Hungarian Revolution and the Mayflower Compact. A closer look at the different types of associations in Arendt’s body of work is intended to situate her emphasis on action as a dissociative political category, which is the topic of Chapter 5. Similar to Schmitt and Mouffe, though with significant differences, the political category that is at play in Arendt’s body of work is one of resistance to contemporary political practice and an appeal to political experience.

¹²⁰ At the outset of his treatise, Schmitt proposes that “The concept of the state presupposes the concept of the political”; which may potentially undermine the stated hypothesis. As I will show in Chapter 4, if this statement is read as presenting an undeniable ontological understanding of our anthropological makeup, it would have to be detached from Schmitt’s insistence on the actuality of politics – a view that I do not share with some of his commentators.

Chapters 4 and 5 are thus aimed at presenting an argument for the concept of the political in terms of dissociation. By dissociation is meant that the political categories are aimed at establishing divisions between various groups. The main purpose of the conception of the political is to distinguish between those who belong to the association and those who do not. Contra contemporary literature, the political as a differentiating principle – as a category through which a distinction between groups is made – is present in all three scholars. Each presents an argument on the basis of which the political is to be understood in a dissociative way.

Nevertheless, while the presentation of the political category is dissociative, each scholar simultaneously holds on to an overarching associative category under the umbrella term of ‘humanity’. The discussion of associations is thus relevant to the claims made by the three scholars on the attempts, informed by liberalism, to ‘neutralise’ political groupings; whereas their conceptions of the political aim to re-politicise them. While asserting dissociative political categories, each of the scholars nevertheless maintains a notion of humanity that transcends the restrictions imposed upon their respective views of an association. The aim of Chapter 6 is to evaluate the relationship between the political and the notion of humanity that is employed by the scholars with the intention to minimise the possibilities of unrestrained violence. A discussion about the role of humanity is deemed necessary in order to preclude the possible misunderstanding of their political projects.

whole and not whole, what is drawn together and what is drawn asunder, the harmonious and discordant.
– Heraclitus, fragment 10.

Chapter 4, Tracing the political back to associations – Schmitt and Mouffe

Introduction

The concept of the political has been widely criticised, defended, applied, etc.; where some scholars have criticised Schmitt for his involvement in the Nazi party, and the ease of adaptation of his views to its aims;¹²¹ others have attempted to defend Schmitt by giving an historical account of his proceedings;¹²² while again others have shown interest in theoretical possibilities of the concept of the political while paying little attention to the historical bearing altogether.¹²³ Especially in the fields of political theory and political philosophy various interpretations have followed, which are at odds with Schmitt's objectives regarding the concept. Little attention has been paid to the compatibility of these widely divergent views in relation to Schmitt. It is my view that, precisely because of Schmitt's influence on contemporary political theories, it is useful to look at the type of association that he had in mind in order to make a valuable application of his conception of the political. It is therefore necessary to first discern what 'the political/politics distinction' means by assessing its theoretical viability given the historical circumstances under which Schmitt was writing.

By 'tracing' the political,¹²⁴ I thus mean to locate the alleged distinction between politics and the political in Schmitt's work. The ensuing discussion on 'ontic' reading of Schmitt's conception is therefore not meant to take away the generality of the concept or its applicability to times other than Weimar Republic. Rather, my aim is to stress that the concept is rooted in the political climate and is not simply a theoretical tool to be used in isolation of the actuality of politics. The political needs to be integrated in the historical actuality, while the friend and enemy categories cannot be treated without the specificity of this historically contingent actuality.

In the first section of this chapter, therefore, I will relate *The Concept of the Political* (CP) to Schmitt's earlier *The Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy* (CPD). There is already considerable literature relating the former to his *The Age of Neutralizations*

¹²¹ Habermas (1989b); Müller (2003); Scheuermann (1999). Cf. also, Arendt: "scholars who went beyond mere co-operation and volunteered their services . . . Most interesting is the example of the jurist Carl Schmitt, whose very ingenious theories about the end of democracy and legal government still make arresting reading" (Arendt, 1979: 339-340n; 1994: 201).

¹²² Bendersky (1983); McCormick (1999); Schwab (1970).

¹²³ Marchart (2007); Mouffe (2000) and (2005b); Rasch (2004); to a great extent Slavoj Žižek employs the political in the Schmittian sense, however without direct references, e.g. in *The Fragile Absolute* (2008), cf. also 'Carl Schmitt in the Age of Post-Politics', in Mouffe (1999b).

¹²⁴ I owe the title to Benjamin Arditi (1994) *Tracing the Political*. Even though we are in general disagreement on the presence of the political/politics distinction in Schmitt, I agree with Arditi on the influence and fruitfulness of the distinction given some caution is placed in applications.

and Depoliticizations (AND) and *Theory of the Partisan*, to the extent that some scholars have claimed that no satisfactory understanding of these works can be achieved unless their connections are taken into account (Rae, 2013: 2). This is in particular true of CPD, the second edition of which, with a new preface as a response to a critique, appeared a year before the first publication of the first edition of CP. Schmitt's discussion of such issues as equality and homogeneity within an association in CPD, I claim, are of direct relevance to our understanding of political differentiation.

It is equally important to show why certain contemporary applications of Schmitt's concept of the political fail. Applications of Schmitt's concept disregard the reliance on a particular kind of association, thereby also disregarding the underlying rationale behind the concept. While it is beyond the scope of this thesis to fix these shortcomings, it is deemed necessary to point out what these shortcomings are as a prelude to future research. This is why the second section turns to Chantal Mouffe by elaborating on her conception of an association as a necessarily fragmented society.¹²⁵ In recent literature, there has been some critique towards her version of agonistic democratic theory.¹²⁶ To my knowledge, there has been no direct evaluation of the compatibility of her type of association with the political of Schmitt. As will be shown below, Mouffe's type of association does not engender the political category that she thinks to take from Schmitt; the reason for this is that their theories of association differ considerably. The application of Schmitt's concept to an agonistic model of democracy, I argue, fails on this ground.

1. Schmitt's concept and homogeneity

In his *The Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy*, Schmitt posits homogeneity as an inevitable outcome of the crisis of the parliamentary system. The parliamentary system, according to Schmitt, is characterised by an appeal to the principles of "openness and discussion"; and it is a system that does not presuppose an alternative (Schmitt, 2000: 49, 76).¹²⁷ By the parliamentary system is thus understood a liberal

¹²⁵ By fragmentation of the association is meant that it is not a unity or a homogenous whole as it is for Schmitt. As noted previously in Chapter 3.1, I equate the fragmentation of society with Lefort's notion of democracy as an empty space: "The reference to a transcendent guarantor disappears, and with it the representation of the substantial unity of society" (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001: 186). This is indeed to reiterate that for Laclau and Mouffe the social belongs to discursive practices.

¹²⁶ For recent critical discussion cf. Erman (2009); Fritsch (2008); Wenman (2014); and Ibrahimy (2014).

¹²⁷ Recall here Churchill's famous dictum: "democracy is the worst form of Government except all those other forms that have been tried from time to time" (House of Commons speech of November 11th, 1947); with this statement Churchill does not only proclaim the superiority of one system over the other, but also aims to establish the lack of better alternatives. It is noteworthy that Churchill defends the parliamentary system on grounds resembling those invoked by Schmitt to defend his illiberal model. Churchill: "there ought to be a constant relationship between the rulers and the people"—Schmitt: "The essence of the democratic [i.e. not parliamentary] principle . . . is the assertion that the law and the will of the people are identical" (2000: 26); they also share a critique of the party system: Churchill: "'We have got our majority, never mind how, and we have our lease of office for five years, so what are you going to do about it?' That is not democracy, that is only small party patter"—Schmitt: "Small and exclusive committees of parties or of party coalitions make their decisions behind closed doors" (2000: 49-50).

aspiration to eliminate violence – “discussion in place of force” (Forçade in Schmitt, 2000: 49) – by removing the political categories from the public sphere. However, as Schmitt notes, the actuality of the Weimar Republic proved openness and discussion to be deficient. Neither he, nor any adherents to the parliamentary system, could show the actuality of the system to correspond to its principles; so much was this the case, that even his critics agreed with Schmitt: “It goes without saying that no rational person today is so naive and optimistic as to place any hope at all in such wonderful results from parliamentary debates” (Thoma in Schmitt, 2000: 79). Schmitt’s remarks focus on dispelling the validity of the principles of the parliamentary system. He succeeds in this by contending that openness and discussion should presuppose, (1) a political elite which does not hold an allegiance to their constituents (Schmitt, 2000: 3); and (2) discussion presupposes an exchange of opinions with an aim to

[persuade] one’s opponent through argument of the truth or justice of something, or allowing oneself to be persuaded of something as true and just . . . To discussion belong shared convictions as premises, the willingness to be persuaded, independence of party ties, freedom from selfish interests (5).

On the first point, Schmitt quickly notes that even though according to the Weimar constitution the parliamentarians were required to be independent, in practical terms a ‘lack of allegiance’ was absent during the Weimar Republic (5, 20), if ever present elsewhere (49).¹²⁸ The crucial point here is not so much whether the members of an assembly are acting independently from various interest groups, or indeed, their constituency, which according to Schmitt was not the case; but rather whether such an independence as required by parliamentarism/liberalism¹²⁹ does not *necessarily* fail: “it is of course *practically impossible* not to work with committees, and increasingly smaller committees; in this way the parliamentary plenum gradually drifts away from its purpose (that is, *from its public*), and as a result it necessarily becomes a mere façade . . . parliamentarism thus abandons its intellectual foundation and that the whole system . . . is losing its rationale” (ibid., my emphasis).

The second point is more germane to the inadequacies of the parliamentary system. Schmitt holds that through an open interaction, discussion was aimed at producing rational opinions through which violence would be subverted. Its ultimate aim was to create a ‘general will’ through which a claim to legitimacy of power could be made. Relying on Rousseau, Schmitt posits the ‘general will’ as the unifying principle:

the ‘general will’, demonstrates that a true state, according to Rousseau, only exists where the people are so homogeneous that there is essentially unanimity. According to the *Contrat social* [sic.] there can be no parties in the state, no special interests, no religious differences, nothing that can divide persons, not even a public financial concern (13).

¹²⁸ Note, for instance, a similar requirement from the members of the European Commission (and the Commission itself) as stipulated in Article 17(3) of the *Consolidated versions of the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty on the functioning of the European Union* (6655/08). However, as with Schmitt, the ‘lack of allegiance’ is quite clear: there is clear public backing of specific candidates in national elections (e.g. Kroes—Merkel, or Wallström—Royal).

¹²⁹ Parliamentarism and liberalism are certainly not the same, even though parliamentarism arose from liberal pressures towards economic emancipation. The reason the two notions are aligned together is due to the critique forwarded by Schmitt to both notions. In particular, in CPD his critique is towards parliamentarism, while in AND and CP his critique is towards liberalism. Additionally, the reader should keep in mind, and as this chapter will show, there is a fundamental difference between democracy and parliamentarism for Schmitt.

Discussion does not only form a basis to subvert violence, but claims a position through which ‘truth’ can be ascertained: “truth can be found through an unrestrained clash of opinion” (35). The legitimacy of the parliamentary system is thus based on the epistemic outcome of its principles. Truth in this context, however, does not pertain to an eternal truth, but “becomes a mere function of the eternal competition of opinions . . . it means renouncing a definite result” (ibid.). To this end, all other procedural matters – committees, chambers, press, and even voting – function to uphold the core principles of openness and discussion; they all uphold the claim to ‘truth’.¹³⁰ Here too, Schmitt relies on the constitution and the requirement to represent ‘the whole people’; thus claiming that in practical terms the parliament could not be reconciled with the requirements of the constitution.

Schmitt’s emphasis on the general will is important in this regard, especially because of his argument that a stage in history had been reached under which the parliamentary system could no longer function. His critique of the parliamentary system thus turns into a discussion of the compatibility of democratic and liberal principles, both of which he identified in the Weimar Republic. Some Schmitt scholars have claimed this to be the main force behind his interests in the issue – specifically, because of the seeming contradictions between liberalism and democracy, and the presence of both in the Weimar constitution in the roles of the Reichstag and the Reichspräsident (cf. Schwab, 1970). While the former was meant to provide the platform for the parliamentary principles – lack of allegiance and openness and discussion; the latter was meant to embody the general will through a representative of ‘the whole people’. The emphasis on general will serves a particular purpose: ‘the whole people’ are incompatible with the democratic principle of demarcation – “Every actual democracy rests on the principle that not only are equals equal but unequals will not be treated equally” (Schmitt, 2000: 9). The thought itself is not unique, and, as Ellen Kennedy points out, can in fact already be found in Aristotle’s *Politics* and *Nicomachean Ethics*.¹³¹ Schmitt’s addition is in the following sentence: “Democracy requires, therefore, first homogeneity and second—if the need arises—elimination or eradication of heterogeneity” (ibid., my emphasis). Schmitt, in other words, devises a conception of the ‘general will’ that forbids any alteration to its content resulting from radical dissent (either external or internal). This is not to say that the general will is thereby static; rather the association becomes a self-contained unit that has reached a point where not only no difference is possible internally, but especially that, if it arises,

¹³⁰ This view is exemplified by Mill, as Schmitt notes: “Even the thought that a single person might be deprived of the opportunity to express his opinion set this positivist in an inexplicable uproar, because he considered it possible that this individual’s expression of opinion might have come closest to the truth” (2007b: 39). Furthermore, note the point of intersection with the Lefortian notion of the ‘empty place’ – ‘renouncing a definite result’ is precisely what is at stake in the democratic invention. As shown in Chapter 3, the ‘definite result’ would amount to a ‘permanent’ occupation of the place of power, while the democratic invention aims at ‘temporary’ occupation.

¹³¹ “For instance, it is thought that justice is equality, and so it is, though not for everybody but only for those who are equals; and it is thought that inequality is just, for so indeed it is, though not for everybody, but for those who are unequal” (οἷον δοκεῖ ἴσον τὸ δίκαιον εἶναι, καὶ ἔστιν, ἀλλ’ οὐ πᾶσιν ἀλλὰ τοῖς ἴσοις; καὶ τὸ ἀνίσον δοκεῖ δίκαιον εἶναι, καὶ γὰρ ἔστιν, ἀλλ’ οὐ πᾶσιν ἀλλὰ τοῖς ἀνίσοις) (1280a). However, Aristotle goes on to point out that this view is short-sighted and mistakes the end of state for ‘life’ rather than ‘good life’ (εἰ δὲ μήτε τοῦ ζῆν μόνον ἔνεκεν ἀλλὰ μᾶλλον τοῦ εὖ ζῆν). See also, Scott (2014) and Agamben (1998); for an interpretation in line with Schmitt, cf. Calkins (2014: 95-96).

difference can be eradicated. Schmitt's predicament thus lies in the presence of contradictory roles in the Weimar constitution: the Reichspräsident functions as a sovereign embodiment of a total unity, while the Reichstag functions as the liberal fragmentation of interest groups in the association.

In this sense, homogeneity proves to be the inevitable outcome of Schmitt's critique of the parliamentary system. Schmitt's concern, as ever, is not with abstract conceptions as such. The democratic principle demands homogeneity of the demos *as a result of* the crisis of the parliamentary system – the democratic principle stands in absolute negation to the parliamentary/liberal ones. The negation must proceed from the principles of openness and discussion that declare identification with the demos but cannot sustain this demand due to the gradual 'drift from the public'. In Schmitt's view, identification with the demos can coincide fully only through a sovereign representation – an embodiment of the 'general will'. In other words, due to the homogeneity of the population, the concept of the political must rest on the premise that political differentiation is something alien to the association and only plays a role in the international arena – i.e. that the political category holds to the extent of seeing only states as actors, and lacks substance *within* associations.¹³²

Two points should be clarified from the preceding discussion. First, despite Schmitt's emphasis on actuality, the requirement of homogeneity remains theoretical. Just as with liberalism, where the principle of openness and discussion is absent from actuality; so in democracy, complete homogeneity retains elements of heterogeneity. Although Schmitt does not claim this explicitly, his acknowledgement of this can be found in his remarks to the effect that homogeneity is not factually present, as it must be "developed [because] the earth is divided into states" (Schmitt, 2000: 11); it must be "emphasised [because] universal human equality has been established" (12). To be sure, even though Schmitt agrees with the tenets of the democratic principle, he is not prescribing homogeneity with these statements; he is only elucidating the actuality of the democratic principle in more detail. His examples of population exchanges between Turkey and Greece in early 1920s, or of the inhabitants of the British Empire being excluded from universal suffrage, are perhaps outdated (2000: 9-10). They nevertheless retain some kernel on the basis of which his views on the democratic principle can be discerned in contemporary political rhetoric. While the terminology may have changed, the essence of discrimination on the basis of homogeneity is still present: where Schmitt wrote of Australia's laws restricting immigration to the "right type of settler" (ibid.), the relatively recent wave of requirements for naturalisation in European states emphasises native language tests and knowledge of 'life' in these states, as well as display of 'good character'. Schmitt's example of United States of

¹³² This position is best summarised by J. P. McCormick: "He depicted the principles of pluralism, publicity, discussion, and representation; the practices of separation of powers, judicial review, and majoritarian elections; and such institutions as the Western European parliament as misguided and dangerous endeavors that ultimately only paralyze the modern state. Such principles and practices inhibit a state's ability to decide on the unavoidable question of friend and enemy, what he termed 'the political'" (McCormick, 1999: 2). See also, R. Wolin (1990).

America not “allowing foreigners to share in its power” is as valid today as it was at the time of drafting its constitution (11).¹³³

Second, a note has to be made on the notion of sovereign embodiment of the population. Schmitt often mentions ‘dictatorship’ in this regard, but the type of dictatorship Schmitt had in mind does not correspond to the familiar conception of a despotic or authoritarian regime. What is pertinent to the present discussion, is Schmitt’s vehemence that democracies are not antithetical to dictatorships, whereas parliamentarism and democracy are antithetical (32). Schmitt’s conception of sovereignty rests on the understanding that the sovereign embodies the democratic homogeneity – in this sense, it is a ‘dictatorial’ representation, but one that is not, and indeed cannot be, equated to an authoritarian regime. The sovereign embodiment of a democracy represents the general will, which is implicit in the notion of homogeneity that it comprises. To phrase this in contemporary terminology of democratic theory, Schmitt’s concern is with the identity of constituting power of order (state) and constituent power that is derived from, and indeed identical to, the demos (people). In relation to the Weimar Republic, this should clarify Schmitt’s concerns with the distinct parliamentary and democratic principles that could not be unified – they were so opposed that the democratic Reichspräsident would have to either usurp the power and become a dictator or lead the state into chaos.¹³⁴

On a more theoretical level, the identity of the constituting and constituent powers already advocates a ‘dictatorial’ representation, because it assumes a ‘general will’ that must be embodied by the sovereign who decides on the friend and enemy categories. In Schmitt’s view, dictatorships are meant as correctives to the political climate: “Only within an at least theoretically small area—to overcome what is out-of-date or to correct false appearances—would a dictatorship be possible” (56-57). The implication of this view is that the concept of the political that Schmitt employs relies on the homogeneity of the population in order to announce an ‘unequal’ enemy. It should be recalled that for Schmitt the political is expressed by a sovereign decision which is, furthermore, dually constituted: the sovereign decides “whether there is an extreme emergency [and] what must be done to eliminate it” (Schmitt, 2005: 7). The concept of the political thus functions as a corrective to contemporary politics insofar as the dictator decides on the exception. The identification of the constituent and constituting powers in the form of an ephemeral sovereign decision thus points towards an understanding of the political as a mark of exclusion – a democratic demarcation which appeals to a ‘true’ notion of politics by ‘correcting’ the contemporary political climate.

¹³³ Cf. Article II, Section 1, of the Constitution: “No person except a natural born citizen, or a citizen of the United States, at the time of the adoption of this Constitution, shall be eligible to the office of President”.

¹³⁴ In this sense, dictatorship is central to democracy, though dictatorship should be understood as a technical term. For a discussion, cf. his *Dictatorship* (2014). Briefly, Schmitt distinguished between two historically developed conceptions of dictatorship: commissary and sovereign. The former exercises power only provisionally and with the purpose of restoring constitutional order, whereas the latter creates an entirely new constitutional order. For a critical overview of Schmitt’s views on dictatorship, cf. Fox (2013). For Schmitt’s views on democracy, cf. an excellent summary by A. Kalyvas (2000); for critical remarks, cf. the commentary by Jean L. Cohen in the same issue.

Schmitt's preoccupation with the principles of the parliamentarism and democracy have an air of concrete fear of chaos:

But worse and destroying almost every hope, in a few states, parliamentarism has already produced a situation in which all public business has become an object of spoils and compromise for the parties and their followers, and politics, far from being the concern of an elite, has become the despised business of a rather dubious class of persons (2000: 4).

It could be argued that the political category stems from this same fear that results from the current 'despised business' – a fear, moreover, closely connected with Arendt's concern over the centrality of economic interests. The political as a corrective to current affairs is thus simultaneously a proposal on 'true' politics. One should be careful here not to attribute to the political a domain different from that of politics, because Schmitt's point is exactly that only a certain type of politics – i.e. parliamentarism – is predatory. It is through the inclusion of the public whims that the constituting and constituent powers become unidentifiable – they are neither identical, nor clearly separable; leading to Schmitt's rejection of the parliamentary system altogether. Schmitt's delimitation of the concept of the political is therefore meant to establish a kind of politics that does not succumb to this 'despised business'. By looking at the newly correlated principle of democracy, by identifying the constituting and constituent powers, Schmitt aims to establish the contours of politics through uniquely political categories – friend and enemy. The concept of the political is thus aimed at the establishment of a new principle according to which political associations function – the democratic principle of demarcation.¹³⁵

The political/politics distinction

Two interconnected claims could be made on the political/politics distinction in relation to associations. In legalistic terms, Schmitt's aim is merely to redefine the concept for specific aims: 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'.¹³⁶ In this legalistic framework, Schmitt's conception of politics as a friend/enemy differentiation also provides the means through which conflicts could be justified. It is through this concept alone that legitimacy towards conflicts may be gained by resorting to the democratic principle of a homogeneous association. Based on internal unity, the democratic principle 'eradicates or eliminates heterogeneity'. In this sense, conflicts are only justifiable *politically*, without resorting to other domains such as economics or morality. Schmitt's interest in conflicts as *political* manifestations can thus only be understood in the light of this framework. A possible contention that legitimacy of conflict cannot solely rest on political categories is certainly conceivable, but acceding to this critique would inevitably amount to a blur between various domains, in particular the blurring of politics and morality. The crucial point is that Schmitt unmasks the moralistic

¹³⁵ One could go a step further with Schmitt and state that his concept of the political is a restatement of the classical Hobbesian division between politics and the state of nature.

¹³⁶ In the *Nachwort* from the second edition (1931): "Was hier über den 'Begriff des Politischen' gesagt ist, soll ein unermeßliches Problem theoretisch 'encadrieren'"; in the preface to the third edition (1963): "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".

façade that is mustered to justify and legitimise conflicts – he draws attention to the view that behind this moralistic façade there is commitment against an existential enemy. The concept of the political thus proposes a view of conflicts that stands separate to other forms of legitimisation. The central point is precisely that a purely moral justification for conflicts is impossible; or, when made, leads to extremely intense antagonisms, which serve as justifications for the inhuman treatment of the enemy.¹³⁷

Schmitt's analysis of the association conceived of as a general will, of sovereignty as an embodiment of that will, cannot sustain any pretence to a clear distinction between the political and politics. For, if the political is to be framed as a rigid distinction – as an ontological potentiality which forms the basis of actual political practice – then the conception must equally apply to every political system, be that parliamentary or democratic. An argument could be made that the political as a distinct concept thus applies to different systems for different purposes – a parliamentary/liberal system would thus depart from the political domain and become an object of criticism from that system. Schmitt's view clearly does not conform to this: the concept of the political is a remedy to the 'despised business' of parliamentarism in particular without recourse to other political systems. His proposition of the political as a formal conception is meant to capture the dynamics of historically contingent events – the political is meant to undermine the liberal aspirations to neutralise and mask group antagonisms.

However, Schmitt's conception of the association as a democratic unity, where different political formations as such are eliminated, lends to a problematic essentialist position – insofar essentialist refers to Schmitt's insistence on homogeneity as an essential characteristic of association; while simultaneously acknowledging that identities are not fixed, that homogeneity is never complete. It is exactly because of the type of association that Schmitt has in mind that the categories of the concept of the political are presented in opposition to one another; that in the event of complete pacifism, or the state of neutrality, Schmitt is poised to proclaim the 'end of politics'. Politics, in Schmitt's view, thus only concerns modulations of conflicts – the *necessity* of the friend/enemy differentiation outside of conflicts is wanting. Treating the political as isolated from particular type of associations – i.e. treating the political as broader than a democratic demarcation – is unsustainable; to the political in its Schmittian conception *necessarily* belong the friend and the enemy. And yet, precisely because of this demarcation the nature and content of political praxis remains elusive – Schmitt treats each event as a unique and unpredictable expression of the general will embodied by a sovereign decision; a point, furthermore, that Schmitt has in common with Arendt, given her view of events as unique expressions of power (as was discussed in Chapter 2).

The main conclusion to be drawn from the preceding in relation to the political/politics distinction is that the concept of the political should not be understood as a separate ontological precipice that shapes or forms a particular type of politics. The political is not a separate form that can be viewed distinctly from an association. Contrary to many contemporary readings of Schmitt, as will be shown briefly with reference to

¹³⁷ I return to the relation between intense antagonism and humanity in great detail in Chapter 6.

the analysis of Mouffe's transformation below, the political has a particular purpose that is at work within the democratic states: a democratic demarcation that necessitates an opposition according to which alignments and allegiances are formed. In Schmitt's conception of democracy, and in particular of the democratic principle, demarcation leads to a *politics* of opposition to internal disintegration or external threat. *The political* as a separate concept only comes into play to elucidate the principle of demarcation – it does not have a function other than that of a theoretical elucidation within democratic theory. All other notions and procedures that contemporary democratic theories find essential to the (proper) functioning of democracy – i.e. effective participation, voting equality, control of the agenda, inclusiveness and even 'enlightened understanding'¹³⁸ – in effect re-emphasise Schmitt's main principle: the principle of demarcation based on equality. In this sense, the political and politics are intrinsically connected, whereby speaking of the political/politics distinction only theoretically elucidates the content of politics as friend/enemy differentiation. What matters, in other words, is that this fundamental principle of demarcation is not meant as a proposition of the political as an ontological potentiality of conflict.

Nevertheless, there are some passages in Schmitt which could obscure the matter to some extent. Even though 'the political' and 'politics' are not explicitly mentioned as separate concepts anywhere in Schmitt's body of work,¹³⁹ there remain allusions to the distinction in his early writings. First, at the very beginning of *The Concept of the Political*, for instance, Schmitt notes that the "concept of the state presupposes the concept of the political" (2007b: 19); that is, the political is prior to the state and in this conception is to be differentiated from politics. It is viewed as a concept that would be distinguished from practice – politics is thus viewed as subjected to a number of contingent conditions, while the political is seen as an ontology that imposes itself on the contingent praxis. It should be noted, however, that for Schmitt the state has a specific contextual meaning – it refers to absolute monarchies where politics coincides with the state. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, with the emergence of and subsequent demands from the civil society, the state ceases to be the sole referential point of politics (2007b: 20-24). Accordingly, it is with the rise of liberal-democratic aspirations that the identity of state and politics ceases to coincide as societal interests start penetrating politics: "Thus it blurs the boundaries between state and society and looks to the state for the things that society will most likely refuse

¹³⁸ This list is taken from Robert Dahl's *Democracy and Its Critics* (1989). It should be noted that also in Dahl's conception of an ideal of democracy, the inclusionary aspect of liberalism is absent – his conception of democracy refers to the demos or citizens.

¹³⁹ There is, to my knowledge, only one exception where Schmitt uses the political and politics as separate conceptions, and that is in the 1972 Italian edition of *The Concept of the Political*, where Schmitt notes: "The classical profile of the state vanished when its monopoly on politics decreased and a diversity of new subjects engaged in political struggle with or without the state, with or without a 'statal' content. This marks the emergence of a new phase of reflection for political thought. The distinction between politics and the 'political' is introduced, and the issue of new bearers and subjects of political reality becomes the central theme of the complex problematic of the 'political'. This is both the starting point and the meaning of all the efforts to distinguish the multiple new subjects of the 'political' that become active in the political reality of politics, whether it is a statal reality or not . . . the criterion of the 'political' that I have proposed is in fact an approximation to the recognition of this political reality" (Schmitt in Ardit, 1994: 15). Note here that Schmitt does not treat the two concepts separately, the principal point remains that the 'new bearers and subjects' invade the already problematic 'political reality of politics'.

to do” (Burckhardt in Schmitt, 2007b: 23). Schmitt’s remark that the political is prior to the state is therefore meant to emphasise the historical continuity of politics, not to establish a distinct ontological conception of the political. Schmitt’s point is that there is no conception of the political/politics without a state as the arbiter on the friend/enemy differentiation. The political is thus understood as a condition of the state, precisely because it cements the differentiation between political groupings. Indeed, the very conception of the political, the desire to find a definition through its content and categories, is tied to a specific historical process of democracy.¹⁴⁰

Second, Schmitt’s exposition of Gierke’s/Laski’s theories of association/pluralism could lend to a view that the political is located outside the realm of politics. In a critique of their views that the state is only one of the many forms of human associations – next to religious, cultural, scientific, etc. associations – Schmitt notes that a “religious community which wages wars against members of other religious communities or engages in other wars is already more than a religious community; it is a political entity” (Schmitt, 2007b: 37). A political grouping is thereby defined through “the capacity of promoting that decisive step”, which could amount to a conflict; or even negatively, by “forbidding its members to participate in wars” (ibid.). In other words, it could be argued that the political/politics distinction is already in place in any grouping that, if necessary, can make such a ‘decisive step’; it is the underlying principle according to which any grouping functions, and indeed that all groupings are political from an ontological point of view, even though they do not engage in actual enmity on the ontic level. This presentation of the political/politics distinction does not take Schmitt’s view into account fully however. For it is also Schmitt’s position that associations lacking the decisive factor also lack a notion of the political – he speaks of ‘transformations’ from one type of grouping into a political: “The political does not reside in the battle itself . . . but in the mode of behavior which is determined by this possibility” (ibid.). A transformation may elucidate something inherent in our ‘anthropological make-up’, but it does not say something about the political as distinguished from politics. Quite the contrary, such a transformation could be a viable option in the realm of politics; Schmitt can thus conclude that a state of neutrality is not only possible, but can also be “politically reasonable” (35).

Finally, Schmitt clearly states that “nothing can escape this logical conclusion of the political” (36), which once again gives rise to the immutability of the political and “ineradicability of antagonism” (Mouffe, 2005b: 3, 19). This type of conclusion implies that fundamentally and historically, the friend/enemy differentiation is the ground of the political; but also that this ground itself cannot be changed or altered. Maintaining such a position would amount to maintaining that the political category is separable from actual politics; which would neglect Schmitt’s insistence on actual politics, by frequently employing such terms as “today”, “currently”, “our situation”,

¹⁴⁰ This is also why Schmitt’s *The Age of Neutralisations and Depoliticisations* is fundamental to an understanding of the concept of the political; as Schmitt notes there, the present situation is characterised by neutralisation and depoliticisation – and it is characterised in this way because this four century long historical process has “reached its end” (Schmitt, 2007a: 94). Proclaiming the political as an ontological concept would not be able to account for a historical process as such.

etc. (Schmitt, 2007b: 37, 54, 80). Schmitt does not detach the friend and enemy categories from the actuality of politics.

2. Mouffe's transformation and fragmented society

Chantal Mouffe's characterisation of an association is fundamentally different from that of Schmitt. Mouffe criticises Schmitt and claims to reject "any kind of essentialism" (Mouffe, 1993: 7). This is to say that she rejects homogeneity as an essential characteristic of associations, thus departing from Schmitt's views of a political association. Her critique of essentialism can be traced back to the early *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, co-authored with Ernesto Laclau; but it is equally present in all of the subsequent books on the matter. The most direct formulation comes from *The Return of the Political*, a collection of essays with a clear statement in the introduction: "all the essays deal with the same topics . . . which are here approached from an 'anti-essentialist' perspective" (Mouffe, 1993: vii). As mentioned in Chapter 3, the requirement of associations to have a homogenous essence is inconceivable – society is internally divided/fragmented.¹⁴¹ In Mouffe's view, the democratic adversaries belong to the same association and are in agreement on the ethico-political values – "liberty and equality for all" (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001; Mouffe, 1993, 2000, 2002, 2005b). Together with Laclau, she posits the "internal frontiers within society" as characteristic of associations:

antagonisms are not *objective* relations, but relations which reveal the limits of all objectivity. Society is constituted around these limits, and they are antagonistic limits . . . it follows that . . . social division is inherent in the possibility of politics, and . . . in the very possibility of a democratic politics (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001: xiii-xiv).

Laclau and Mouffe thus claim that the type of unity that characterises Schmitt's association is empirically and theoretically inadequate. At best, it is possible to unite different subject positions by creating what Laclau and Mouffe call 'chains of equivalence' – i.e. where various particular positions come under the same universal hegemonic articulation. That is to say, while social actors hold differing positions, representation of these positions is possible when their 'particularisms' are transformed into universal claims – "It becomes necessary, however, to represent . . . beyond the mere differential particularisms" (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001: xiii). The transformation from particularity to universality is not definite and remains "reversible"; nor do universal claims replace or even fully coincide with the particular positions. The point of intersection between the particular positions is to emphasise that society remains fragmented despite various levels of unity being achieved for certain universal claims. More specifically, the fragmentation of society is due to various interpretations of the content of liberal-democratic values, and of the various ways to implement these values.

As noted in the previous chapter, Mouffe's reliance on Oakeshott in order to reach "conflictual consensus" is problematic (2005b: 52). While there the argument was

¹⁴¹ While I am in agreement with Mouffe on Schmitt's problematic insistence that there is an essence to associations (homogeneity), Mouffe also overstates Schmitt's position that the categories of the political have fixed identities and functions. For Schmitt group formation and functions are always relative to specific circumstances.

made that the fragmentation of society does not create a theoretically viable alternative – i.e. that Mouffe faces the same critique as the liberal theorists¹⁴² – it is of equal importance to point out in this chapter that Mouffe’s insistence on fragmentation cannot posit the ubiquity of the political while disregarding Schmitt’s requisite of homogeneity. That is to say, while Mouffe can rightly posit that associations are fragmented, she must concede that within her model there always exists a possibility of further fragmentation *ad infinitum* – precisely because “a democratic society cannot treat those who put its basic institutions into question as legitimate adversaries”, because her model “requires discriminating between demands which are to be accepted as part of the agonistic debate and those which are to be excluded” (120). In other words, if Schmitt’s requisite for ‘strong’ homogeneity is replaced by a ‘weak’ ethico-political bond, the possibility of further fragmentation is always open because interpretation of that ethico-political bond – i.e. the extent of inclusion/exclusion – is dependent on the inner group, which may very well turn its legitimate adversaries into political enemies.

What is of interest is whether the political/politics distinction that Mouffe ascribes to Schmitt is tenable in a fragmented society; and if so, to what degree. Let us, therefore, assess her position by contrasting it with Schmitt’s views on democracy.

It should be clear by now that, unlike Schmitt, Mouffe is unwilling to sacrifice liberal principles to democratic ones. Mouffe discusses this issue in detail in her *The Democratic Paradox*, where together with Schmitt, she asserts that the two traditions – liberalism and democracy – are juxtaposed: “liberal democracy results from the articulation of two logics which are incompatible in the last instance and that there is no way in which they could be perfectly reconciled” (2000: 5). For Schmitt, the irreconcilability of the two traditions resulted in favouring one over the other – the lack of liberal practice in the Weimar Republic had as an inevitable result the democratic principle of demarcation. On a theoretical level, Mouffe does not yet disagree with this conclusion; quite the contrary, she attributes the rise of contemporary extreme right parties, that emphasise the lost homogeneity, to the lack of the democratic representation under the liberal aegis. Unable to identify with the new left – i.e. the parties that have traditionally occupied the left, and moved to the centre – “the working classes feel that their interests are better defended by those [‘right-wing populist’] parties than by social democrats” (7).¹⁴³ Furthermore, her critique of contemporary democratic theory – specifically of Rawls and Habermas – is exactly hinged on the issue of reconciling the two opposed traditions of liberalism and democracy. Despite some fundamental differences, “neither Rawls nor Habermas is able to bring about a satisfactory [reconciliation], since each of them ends up by privileging one dimension over the other: liberalism in the case of Rawls, democracy in the case of Habermas” (8). By proposing a constant realignment of the content of

¹⁴² Cf. pp. 71-75.

¹⁴³ This point of Mouffe is only valid to a certain degree. Along with the ‘new right-wing populist parties’, there has been a significant rise in single-issue parties. Additionally, in some countries where ‘blank’ votes are properly counted – i.e. not amalgamated together with invalid/rejected votes – a slow rise of dissatisfaction with the ‘system’ as a whole can be observed. For some recent studies on the issue, cf. Brown (2011), Kohler (2011), and Driscoll and Nelson (2014).

the liberal-democratic values, Mouffe aims to keep both traditions continually revitalised, endorsing a “pluralist form of human coexistence” (10-11).

This is, of course, already a significant departure from Schmitt. The ambiguous aspect of Mouffe, however, is that her position does not offer a ‘real’ alternative – she only claims that we should ‘come to terms’ with the paradoxical nature of liberal democracy (8-9). Yet, coming to terms with the paradoxical nature of liberal democracy does not on its own provide us with a theoretically sound possibility. Schmitt contended that because the members of the parliament were not independent and remained partial to their constituents, the alternative to this ‘despised business’ lay in full democratic identification. For Mouffe, complete democratic identification is not possible; instead, she insists on both traditions by emphasising the fragmentation of the association as well as the necessity to delimit what constitutes as ‘the people’. The problem here is precisely that a position that delimits ‘the people’ simultaneously appeals to the democratic principle *over* the liberal one, while an emphasis on fragmentation appeals to liberalism *over* democracy. The incompatibility of the two traditions, it seems, is understated and the paradoxical aspect of liberal democracy abandoned.¹⁴⁴

Furthermore, if Mouffe is to account for a viable alternative, she has to propose a model of democratic theory where agonism informs the actions of various political groups practically. However, on this point Mouffe fails to give an account of how antagonism is to transform into agonism. Unlike the liberal tradition which transforms antagonism into cooperation through the market – that is, by sublimating antagonism into competition – for Mouffe this transformation is not radical enough and is therefore rejected. According to her, adversaries in an agonistic model are not competitors (2000: 102; 2005b: 20, 32). A voluntary agreement does not seem plausible either, given Mouffe’s insistence on the political as a space of “power, conflict and antagonism” (2005b: 9); and it is doubtful that some form of authoritarian imposition would appeal to Mouffe. The very conditions which Mouffe cherishes – the conditions which produce plurality – would ultimately also produce the conditions of impossibility of accepting – or ‘coming to terms with’ – the paradoxical nature of liberal democracy. This is so because the conditions for plurality are instilled in the liberal-democratic process itself, thereby giving rise to dissent and disavowal to the process on the basis of a generated plurality. “The aporia is of acute urgency in any regime that purports to secure cooperation on purely voluntary grounds. This, contra

¹⁴⁴ In an interview with *Grey Room*, Mouffe articulates the problematic relation very succinctly: “Where I think Schmitt is wrong is when he says that, as a consequence, liberal democracy is an unviable regime and must necessarily self-destruct. What I’ve been trying to show is that, in fact, what he sees as the main fundamental weakness of liberal democracy is its great strength. In essence, the articulation of those two independent logics creates the space in which pluralist democracy is possible. Within the pure logic of democracy is inscribed the possibility of totalitarianism, and the logic of liberalism, without its articulation with democracy, would be a pure logic of dissemination, a logic of difference without any possibility for the struggle for equality or self-government. Within the articulation of these two logics, however, liberalism and the reference to humanity constantly subvert the totalitarian tendency to exclusion inscribed within the democratic project” (Mouffe, Deutsche, Joseph, & Keenan, 2001: 106-107). It remains unclear how the two logics would function given their incompatibility; precisely because Mouffe’s proposition is ultimately based on a democratic exclusion, as discussed in Chapter 3. I will return to the role of humanity in Chapter 6.

Mouffe, is the real ‘democratic paradox’” (Kaplan, 2010: 215n; cf. also Ardit, 2008: 9-11).¹⁴⁵

The political/politics distinction

Mouffe’s critique of liberalism emphasises its depoliticising effect – what liberalism refuses to acknowledge is that “any form of social objectivity is ultimately political and that it bears the traces of the acts of exclusion which govern its constitution” (2002: 6). Mouffe claims that a fully inclusive association cannot be realised, as there will always be a need for an ‘exterior’ to that association, as something defining and giving it a political identity. What is required, Mouffe claims, is an establishment of “a frontier, defining an ‘enemy’” (1993: 69). Creation of political identities proceeds by establishing a difference – an ‘exterior’ to the association is perceived according to which the ‘interior’ acquires its substance. This view of an association is telling in relation to Mouffe’s endorsement of the Schmittian conception of the political. The distinction is not only present, but also ‘ineradicable’ as it dictates the very condition according to which political identities are formed. Accordingly, the possibility of antagonism gains a level of permanence as the exterior unceasingly poses a threat to the interior; antagonisms thus form the very basis of identity formation, without which there is no possibility of political identification. To be sure, it is only a possibility of antagonism, since the exterior can be perceived as a threat in a variety of forms. Mouffe’s contention is, however, that such a possibility is what defines the political as opposed to politics. All social relations are possibly antagonistic; and any group is by definition political.

What is of importance here is that Mouffe presents a somewhat different conception of the political – the political/politics distinction is aligned according to the ontological/ontic divide. As argued at the end of the previous section, Schmitt’s conception should not be understood as an ontology that forms a particular type of politics. For him the political and politics are closely related in actuality. Mouffe, in contrast, must raise the political to a level of abstraction in order to formulate her view of political identity formation. In other words, the political as antagonism is “at the centre”, it receives the “status of an ontology of the social” (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001: xiv). However, Mouffe does not seem to pay sufficient attention to the implications of untying the political from politics – the point in raising the divide between ontological and ontic is exactly that the search for ontology could not be accomplished solely through an understanding of the ontic. But this is exactly what Mouffe is doing: “My main field of enquiry in this book concerns the current practices of democratic politics and is therefore located at the ‘ontic’ level. But I contend that it is the lack of understanding of ‘the political’ in its ontological dimension which is at the origin of our current incapacity to think in a political way” (Mouffe, 2005b: 9).

¹⁴⁵ It is for this reason also that the earlier *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* cannot reconcile the two distinct traditions. As Laclau and Mouffe state there, “the demand for *equality* is not sufficient, but needs to be balanced by the demand for *liberty*, which leads us to speak of a radical and *plural* democracy” (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001: 184). The notion of ‘plural democracy’ faces the same critique as posed earlier – it is not clear what the effects are, if any, of coming to terms with the paradox of liberal democracy; and equally, whether it is indeed theoretically possible to do so.

The possibility of antagonism is given a priority that is absent in Schmitt; the political is taken to a level which makes antagonism the focal point of politics, albeit in some sublimated form – even though Mouffe is unclear on how sublimation would ensue. The political/politics distinction is embraced as the theoretical underpinning prior to the view on association. As such, it is an expected result that an association remains divided and political antagonisms are the desired outcome. Whereas for Schmitt, the political is a function according to which democratic states differentiate between their interior and exterior; for Mouffe, the process is reversed – the democratic principle of demarcation is deemed necessary for the function of the political. In other words, although both authors agree on the necessity of the political for their respective associations, for Schmitt this necessity proceeds from the failing of the parliamentary system *in actuality*, whereas for Mouffe it is a perpetual, *ontological* condition which encompasses all associations by its very definition.

Furthermore, by untying the political from politics, Mouffe cannot tackle Schmitt's critique of the compatibility of liberalism and democracy in a sufficiently rigorous manner. Schmitt certainly raises the point of depoliticisation on a number of occasions – and his fear of chaos is certainly legitimate in light of the catastrophic outcomes of WWI.¹⁴⁶ Nevertheless, Schmitt's concern is far more sophisticated on the account of the incompatibility of the two principles. Coming to terms with the paradox of liberal democracy – and it is unclear what the effects are of simply 'coming to terms' – does not offer democratic theory with any specificity on further dealings within associations. Would the antagonistic aspect of the political be diminished in any way because we have now recognised that two theoretical traditions are incompatible? Presumably, Mouffe's intention is to show that within an association a division must be drawn for there to be *political* groupings; acknowledging a democratic demarcation would then allow the members of an association to form groups and contest each other's opinions, thereby reaching a vibrant democratic 'society' that continuously realigns its position in accordance with both liberal and democratic principles of freedom and equality. This would be an admirable aim, but it downplays the problematic character of the very basis upon which it is based: the incompatibility of liberalism and democracy. In fact, it reproduces the very liberal aspiration which Rawls and Habermas hold.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁶ It should be noted that *The Concept of the Political* is dedicated to Schmitt's friend and victim of WWI.

¹⁴⁷ Another point could be added on Mouffe's requisite for maintaining the political/politics distinction within associations; namely, that without the distinction in place, Mouffe faces a considerable vulnerability from the post-modernist critique. As she mentions towards the end of *On the Political*, her view of pluralism is not meant "to encompass all differences and to overcome all forms of exclusions", which is the view of post-modernists like William Connolly and Bonnie Honig (2005b: 120; cf. also Mouffe, 2013: 13-15). The reason for this is twofold. First, according to Mouffe, postmodern thinkers do not take into account that politics is about passions and power. She claims that associative theorists like Arendt "envisage the political as a space of freedom and public deliberation, while others see it as a space of power, conflict and antagonism" (2005b: 9). This is of course incorrect, as for Arendt power plays a significant role and, contra Mouffe, has a meaning that goes beyond some amalgamation between force and violence. For distinctions, cf. Arendt (1972: 143-145). More generally, the notion of power as pervasive in all manners of daily life in fact stems from the post-structural tradition. Cf. further Lukes (2004) and Morris (2002). Second, in order to have a debate over contentious issues, the adversaries within the association are to share a "symbolic space" (121). On this point too, however, there seems to be an incompatible alliance between liberalism and democracy, as

3. Conclusion

Schmitt's specific circumstances may certainly not interest political theorists, as long as a particular theoretical insight can be translated into contemporary political theory. The aim of this chapter was not to limit the scope of interpretations of Schmitt's conception of the political. My aim was to make clear that to his conception belongs a particular type of association, which cannot be wholly disregarded if we are to approach political theory through the lens of the concept of the political to which the categories friend and enemy are central. I thus hope to have established that while Schmitt's concept of the political is instructive of our contemporary political anxieties – ranging from mild xenophobia to racism, from civil disobedience to terrorism; to all of which belongs a possibility of violent conflict, of 'physical killing' – it is equally so that his conception of the political is tied to a specific association according to which it functions. It is this latter point that has been neglected by Mouffe in her application of the political to 'agonistic pluralism', strongly diminishing the theoretical viability of her proposal.

In the first section of this chapter, my aim was to show Schmitt's views on associations as fundamentally linked to his views on the political. I have illustrated how his *Crisis of the Parliamentary Democracy* is informative in understanding the concept of the political by positing that Schmitt's views on a homogeneous association are relevant to the construction of the political as the friend/enemy differentiation. I have thus claimed that the distinction often put forward in Schmitt scholarship that the political and politics are wholly separable, or that one is 'prior' to another, is untenable. The reason for this is that Schmitt tied the political to his conception of a homogenous association, an association based on a rigorous employment of the democratic principle of demarcation – the friend/enemy differentiation – in order to remain homogeneous. Schmitt's understanding of Rousseau as a theorist who espoused the complete identity between the constituent and constitutive powers, between the sovereign and the people, further testifies to this end. I have also claimed that the passages lending most closely to the reading of Schmitt as providing a distinction between the political and politics are more informative if they are understood in the relation of the political to a specific timeframe.

In order to bring Schmitt's conception to bear on contemporary political theory, therefore, there is a need for a consistent/systematic approach that would take into account the type of association for which the concept is 'designed'. Without a homogenous association, the concept of the political in its Schmittian form lacks the foundation according to which its categories – friend and enemy – are to function. Starting from this remark, the second section of this chapter has put forward a number of critical observations to the effect that the agonistic model of democracy espoused by Mouffe cannot rely on the category of the political without a very strong deviation from Schmitt's original form. In particular, Mouffe's proposal is missing a convincing account of (1) how the ontological antagonisms could be sublimated into an agonistic relation; (2) how one is to come to terms with the liberal-democratic paradox; and (3)

the 'symbolic space' presumes a liberalism – i.e. the ethico-political bond – that is denied through a democratic exclusion.

how that would affect the political association. The reason why Mouffe is unable to offer satisfactory answers to these questions is precisely that her conception of the political disregards the interdependency of the political and an unambiguously cohesive association.

They believe popular folk-tales and follow the crowd as their teachers, ignoring the adage that the many are bad, the good are few.

– Heraclitus, fragment 104.

Chapter 5, Arendt's political association

Introduction

In the previous chapter, an argument was presented that Schmitt's conception of the political pertains to a homogeneous association. Equally, the insistence on the fragmentation of society aimed to show the type of association Mouffe would endorse in relation to her conception of the political. Both scholars thus set out their views of an association in relatively clear terms, and their respective conceptions of the political aim to address the shortcomings of contemporary political systems. Unlike Schmitt and Mouffe, Arendt is not specific about the type of association she has in mind, while her notion of the political as concerted action aims to achieve similar ends – i.e. an association that does not neglect its political categories. Nevertheless, even though Arendt does not present the reader with any specificities of a political association, her analyses of historical events always return to a familiar theme of a political experience. This theme, furthermore, is usually addressed by an emphasis on a particular kind of power, spontaneity of group formation, an insistence on freedom as novelty, and the recognition of a distinct public space – these categories are central to Arendt's conception of the political association. Consequently, while Arendt does not explicitly specify a type of association for her conception of the political, she nevertheless advocates what would be pertinent to that association, as a proper foundation of a political sphere, by a frequent emphasis on these categories.

Contemporary academic literature has emphasised the difference between the 'Arendtian' and the 'Schmittian' traits of the political. The associations that Schmitt and Mouffe present fall under the latter category and are more broadly called the 'dissociative trait of the political' (Marchart, 2007). The dissociative trait emphasises that the political category functions in antagonistic terms – it shows conditions under which particular groups 'dissociate' themselves from others. By contrast, the Arendtian trait – also called the 'associative trait' – is supposed to emphasise collaboration and deliberation. It is the claim of this chapter that while Arendt certainly does stress deliberation and collaboration, an associative trait does not sufficiently capture her political theory, and that indeed on a number of instances and certain interpretations Arendt is a dissociative thinker.

In what follows, several examples are taken from Arendt's work as illustrative of her views of an association; which, furthermore, show Arendt's interest in political associations that transcend mere organisation of our social concerns and emphasise instead the importance of political interaction. These examples are of direct democracy in the manner of Ancient Greece as discussed in *The Human Condition*,

and the early stages of US republicanism as discussed in *On Revolution*.¹⁴⁸ Before proceeding with these examples and their relation to the political/politics distinction in more detail, however, something should be said about the possibilities of and concerns over the representative model of democracy present in many of Arendt's works. While some applications of her views to a representative model of democracy are certainly possible, it is important to emphasise why Arendt remained highly critical of representation and proposed the foundation of the political category to be in concerted action. As will be shown in the first section of this chapter, Arendt's concern with plurality as the main characteristic of politics is diminished profoundly if the form of government is to be representative.

1. Arendt and representative democracy

Arendt's views on representative democracy are mostly critical. Especially in her publication of *On Revolution*, there is a clear sentiment against a representative government. She thus, for instance, argues that

representation is no more than a matter of 'self-preservation' or self-interest, necessary to protect the lives of the labourers and to shield them against the encroachment of government; these essentially negative safeguards by no means open the political realm to the many, nor can they arouse in them that 'passion for distinction' (Arendt, 1990a: 69).

The form of 'representation' that Arendt finds most congenial is direct participation in the public realm through which representatives are selected – the “freely chosen” representatives would thus function as “spokesmen, . . . not in the sense that they did something *for* the people . . . [but that] they spoke and acted *as* their representatives in a common cause” (176, 174, my emphasis). Arendt's concern is with the loss of what she finds the primary characteristic of the political under a representative government – namely, a constraint on the public realm and a limit on plurality. Any form of representation by definition restricts the number of actors in the public realm, whereby “the business of government [would] become the privilege of the few” (ibid.). That is, representation by definition restricts the centrality of plurality in Arendt's conception of the political. It is for this reason that she claims that diminishing the number of actors by creating a political organ that is too large for

¹⁴⁸ There is, of course, also Arendt's account of Ancient Rome – an account which is both novel and potentially fruitful for considerations, but is nevertheless omitted in order to maintain a clear distinction with Ancient Greece. It is nevertheless fruitful to briefly contrast the two experiences by pointing out the “elemental difference between Greece and Rome [in] their respective attitudes toward territory and law. In Rome, the foundation of the city and the establishment of its laws remained the great and decisive act to which all later deeds and accomplishments had to be related in order to acquire political validity and legitimation” (Arendt, 1998: 195). As discussed in Chapter 2, for the Greeks the notion of foundation is absent – political experience is in the appearance in the public realm that stands opposed to the private one. This essential distinction marks Arendt's departure from contemporary political praxis and establishes the political realm as an independent and autonomous domain, undisturbed by the moral categories characteristic of post-Platonic political philosophy. It is therefore not surprising that, just as Machiavelli, Arendt returns to the Romans as the emblem of political foundations. However, the Latin rendition of Greek political life was distorted by the time it reached the Romans. As Arendt makes clear early in *The Human Condition*, “More than any elaborate theory, this unconscious substitution of the social for the political [from ζῷον πολιτικόν to animal socialis] betrays the extent to which the original Greek understanding of politics had been lost” (23). Cf. also Arendt (1961: 120-121) and Cassin (1990).

direct participation in the public realm would either lead to concerns with technical and administrative issues because of the social concerns of the represented; or, perhaps even worse, representation will result in the reconstitution of the “age-old distinction between ruler and ruled” (237). The few represented will rule, while the many will be ruled. In either case, the expression of public freedom and power as concerted action would be contained. In short, under a representative government the conditions are set for a polity lacking its political characteristics.

However, some scholars have noted that Arendt’s dismissal of representative democracy may be too hasty; and that indeed her views are not necessarily incompatible with representative democracy. As Kateb notes, for instance: “By her reckoning, it [representative democracy] has some good effects; but by and large it is, for the mass of people, simply a form of government. As in other forms, a few govern; the many are governed, they obey” (Kateb, 1983: 20). What Arendt seems to miss, according to Kateb, is that her preoccupation with action and civil disobedience are primarily possible under the conditions specific to a representative government. It is not only accountability in representation that prompts political action, but especially the possibility for concerted action that underpins the conditions upon which representative democracy rests: “the spirit of representative democracy keeps the spirit of resistance alive and allows resistance to shape itself into the latest expression of direct political participation, civil disobedience” (21).¹⁴⁹ Representative democracy, in other words, forms the conditions under which a form of civil disobedience is possible – without it, Kateb seems to claim, disobedience could not take a civil form (Kateb, 1983: 31-32).

Kateb also notes, however, that after the publication of *On Revolution* Arendt never “goes as far in abandoning representative democracy; . . . [even though] the distaste never leaves her” (25). Nevertheless, Arendt’s ‘distaste’ remains quite appropriate, given her interest in political theory is with the public realm and plurality. Paralleling Schmitt’s critique of parliamentarism, in *Civil Disobedience* Arendt states that

Representative government itself is in a crisis today, partly because it has lost, in the course of time, all institutions that permitted the citizens’ actual participation, and partly because it is now gravely affected by the disease from which the party system suffers: bureaucratization and the two parties’ tendency to represent nobody except the party machines (Arendt, 1972: 89).

As noted in the previous chapter, Schmitt’s critique stems from a fear that politics under parliamentarism had become “an object of spoils and compromise for the parties and their followers” (Schmitt, 2000: 4). Rather than emphasising the political, a representative model tends to purge the polity of this concept. Certainly, the conception of the political differs significantly between Schmitt and Arendt. They do, however, share the critique that representation leads to a ‘dubious class of people’ concerned with ‘party machines’, ‘spoils’ and ‘compromise’.

¹⁴⁹ Curiously, Kateb’s observation resembles Thomas Jefferson’s, who aimed to “‘preserve the spirit of resistance’ to whatever government they have elected, since the only power they retain is ‘the reserve power of revolution’” (Arendt, 1990a: 238). In other words, where Kateb embraces representation as creating the possibilities for ‘the spirit of resistance’, Jefferson used these words to caution against representation.

Furthermore, next to Arendt's implicit agreement on the 'dubiousness' of the representatives,¹⁵⁰ for her representation itself is 'dubious'. Recall that for Arendt "the *raison d'être* of politics is freedom" (1961: 146, 151), while representation deprives politics of this *raison d'être*. What is essentially problematic in representation is the lack of direct participation. Even though Kateb rightly notes that 'the spirit of resistance' is generated through representation, Arendt's insistence on politics as freedom – i.e. as a generation of novelty and spontaneity, "the freedom to call something into being which did not exist before, which was not given, not even as an object of cognition or imagination, and which therefore, strictly speaking, could not be known" (151) – cannot be satisfied under a representative government. The reason for this is precisely in her notion of 'natality'. Representation cannot satisfy the conditions necessary to take *each* birth as setting forth a new and unpredictable narrative. As Arendt points out, representation ultimately results in a "conflict between government and the people . . . turned into the old conflict between rulers and ruled" (1990a: 241). Any form of representation where the representatives do more than merely represent – that is, more than 'speak and act *as* their representatives in a common cause' – the gap between the representatives and the represented widens to undermine the spirit of politics as freedom. Kateb's critique that the conditions that foster civil disobedience belong to representative government does not acknowledge this gap; and Arendt's intention is certainly that politics is meaningless, and even non-existent, as long as this gap remains. That is to say, that any form of representation should be vested through direct participation in the public realm, which, Arendt finds absent in actual representative governments. Or to put it in more Arendtian terminology, politics is not about finding the right command-and-obey system, but about creating a public space where plurality may flourish and action in concert becomes possible.

What is fundamentally at stake in Arendt's view, is that representation reduces the number of actors; exactly because, as Arendt notes, 'the room will not hold all', an association that demands representation because direct participation becomes unfeasible leads to the number of actors to decrease (1990a: 236, 241). A 'legitimate' association, Arendt seems to claim, is to be founded on an acknowledgement of plurality; and it is for this reason that she turns to two distinct moments in history which function as a model for a desired association. These are the Greek city-states and Athens in particular, and the council/ward system during the American and French revolutions. Both cases are, of course, only rough sketches, but it is through these 'sketches' that a lost experience of politics can once again be discerned.

2. Arendt and the Greeks

When turning to Greek city-states and Athens in particular, Arendt accentuates a particular experience (Arendt, 1998: 22-37). Arendt does not consider Athenian democracy free of problems, two notable ones being coercion of slaves and subjection

¹⁵⁰ Cf. Arendt (1972: 96).

of women.¹⁵¹ The Greek city-states are approached as a representation of a historical event that accentuated a political experience. In Athenian democracy, the political experience of plurality and equality played a central role. These conditions, as mentioned in Chapter 2, are central to Arendt's conception of politics. Even though some scholars have noted that Arendt is not concerned with prescribing a specific form of government in a "systematic" way (Villa, 2000: 1), it is nevertheless the case that through Arendt's example of Athens a conception of an association which is centred around political interaction is discernible; this association, furthermore, is rooted in her understanding of plurality and equality.

Arendt's use of these two concepts has been elaborated on in Chapter 2. By equality Arendt emphasises the equal appearance in the public realm – based on an equal recognition of one another, as free men and citizens, interaction in form of action and speech becomes possible. Plurality extends this conception of equality to others – it is "men in the plural, that is, men in so far as they live and move and act in this world" that are the content of political action (Arendt, 1998: 4). However, what stands out in Arendt's use of these terms as applied to associations is that both concepts apply to a specific form of exclusion in the Athenian city-state. The division between the private and the public realms leads to a separation or detachment between the activities of the household master and those of the free men. In order to be free, Arendt holds, the private realm has to be left behind – or more specifically, upon entering the public realm, the concerns from the private realm are to be left behind. This is, presumably, also the case because equality derives its full possibility only if certain minimal biological constraints have been overcome. Arendt thus sets as a condition of entering the public realm that the content of deliberation should not concern the matters of the household (the private realm). So far, Arendt's view of an association is exclusionary only on the content of deliberation in the public space.¹⁵² This goes against the often repeated critique of Hanna Pitkin (1981): "what is it that they talk about together, in that endless palaver in the *agora*?" and "what *does* she imagine as the *content* of political speech and action" (336-337)? Precisely by excluding concerns over social matters and more explicitly over 'justice', the citizens are left with concerns that are central to politics. Our inability to think politically is precisely due to our attachment to social justice – and yet, other content is readily available: how to rule the city-state

¹⁵¹ For elitist assumptions by Arendt, cf. Brunkhorst (2000: 178-198). Nevertheless, it could be argued that Arendt's critique of representation is akin to Nietzsche's critique of democracy; contra an elitist reading of Arendt, a similar defence could be conjured as Siemens does for Nietzsche – namely, opposition to a domination of a certain class from "a standpoint in human diversity and a generic concern with the future of humankind" (Siemens, 2009: 20).

¹⁵² Unlike Mouffe (yet in line with Schmitt), therefore, the content of political debate, though not fully articulated, does follow certain 'guidelines'. On the other hand, Arendt's conception of plurality is more minimal than that of Mouffe; where for the latter it denotes different affiliations and possibilities of hegemonic projects, for the former plurality alludes to the existential singularity of human beings and their outlook on the world. The plurality of views must enter the public space because, in Arendt's view, human beings act to distinguish themselves "through unique deeds or achievements that he was the best of all" (Arendt, 1998: 41). Arendt continues: "But only man can express this distinction and distinguish himself, and only he can communicate himself and not merely something . . . In man, otherness, which he shares with everything that is, and distinctness, which he shares with everything alive, become uniqueness, and human plurality is the paradoxical plurality of unique beings" (176). Furthermore, for Arendt it is individuals who are political, not groups – her conception of "action is highly individualistic" (194).

together? Or, how to align our differences over certain issues? These issues could be as problematic as a Schmittian decision on friend/enemy, or as ‘simple’ as redecorating the *agora*; at any rate, they do not necessarily concern social justice.

There is, however, a second and fundamentally more problematic level of exclusion which operates in Arendt’s view of the Greeks. As pointed out earlier, Arendt’s conception of politics is categorised as the ‘associative trait’, in direct contrast to the ‘dissociative trait’ (Marchart, 2007).¹⁵³ By dissociation is meant that the political categories are aimed at establishing divisions between various groups. The main purpose of the conception of the political is to distinguish between those who belong to the association and those who do not. The associative trait by contrast emphasises deliberation and collaboration. Arendt’s conception of politics in the Greek context seems to rest on a paradoxical attachment to both association and dissociation. While she certainly stresses the importance of public deliberation as well as emphasises concerted action, it is also the case that Arendt’s ‘phenomenology’ of both the public and private realms, and her conception of action as speech, indicate a differentiation between those who *should* participate in a public discourse, and those who are to be excluded. To put it differently, Arendt’s depiction of the Greeks fails to notice that exclusion on the content of deliberation is followed by an exclusion of a particular kind of action in the public realm – the space of action. What the reader is confronted with is an unclear relation between space and people – *is the space of an association prior to or posterior to the people belonging to that association?*¹⁵⁴ This problematic is best illustrated by taking three statements in HC that quickly follow one another in Arendt’s discussion over making (ποίησις) and acting (πρᾶξις):

(1) “Before men began to act, a definite space had to be secured and a structure built where all subsequent actions could take place, the space being the public realm of the *polis* and its structure the law” (Arendt, 1998: 194-195).

(2) Arendt continues to point out that what made the *polis* was not the space itself, but its actors: “these tangible entities themselves were not the content of politics (not Athens, but the Athenians, were the *polis*)” (195).

And a little further, (3): “The *polis*, properly speaking, is not the city-state in its physical location; it is the organization of the people as it arises out of acting and speaking together, and its true space lies between people living together for this purpose, no matter where they happen to be. ‘Wherever you go, you will be a *polis*’:

¹⁵³ For this reason too, Mouffe emphasises that her conception of politics is not Arendtian, but rather Schmittian.

¹⁵⁴ The following discussion can be read as a supplement to Jacques Rancière (2004) *Who is the Subject of the Rights of Man?* As Rancière points out there, for Arendt the public realm is separate from the private; from this also follows that there is a distinction to be made between the ‘private rights’ and ‘public rights’. While the primary aim of this chapter is to uncover what kind of association Arendt has in mind, it should be borne in mind that the discussion on rights is implicit in any notion of association. However, unlike Rancière, the claim made here does not utilise the same notion of the demos as “those who have no qualification for exercising power” (304), instead by the democratic demos is meant a demarcation between the inner and the outer group. As has been noted in the introduction, the claim put forward is that Arendt’s notion of the political retains elements of exclusion – and that this exclusion is on occasion based on the basis of ‘private rights’ while on other occasions on the basis of ‘public rights’. As Rancière points out, furthermore, the discussion on the association is deeply entwined with a discussion on humanity, which is the subject of Chapter 6.

these famous words . . . expressed the conviction that action and speech create a space between the participants which can find its proper location almost any time and anywhere” (198).

These three statements are not readily compatible, and indeed are contradictory. In a strict interpretation of these sentences, Arendt prioritises different entities over each other. Thus, statement (1) prioritises the space over the people – the space of action has to be built *before* people can act there. The priority of space over the people in statement (1) connotes an association that is only possible in the form of citizenship. It is not surprising then that Athenians kept the public space exclusively for their citizens – no women and slaves, but also no foreigners (Aristotle comes to mind) could become citizens of the polis.¹⁵⁵ To be sure, Arendt is very clear that “homogeneity of past and origin, the decisive principle of nation-state, is not required” (1990a: 174). Nevertheless, her position with statement (1) is at best elitist, resembling a form of aristocratic self-government and implying a form of exclusion that is the result of creating a space of action. With the Greek model, Arendt’s proposition seems to reduce the number of actors by selecting only those who are able to leave their private concerns behind in order to enter the political realm.

Statement (2) seems to recognise the limitations the Greek model poses to the political experience if we are to rely only on the first statement and view the space as prior to the people. Instead, the second statement prioritises a particular people with political action, thus disregarding the physical space of action – Athenians as the people come before Athens as the space of action. The last statement (3) seems initially only to restate statement (2) – not the city-state, but the intercourse of its people is prioritised. However, statement (3) goes further by overriding the particularity of the people – Athenians are no longer particular to the space of action, they are only accidental, while the space of action is between the participants ‘any time and anywhere’. Statements (2) and (3) therefore seem to establish a different dialectic – the ‘definite space’ of an association gives way to an association based on intersubjectivity – it is not the space where the people are that forms the association, but their interaction with one another. Thus, with statement (1) Arendt only emphasises the genesis or foundation of an association – what makes a political association *political* is what follows after this foundational act.¹⁵⁶ Arendt’s profound finding is that the public space “does not always exist, and although all men are capable of deed and word, most of them—like the slave, the foreigner, and the barbarian in antiquity, like the laborer or craftsman prior to the modern age, the jobholder or businessman in our world—do not live in it” (1998: 199). The tension between these three statements – i.e. the question over priority of space over people – remains. There is, however, a possibility of resolving this tension by looking at Arendt’s other example: the American Revolution.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁵ Note that there is a level of similarity here with Schmitt’s conception of an association as a homogenous whole. Only equals can participate in the association and be treated as equals; ‘unequals are not to be treated equally’.

¹⁵⁶ I will return to this issue in Chapter 6.

¹⁵⁷ Note that the Greek model does not propose a form of government that surpasses representation. Only those able to practice politics, to be engaged in the political realm, are welcome to do so. The actors of the *polis* are certainly free in the political sense; yet their actions are not isolated from others

3. The council system

The contrast between the three statements discussed in the previous section becomes even more apparent when we consider Arendt's speculative remarks towards the end of *On Revolution*. In the last chapter of OR, Arendt points towards the loss of the "revolutionary spirit" as the initial principles of "public freedom, public happiness, public spirit" turned into "civil liberties, the individual welfare of the greatest number, and public opinion" (Arendt, 1990a: 221). It is fitting that in this last chapter Arendt's concern turns to what generated this 'revolutionary spirit' in the first place. In her analysis of the councils that sprang up during the American and French revolutions, but also subsequently in the Soviet and Hungarian revolutions (261-262), she finds that, independent of one another, these councils arose in a similarly spontaneous manner, without recourse to some theoretical doctrine (262). Next to the spontaneity of their arrival, the councils shared a number of other characteristics: they were "organs of order" (263), they "crossed all party lines" (ibid.), and they aspired to "become a 'participator' in the public affairs" (264-265).

Each of these four characteristics refers to Arendt's insistence that politics is about freedom, and that political freedom can only be achieved as long as action and plurality play the central role in politics. Thus, the spontaneity of the coming into being of the councils is paired with the councils being organs of order – they both refer to Arendt's conception of action; as acting in concert in order to create something new. Similarly, crossing party lines and becoming a participator refer to her conception of plurality – as the "professional revolutionists" dictate specific mandates, they by definition restrict the plurality innate to political action. By 'professional revolutionist', Arendt refers to "an entirely new figure on the political scene . . . his life was spent not in revolutionary agitation . . . but in study and thought, in theory and debate, whose sole object was revolution" (258-259). Arendt's aim is to distinguish between the spontaneity of the revolutionary uprising and the use of revolutions as a means to rise to power (258-261). Professional revolutionaries aimed to dictate and direct, rather than act freely – they sought to enlighten the masses (263), reduced the councils to executors of commands (264), and thereby disregarded the plurality innate to political action. They created a division between what is known and what should be done, and "Wherever knowing and doing have parted company, the space of freedom is lost" (264).

These four characteristics, furthermore, are telling of the problematic between the priority of space and the people that occurs in Arendt's discussion of the Greeks. Much like the Greeks, the revolutionary councils were spatially restricted; more precisely, they were restricted by what constitutes equality: "Freedom in a positive sense is possible only among equals, and equality itself is by no means a universally valid principle but . . . applicable only with limitations and even within spatial limits" (275). Arendt suggests here that a conception of equality is only possible if limits are applied to the notions of space and the people. Just as with the Greeks, political

left outside of this realm of freedom. Athenian citizens' actions were not isolated to themselves, they had profound effects on the wider population of Athens. To put it bluntly, only those able to participate in the matters of state could do so; while the rest were subjected to the decisions made by these select few.

freedom could be realised only through equality; and it is only through equality that a particular space gets its political “essence” (276). Arendt’s suggestion is not, as one would imagine, to remove the spatial limitation entirely, but rather to broaden the space on two distinct levels. On the one hand, “the trouble lies in the lack of public spaces to which the people at large would have entrance and from which an élite could be selected, or rather, where it could select itself” (277). In this regard, Arendt’s proposal seems to conform to some forms of agonistic models of democracy, by broadening the space ‘horizontally’.¹⁵⁸ On the other hand, Arendt also proposes several levels of representation; as it were, broadening the space ‘vertically’. She envisages a pyramid, yet one where authority “would have been generated neither at the top nor at the bottom, but on each of the pyramid’s layers” (278). The image of a ‘broader’ pyramid is further elaborated on in relation to the people. In contrast to some commentators,¹⁵⁹ Arendt clearly notes that the council system “would spell the end of general suffrage” (279). She thus suggests that in order to appear as equals in the public realm, only those who “care for more than their private happiness” would be able to enter it – in effect, applying a limit on the notion of ‘the people’. To be sure, Arendt is also clear that this type of exclusion should not be “derogatory”, and, more importantly, “would not depend upon an outside body; if those who belong are self-chosen, those who do not belong are self-excluded” (279-280).

It is indeed so that the councils are not built according to the traditional command-and-obey system, but aim to transcend the ruler through an active participation in politics by those ‘interested’ enough. On this account, the council system holds an advantage over the Greek model. Nevertheless, the council system still faces the space/people problematic despite broadening the pyramid ‘horizontally’ and ‘vertically’. The concerns over the priority of space are left intact and, furthermore, are intensified because the notion equality is ‘spatially limited’. We are thus confronted with the openness of political action because the spatially limited notion of equality forms the basis of action. It should be recalled that for the Greeks participation in the polis meant equality based on leaving private concerns upon entering the public realm. In the council system equality is based on concerted action – the distinction between private and public is subsequent to the act. That is, the space of action (the public realm) is limited by a particular kind of action; and because it is so limited, the space of action is considered to come *before* the particular actions of individuals.

In either of the two examples, the Greek model and the council system, the priority of space over people remains intact to a degree. A specific conception of equality operates as the mechanism through which those who belong to an association and those who do not are distinguished. This distinction, furthermore, is *politically* motivated – “equality was not natural but political” (278). That is, the distinction functions according to the principle of democratic demarcation, a demarcation in terms of who the demos of the association is and who is to be excluded. Or, to put it

¹⁵⁸ Cf. for instance Connolly (2002) and Honig (1993); curiously, Chantal Mouffe’s proposition follows similar lines, without explicitly announcing them. Creating spaces for agonism is the only viable option given her otherwise restrictive views on a democratic association – though perhaps for Mouffe the space can remain symbolic and not actual.

¹⁵⁹ Cf. for instance Canovan (1995), Isaac (1996), Muldoon (2011).

in Schmittian terms, “the principle that not only are equals equal but unequals will not be treated equally” (Schmitt, 2000: 9). Concerning the three statements from the previous section, the council system still faces the incompatibility between the space of action and the people.¹⁶⁰

4. Concerns over equality and plurality

Contemporary academic literature has emphasised Arendt’s concern with a ‘true’ notion of the political – and indeed that her oeuvre can be characterised as answering one fundamental question “What is the political?” (Villa, 2009: 22; Vollrath, 1977). Nevertheless, the political and politics should not be viewed as separate concepts. The political is firmly tied in with politics – Arendt’s claim is exactly that there is no politics without an acknowledgement of plurality, that action is a political manifestation; and perhaps even more firmly still, that the political for Arendt is not a mere theoretical elucidation for the purpose of understanding. Politics is the matter of concrete ‘pre-theoretical’ aims, and a conception of the political in Arendt does not lose sight of this concreteness. A conception of the political is thus only discernible with regard to the initially set framework – as a resistance to contemporary political practice and an appeal to a ‘true’ political experience.

Nevertheless, Arendt does not merely aim to draw attention to a certain type of political experience; her position requires a further theoretical examination. The two concepts of plurality and action certainly form a different type of philosophical anthropology than Schmittian antagonism – they pertain specifically to an understanding of ourselves as *political* beings; yet, they do not point to a determination of the political sphere of existence. There is, however, an exclusionary

¹⁶⁰ To be sure, Arendt seems to ignore this problematic altogether; in her words, broadening the pyramid “could constitute the solution to one of the most serious problems of all modern politics, which is not how to reconcile freedom and equality but how to reconcile equality and authority” (Arendt, 1990a: 278). In this regard, she may indeed have found a solution to the problem ‘how to reconcile equality and authority’. In dealing with the relation between the political and an association, however, Arendt’s solution remains incomplete, perhaps because the relation between the political and the association is closer to the problem ‘how to reconcile freedom and equality’.

There is, moreover, another way of looking at the issue. An alleviation of the space/people problematic is possible by taking Arendt’s example of The Mayflower Compact that is discussed at the beginning of OR. With this example, Arendt points out that prior to any creation of a space, action already plays a significant role: “Nothing but the simple and obvious insight into the elementary structure of joint enterprise as such . . . caused these men to become obsessed with the notion of compact and prompted them again and again ‘to promise and bind’ themselves to one another” (179). What we find, in other words, is a resemblance to statement (3) of the previous section, where the intersubjectivity of action overrides the spatial boundaries as well as the particularity of the people. There is, as it were, not foundation on the basis of which a democratic demarcation could be justified simply because there is no *demos* to speak of. This foundational act – i.e. literally signing a compact – thus leads to an egalitarian stance (rather than an elitist one): “action . . . can be accomplished only by some joint effort” (174). Hauke Brunkhorst makes a similar observation; the remedy against Arendt’s elitism is “fortunately [in] Arendt’s political theory . . . we can insist . . . on the egalitarian power to make a new beginning, a power that is co-original with every human being’s ability to say no, to refuse, and to start again” (Brunkhorst, 2000: 196). The reason I call this an alleviation of the problem, and not a solution, is because it remains but a fleeting, momentary event – the creation of space *necessarily* follows the foundational act, and the preservation of the revolutionary spirit remains subordinated to the space/people problematic. This is indeed why Jefferson envisaged the opportunity of successive revolutions.

element present in Arendt's conception of politics, and what constitutes the political distinction as such, which is found in her conception of equality – for it is only among equals that politics as such can take place; indeed, that the very conception of politics makes little sense without equality. This is noteworthy specifically due to the ensuing tension that is created between Arendt's conception of actuality of politics and a specific type of the political. It is certainly the case that Arendt seeks to go beyond the political/politics distinction by emphasising political action on the basis of plurality; this distinction is nevertheless re-substantiated by the political becoming a distinct sphere of equality. There is, in fact, a similarity in Arendt's approach to Schmitt's: where Schmitt insisted on a criterion through which the political could be discerned (notably, the friend/enemy differentiation), Arendt employs the criterion of equality to 'enframe' her conception of the political: "The cultural, literary, and artistic, the scientific and professional and even the social elites of a country are subject to very different criteria among which the criterion of equality is conspicuously absent" (1990a: 279) – much like Schmitt's concept of the political follows according to different criteria than aesthetics or morality. This is, at least, the view that arises from her view of a political association – and is indeed present not only in the council system, but also in the Greek model.¹⁶¹

There is, of course, a stark difference between Arendt's and Schmitt's conception of equality. The homogenous whole according to which the political is employed by Schmitt refers to equality as well; yet, the 'intent' or 'direction' of the political is different. For Schmitt, the political is a source of differentiation – through the political the association gets its distinct identity and purpose. Arendt's position is not entirely different as identity and purpose are defined through an understanding of equality; from the criterion of equality, certain ways of playing out differences become possible. The two main differences between Arendt and Schmitt are in the formation of groups and the conception of plurality. The latter does not play a role in Schmitt; if anything, Schmitt would have been critical of any deviation from homogeneity in an association. Equality in Schmitt takes the form of unity; the sovereign is an embodiment of the whole, not a separate entity. Arendt openly lauds Schmitt's conception of sovereignty in *What is Freedom?*¹⁶² and her conception of action as

¹⁶¹ It should be also noted that, like Schmitt, Arendt too creates a binary opposition in her conception of the political: equality stands in direct opposition to authority. This is notably also Arendt's critique towards a representative government discussed in the first section of this chapter. The representative system does not allow for equality because it creates a distance between the rulers and the ruled – effectively, it reinstitutes authority in place of equality.

There is an additional element to be mentioned at the outset of this section. The concerns over equality and plurality amount to a similar concern in the 1980s that led to the so-called Foucault-Habermas debate – a dispute over whose theoretical framework provided a better critique of power. Without taking sides in the dispute, which itself is broader than the scope of the thesis, this section revisits similar concerns regarding equality and plurality regarding Arendt's work. The aim is to show the incompatibility of the two notions through what is commonly understood as a debate between normativity and description.

¹⁶² Even though Arendt lauds Schmitt's conception of sovereignty, she seems to emphasise a different aspect of his conception: "Among modern political theorists, Carl Schmitt is the most able defender of the notion of sovereignty. He recognizes clearly that the root of sovereignty is the will: Sovereign is who wills and commands" (cf. Arendt, 1961, fn. 21 on p. 240). Arendt alludes to Schmitt's conception of sovereignty in relation to the state of exception – where indeed the will plays a predominant role. Nevertheless, Schmitt's claim is that sovereignty is never detached from the whole; that 'commanding'

concerted pre-theoretical spontaneity indeed follows this tradition of sovereignty as unity. Unlike Schmitt, however, for whom equality is always present, for Arendt equality amongst the actors is only achieved at the peak of spontaneity – the actors are not invested with complete equality at any other point than the moment of action, they are only equal in their recognition of one another as political actors. This is indeed to say that equality is more than a framework through which the political category becomes evident; equality is fulfilled in action.

With this in mind, Arendt's position on the formation of groups poses potential difficulties to her theory of action. As noted in Chapter 2, both individual *agon* as well as a need for a concerted action play a significant role in Arendt's theory of action, and yet the two are not easily reconcilable. There, the point was made that Arendt's view of speech may have some potential to remedy the tension. In light of an association that functions according to the democratic principle of demarcation, rather than individual speech-acts (or posterior narratives), the issue remains unresolved. On the one hand, Arendt's conception demands of associations that they apply the democratic principle of demarcation and discriminate between those who belong to the association and those who do not. Group formation is thus integral to Arendt's theory of action – without groups it is meaningless to speak of action *in concert*. On the other hand, Arendt's theory of action is thoroughly "individualistic" (Arendt, 1998: 43, 194). Group formation is not only spontaneous, but is preceded by an individual "fiercely agonal spirit, where everybody had constantly to distinguish himself from all others" (41).

The reason for this conclusion is due to an assumption by Arendt that plurality and equality are compatible – this is not necessarily the case and the tension in Arendt's view of an association does, perhaps, testify to this. By plurality Arendt assumes both a descriptive and a normative claim; similar to Mouffe's assertion that plurality is not "merely a *fact*, something that we must bear grudgingly or try to reduce, but an axiological principle" (Mouffe, 2000: 19). For Arendt plurality is, of course, a fact; but it is also a desired outcome, in the sense that bringing plurality to bear on the formation of a public space is a goal worth achieving. Where Mouffe notes plurality to be "constitutive *at the conceptual level* of the very nature of modern democracy" (ibid.), for Arendt plurality is constitutive of politics in a more general sense; politics is by definition democratic – i.e. it rests on a conception of a plural demos. The incompatibility that we run into here is that democratic politics must adhere to the principle of demarcation. The problematic relation, in other words, is that while politics in a general sense is to be based on plurality for Arendt, exclusion remains central to her view of associations.

An easy solution, and if I may, an 'intellectually lazy' ¹⁶³ attitude, to the incompatibility of plurality and exclusion on the basis of equality would posit that Arendt's exclusion does not depend on an external body. The type of exclusion that Arendt considers is not derogatory – "if those who belong are self-chosen, those who do not belong are self-excluded" (Arendt, 1990a: 279-280). An interest in the public

would not allow for a conception of sovereignty – that it would indeed result into 'the age-old division between rulers and ruled'.

¹⁶³ I borrow the phrase from Villa (1996).

realm is enough of a warrant to partake in the matters of public affairs. This solution, however, is insufficient if we are to take Arendt as positing a conception of the political next to that of politics because the separation between the political and politics would be reduced to an interest in the public realm. Doing so would thus remove from Arendt's analyses the 'concreteness' of the political events as, while politics would be rooted in concrete historical situations, the concept of the political would mark an ontological conception. Instead, it is quite clear that for Arendt both the political and politics are deeply interconnected. While the latter is a matter of concrete 'pre-theoretical' aims, the former becomes apparent as a framework of resistance to contemporary political *practice* – i.e. as an emphasis on political experience of the participants in the public realm.

This tension between plurality and equality is further exemplified in Arendt's example of the Hungarian Revolution. While Arendt does not openly advocate homogeneity, her depiction of the events closely resembles Schmitt's interpretation of Rousseau's *volonté générale*. What is striking in both Arendt and Schmitt is a certain sense of unity in action. Schmitt's reliance on homogeneity for his conception of the political was discussed in Chapter 4 – it suffices to remind the reader that Schmitt relied on a homogeneity with a sovereign embodiment of the whole. He thus states that "the general will as Rousseau constructs it is in truth homogeneity" (Schmitt, 2000: 14). For Arendt, homogeneity is counterintuitive, and yet her analysis of the Hungarian Revolution is closely tied to, if not complete homogeneity, at least a deep sense of unity in action:

[A] student demonstration grew from a few thousand suddenly and spontaneously into a huge crowd which took it upon itself to carry out one of the students' demands, the overturning of Stalin's statue in one of the public squares in Budapest. The following day, some students went to the Radio Building to persuade the station to broadcast the sixteen points of their manifesto. A large crowd immediately gathered, as if from nowhere, and when the AVH, the police guarding the building, tried to disperse the crowd with a few shots, the revolution broke out . . . The workers, hearing of the situation, left the factories and joined the crowd. The army, called to defend the regime and help the armed police, sided with the revolution and armed the people. What had started as a student demonstration had become an armed uprising in less than twenty-four hours. From this moment onward, no programs, points or manifestos played any role; what carried the revolution was the sheer momentum of acting-together of the whole people whose demands were so obvious that they hardly needed elaborate formulation (Arendt, 1958: 26).

The suddenness and spontaneity of the enlargement of the group – that 'in less than twenty-four hours' a small student demonstration became a large-scale armed uprising – is precisely where her view of a unity of action becomes so evident. It is precisely because there was no need for any 'elaborate formulations' of their demands that the revolution could be carried by 'the sheer momentum of acting-together of *the whole people*'.¹⁶⁴ To be sure, Arendt is exceptionally critical of Rousseau.¹⁶⁵ The parallel drawn here pertains to the conception of homogeneity in action in particular and thus not in a general sense. The underlying reason for Arendt's critique of Rousseau is the usurpation of plurality from politics. The homogeneity that is created through the

¹⁶⁴ There are, of course, some differences between the 'general will' and 'will of all' in Rousseau; when it comes to the meaning of homogeneity in action, however, these differences are irrelevant. For a concise summary, cf. Allen (1961).

¹⁶⁵ Cf. in particular Arendt (1961: 163-165).

general will presupposes a unity between the individual and the sovereign – a contract where the sovereign absorbs the individual wills into himself and demands a continuous scrutiny of one’s individual interests (1961: 164; 1990a: 76-79). However, such usurpation of individuality need not accompany the Rousseauian conception, and indeed, the way Schmitt interprets the ‘general will’, there is no sovereign as a separate entity alongside it. That is to say, Arendt’s conception of concerted action would fall in line with Schmitt’s interpretation of Rousseau– namely, that whatever it is that ‘carries the revolution’ is the sovereign will; and this sovereign will cannot be reconciled with Arendt’s conception of plurality. In short, the parallel between Schmitt and Arendt on the unity of action exemplifies the tension between plurality and exclusion on the basis of equality. The tension ensues because a sense of unity within the group, even if not complete homogeneity, is contained in Arendt’s notion of concerted action.

On this note, Laclau and Mouffe’s notion of ‘chains of equivalence’ may perhaps elucidate the manner according to which Arendt’s formation of groups could retain the plurality that is fundamental to her theory of action. In *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, they posit that through chains of equivalence various particular positions come under the same universal hegemonic articulation: “Social actors occupy differential positions within the discourses . . . It becomes necessary, however, to represent the totality of the chain [‘vis-à-vis oppressive forces’], beyond the mere differential particularisms of the equivalential links” (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001: xiii). The transformation from particularity to universality is not definite and remains “reversible”; additionally, the newly assumed universality is never complete as the particularity from which it was initiated does not cease to exist. Laclau and Mouffe thus point out that the tension between universality and particularity is “unresolvable” and resort to calling universality “a *contaminated* universality” (ibid.). Arendt’s notion of action amongst equals can be viewed in analogous terms: the spontaneity of action creates positions that follow a newly formed hegemonic articulation; without, however, losing sight of their particularity. In other words, for Arendt ‘social actors’¹⁶⁶ retain their plurality in concerted action without succumbing to complete unity; in unified/concerted action individuals may set aside their particularity for the purposes of a specific (universal) aim. Additionally, the social actors can still be viewed as a sovereign embodiment of the whole, as long as the unity present in the notion acknowledges the reversibility of the transformation. This by no means eradicates the possibility of violence – groups may still form for the purposes of violence; it nevertheless retains the Arendtian determination that politics is about freedom without reducing action in concert to a Schmittian homogeneity/equality.

5. Conclusion

It could be stated that the type of association that Schmitt, Arendt and Mouffe have at the backdrop of their conception of ‘true’ politics, or politics ‘proper’, also informs

¹⁶⁶ While ‘social actors’ would have a different meaning for Arendt than for Laclau and Mouffe, I retain this terminology for the purpose of clarity. Political actors would suit Arendt’s notion better and ‘social actors’ is used in this sense here.

their views on the political. As has been shown in the previous chapter, both Schmitt and Mouffe formulate a conception of the political based on a characteristic conception of an association: a homogenous association for Schmitt, which turns towards the political as a dissociative dichotomy between friend and enemy; and an agonistic plural democracy for Mouffe, which sets the political on an ontological plane – through which, moreover, the inherently human antagonisms are sublimated into agonistic manifestations that would challenge the status quo. As I have argued in this chapter, for Arendt ‘true’ politics is a manifestation of plurality – an association that recognises plurality and fosters it. It is certainly correct to view Arendt as an associative thinker, as opposed to the dissociative thinkers like Schmitt and Mouffe. While this is the case, however, Arendt nevertheless holds a view of associations as maintaining a division between those who do and those who do not participate in the association. Her conception of the political, in other words, still generates a discrimination on the demos of the democratic polity – i.e. a democratic principle of demarcation.

That is to say, the opposition between the two strands of political thought is not as sharp as contemporary academic literature conceives it to be. Arendt’s association maintains dissociative traits. Her presentation of the Greeks as well as the further remarks on council systems still maintain that politics is founded on the basis of a democratic demarcation. In sections two and three, the argument was made that each politically instituted association follows the democratic principle of demarcation. While discussing the Greek city-states, Arendt maintained that exclusions on the demos should be upheld on the basis of equality – the ‘admission’ to the public realm was on the condition that one would be able to leave his or her private concerns behind. Similarly, in her discussion of the revolutionary councils, Arendt is unable to overcome this shortcoming and thus cannot avoid presupposing a form of exclusion on the demos. She is thus forced, as are Schmitt and Mouffe, to admit a notion of restrictive political realm.

In the last section, an attempt was made to uncover what prompted the tension in Arendt’s work generated by aligning her with the ‘associative’ trait, while her views also strongly incorporate the ‘dissociative’ trait. This section thus addressed the possible incompatibility between the centrality of plurality in Arendt’s theory of action and its compatibility with the notion equality. Arendt’s assumption that these are compatible is questionable – and the preceding tension between space and people testifies to this end. As discussed in the previous sections, Arendt discriminates who belongs to the association and who does not through her notion of equality. At the same time, her conception of plurality is intended to be the core of a political association. As noted towards the end of the chapter, a possibility to remedy this incompatibility is by employing the notion of ‘chains of equivalence’.

I started this chapter with a section on Arendt’s concerns over representative government. It was argued that Arendt was certainly right to worry about representation, as it would ultimately result in the traditional opposition between the rulers and the ruled. However, Arendt did not take into account that, following George Kateb, her ideal association based on plurality is only possible given the liberal democratic backdrop according to which the civility of the groups can be ascertained. Though this may very well be the case, Kateb misses the point that Arendt’s concerns

were with individual distinctness through which a plurality of views is formed. Her concern was to keep the main characteristic of politics – plurality – by ensuring that representation does not amalgamate these into party positions. This is indeed to say, and repeat after Arendt, that representation is perhaps necessary; however, only insofar as the choice on the “spokesmen” is not to do “something for the people”, but to act “as their representative in a common cause” (Arendt, 1990a: 174).

Finally, while this chapter and the one preceding it have shown that Schmitt, Arendt and Mouffe view their ‘ideal’ associations as applying the democratic principle of demarcation – that their vision of a *political* association must incorporate a measure of exclusion on who belongs and who does not belong to the association – they are nevertheless concerned with humanity at large, beyond their respective views of ‘limiting’ associations. In other words, even though each scholar thus far has been addressing the dissociative trait in the political/politics distinction, they nevertheless maintain a sense of an all-encompassing associative trait through a conception of ‘humanity’, which is the topic of Chapter 6.

*It is by disease that health is pleasant, by
evil that good is pleasant, by hunger
satiety, by weariness rest.*
– Heraclitus, fragment 111.

Chapter 6, Politicisation and/or neutralisation; or, ‘a farewell to liberalism?’

Introduction

In the previous two chapters, a case was made that a dissociative element is necessarily present in any conception of an associative politics. The discussion of associations, and the type of demarcation they determine, is relevant to the claims made by Schmitt, Mouffe, and Arendt on the liberal attempt to ‘neutralise’ political groupings. As has been indicated in the first three chapters of the thesis, both Schmitt and Mouffe regard liberalism’s aims as unrealistic and not conforming to the actuality of politics. At the same time, their concern over liberal hegemony is telling of their project to reinforce the centrality of the political and isolate the domain of politics from other domains. Their views of associations demanding a restrictive stance towards the other thus also underpins the necessity of politics – as opposed to the liberal goal of neutralising political conflict, they aim to re-politicise what is determinately political in conflict. A similar case was made regarding Arendt’s concerns over the political domain being dominated by non-political elements. Unlike Schmitt and Mouffe, Arendt’s concern is not directly with the neutralisation of politics, but with the penetration of social concerns as the guide to political action.¹⁶⁷ It could be argued that politicisation is therefore also her primary concern.

These positions are problematic, however, in relation to the conceptions of ‘humanity’ that these scholars have. While claiming a demarcation according to the democratic principle, each of the scholars nevertheless maintains a notion of humanity that transcends the restrictions of their respective views of an association. As will be shown in this chapter, through their respective conceptions of humanity they aim to minimise the extent of violent conflicts. A discussion about the role of the notion of humanity in their works, therefore, demands scrutiny. Moreover, given the paradoxical nature of liberal democracy,¹⁶⁸ and a continued wave of critique towards liberalism in contemporary political theory, it is important to expand on the role ‘humanity’ has on their views of the political.

The concept ‘humanity’, of course, bears on the distinct traditions of liberalism and democracy. These distinct traditions thus also emphasise a different aspect of the concept: an in principle all-encompassing idea of humanity for the liberal tradition; and a restrictive idea of humanity in the form of citizenship for the democratic tradition. As Hermann Cohen observed,

¹⁶⁷ As argued in Chapter 1, Schmitt has a similar concern with penetration of social matter into affairs of the state. Cf. pp. 28-31 of this thesis.

¹⁶⁸ Cf. Chapter 4 of this thesis.

the abandonment of perception and its object that the empirical man imagines is in the ascent: to the people for the prophet; to the polis for the Hellenes. Humanity [Die Menschheit], however, as distinguished from the people [Menschen], will be here . . . the new man . . . Man, as a state, that is the beginning of men of humanity [Menschen der Menschheit] (Cohen, 1915: 34-35, my translation).¹⁶⁹

The critical issue ensues precisely because, despite having underlined the democratic principle of demarcation in their views of the political association (and thus having established ‘the people’), Schmitt, Arendt and Mouffe nevertheless retain the liberal notion of humanity – in the ascent, as it were, ‘to the people for the prophet’ and not only to the polis/citizenship.¹⁷⁰ An attempt at reconciliation between the liberal and democratic traditions under the contemporary liberal-democratic hegemony, following Mouffe’s analysis in Chapter 4, seems to be an ineffective endeavour. Nevertheless, an attempt has to be made to reconcile a universal idea of humanity with the structure of demarcation that emerges in Schmitt, Arendt and Mouffe. It is my claim in this chapter that despite the shortcomings of liberalism for associations, each scholar maintains some level/aspects of a liberal conception of humanity, and they do so specifically in order to minimise the potentiality and the intensity of conflict inherent in their conceptions of the political. In this sense, each scholar also faces difficulties in the reconciliation of their conceptions of the political and humanity.

1. Schmitt’s anti-liberalism and attachment to humanity

In the previous chapters, the relation between *The Concept of the Political* and *On the Age of Neutralisation and Depoliticisation* has been alluded to several times. Schmitt’s concern in both works is to formulate a convincing critique of liberalism and its neutralisation of politics. However, the very premise according to which Schmitt starts his investigation is that of liberalism as a pervading ideology. The concept of the political thus depends in a contrastive way on the very notion of liberalism; as Strauss notes in his commentary on Schmitt: “Schmitt’s basic thesis is entirely dependent upon the polemic against liberalism; it is to be understood only qua polemical, only ‘in terms of concrete political existence’” (Strauss, 2007: 100). Schmitt’s critique that liberalism fails in actuality, that parliamentarism cannot be

¹⁶⁹ “Wiederum dieselbe Richtung der Grundkraft des Denkens: die Abkehr von der Wahrnehmung und ihrem Gegenstande, den der empirische Mensch bildet, und der Aufstieg zum Menschen, wie der Prophet sagt; zum Staate, wie der Hellene sagt. Die Menschheit aber, zum Unterschiede vom Menschen, wird hier . . . der neue Mensch . . . Der Mensch, als Staat, das ist der Anfang vom Menschen der Menschheit”.

¹⁷⁰ Or to put it somewhat differently, despite the theoretical impetus for the democratic insistence on equality as a differentiating principle, “nothing on earth can stop man from feeling himself born for liberty” (Weil, 2001: 79). Weil’s position is, of course, with regards to oppression/servitude, and not equality. An argument could be made, however, that social relations become oppressive precisely through the notion of equality that leads to the principle of demarcation. Despite Weil’s emphasis on ‘liberty and equality’, her discussion over the rise of oppression as a ‘natural’ outcome of increase in production points towards ‘equality’ as the reason for oppression: “What is surprising is not that oppression should make its appearance only after higher forms of economy have been reached, but that it should always accompany them. This means, therefore, that as between a completely primitive economy and more highly developed forms of economy there is a difference not only of degree, but also of kind” (59). The difference in kind, here, refers to the rise of specialisation through which, according to Weil, new forms of inequality – or, the demarcation between equals and unequals – become possible.

sustained because the practice of politics in it is governed by a ‘dubious class of people’, is itself unsustainable if Schmitt’s endeavour is approached as a polemic against liberalism. That is to say, because Schmitt’s conception of the political requires the liberal premise in order to negate it – i.e. that the political can only be articulated as a negation of liberalism – liberalism in turn sustains the political in an antagonistic form. Schmitt’s offensive towards liberalism enforces the political as antagonism because its articulation is dependent on an apolitical conception that is liberalism. Without liberalism, as it were, there is no expression of ‘the political’; and without the political there is no liberalism.

The main concern for Schmitt and Mouffe is the liberal assumption that politics can be neutralised. As we saw in Chapters 3 and 4, for Mouffe ‘the political belongs to our ontological condition’ and thus is ineradicable; while for Schmitt ‘our situation’ cannot meaningfully entertain the speculation of a world without politics. Schmitt’s claim rests on the simple, though by no means simplistic, assumption that conflicts do not disappear when the political characteristic is removed from groups; antagonisms will only move onto other domains and will further intensify conflicts. The so-called ‘third way’ of politics after the disintegration of the USSR, Fukuyama’s declaration of the ‘end of history’, individualistic liberalism, etc., are therefore deeply misguided.¹⁷¹ As Schmitt notes, such conceptions of a post-political/post-ideological order “could be reduced to the formula: legitimacy of the *status quo*. At such a time, all arguments actually entail less the revival of things past or disappearing than a desperate foreign and domestic policy: the *status quo*, what else?” (Schmitt, 2007a: 81).¹⁷² For both Schmitt and Mouffe, the political domain cannot be neutralised – a pretence to neutralisation of politics would unavoidably lead to conflicts that are more violent. The content of the political, in other words, would then be pervaded by other domains to an extent that conflicts would no longer have a distinctive political trait.

With this concern, Schmitt brings forward the puzzling position of humanity as an all-encompassing notion – i.e. a *liberal* notion of humanity. The liberal notion is intended to encompass all of humanity; however, Schmitt claims that by doing so, liberalism paradoxically leads to arbitrary distinctions of human traits, designating various groups as inhuman as such. This claim may seem too strong, but Schmitt qualifies it by looking at early modern political theory. It is not surprising, he claims, that political theory of the time encompassed a false notion of ‘the state of nature’ without a specificity necessary to it.¹⁷³ Frances Bacon’s justification for the colonisation of

¹⁷¹ Cf. in particular Slavoj Žižek’s penetrating remark: “Crucial here is the curious enigma of the second way: where is the *second* way today? That is to say: did not the notion of the Third Way emerge at the very moment when – at least in the developed West – all other alternatives, from true conservatism [sic.] to radical Social Democracy, lost out in the face of the triumphant onslaught of global capitalism and its notion of liberal democracy? Is not the true message of the notion of the Third Way therefore simply that *there is no second way*, no actual *alternative* to global capitalism, so that, in a kind of mocking pseudo-Hegelian negation of negation, this much-praised ‘Third Way’ brings us back to the *first and only way*” (Žižek, 2008: 62-63). Cf. also Jean-Luc Nancy’s emphasis on the date as quoted in the Preface.

¹⁷² A similar claim is made by Arendt with regards to status quo and totalitarian domination – totalitarian regimes aim to restrict all political differentiations precisely in order to maintain the status quo.

¹⁷³ Cf. the alluring mention in both Hobbes and Locke on the state of nature in relation to the new ‘found’ lands: Hobbes—”It may peradventure be thought, there was never such a time, nor condition

Americas, Schmitt points out, rested on a conception of humanity: “the Indians were ‘proscribed by nature itself’ as cannibals. They stood outside humanity (*hors l’humanité*) and had no rights” (2006: 103).¹⁷⁴ The curious conception here is the “by no means paradoxical” conception of humanity. Schmitt’s claim is that precisely through an employment of this notion, “none other than humanists and humanitarians put forward such inhuman arguments, because the idea of humanity is two-sided and often lends itself to a surprising dialectic” (ibid.). The conception of humanity pertinent to liberalism thus produces the conditions under which the ‘real conflict’ takes the extreme form. No longer inhibited by the political, humanity as a historically determined category serves as a justification for the “atrocities [similar to those] committed by Spanish Catholics in the kingdom of the Incas” (96).

Schmitt’s anti-liberalism becomes comprehensible through his dual conception of humanity. While the previous passage shows a critical attitude towards ‘humanists and humanitarians’, Schmitt does not fully abandon either liberalism or humanity, but only a liberal notion of humanity.¹⁷⁵ His concern remains with humanity, because as the state function turns to social concerns, he claims, the “self-understood will to repel the enemy in a given battle situation turns into a rationally constructed social ideal or program, a tendency or an economic calculation” (2007b: 72). The correctly identified fear with this turn is the all-encompassing total state which does not uphold the democratic identification of the people and the sovereign, but instead utilises “propaganda”, “mass manipulation” and “control” to promote a specific end, which ultimately has the potential of a far greater conflict based on a dehumanised enemy (ibid.). The claim that ‘humanity is two-sided’ thus posits a dual notion of humanity: a ‘self-understood’ notion – as a recourse to the political as an antagonism, a recourse to conflict as a defence of our ‘way of life’; and an “ideological humanitarian conception of humanity” (ibid.) – as a notion utilised for specific ends by dehumanising the enemy.¹⁷⁶

It could be argued, though Schmitt does not make this argument, that the problem he identifies can be explained through a methodological error in liberalism. Liberalism’s starting position is the notion of an all-encompassing humanity *from* which a political organisation is envisioned. Any deviation from what is accepted as humanity is

of war as this; and I believe it was never generally so, over all the world: but there are many places where they live so now. For the savage people in many places of America . . . have no government at all; and live at this day in that brutish manner, as I said before”; and Locke—”In the beginning, all the world was America” (Schmitt, 2006: 96-97).

¹⁷⁴ Similarly Locke’s ambiguous ‘property rights’, that served less ambiguously as justification for the colonisation of Americas, became necessarily linked to the notion of humanity. Cf. Arneil (1994) and (1996).

¹⁷⁵ I use the term anti-liberal precisely to emphasise Schmitt’s opposition to liberalism, which requires providing a corrective to that notion. As Strauss notes towards the end of his commentary on Schmitt, “Schmitt undertakes the critique of liberalism in a liberal world; . . . his critique of liberalism occurs in the horizon of liberalism; his unliberal tendency is restrained by the still unvanquished ‘systematics of liberal thought’” (Strauss, 2007: 122). Anti-liberalism captures both a corrective to the notion of liberalism – i.e. maintaining certain liberal aspects as I will show in this section – and a polemic against liberalism as an anti-political ideology. Cf. also Meier (2006).

¹⁷⁶ Corresponding to the distinction between ‘self-understood’ and ‘ideological’ conceptions of humanity, there is a distinction in the conceptions of enmity – ‘enemy’ and ‘foe’ respectively (Schwab, 1987). For an opposing view, cf. Meier (2006), who notes that the differentiation between various enmities are “not decisive for the concept of the political” (26n).

thereby necessarily deemed unhuman – precisely in the sense that they no longer resemble the qualities of human beings; unlike the notion inhuman which refers to specific acts (cruel/barbaric/etc.).¹⁷⁷ In Schmittian terms, a reduction of the enemy to the *unhuman* will necessarily lead to their *inhuman* treatment; and this is indeed the result of liberalism’s denial of politics – the notion of humanity there reduces the other into an unhuman enemy. When discussing “the absolute last war of humanity”, Schmitt notes that such

a war is necessarily unusually *intense and inhuman* because, by transcending the limits of the political framework, it simultaneously degrades the enemy into moral and other categories and is forced to make of him a monster that must not only be defeated but also utterly destroyed (36, my emphasis).

Such a position is only possible if humanity is understood as an ‘ideological humanitarian conception’; under such a conception, dehumanisation becomes the default stance in dealing with the enemy invading our common humanity. The methodological error of liberalism is thus by positing humanity *prior* to politics; while Schmitt’s corrective is to question this process by viewing the political as independent of the moral categories on which the concept of humanity relies – his aim is not to invest with the moral meaning what is a political conflict. His insistence that other categories can become political is thus of acute importance here. The intensity of the friend/enemy relation is precisely due to the level of politicisation of other categories. That is to say, if political antagonisms are solely understood as derived from other domains – that the antagonistic relation is denied its political ground – the intensity of conflicts is thereby amplified and is no longer the result of a sovereign decision of a demarcation within a particular historical moment; instead, that ground is invested with ultimately irreconcilable oppositions.¹⁷⁸ This is also the case for the notion of humanity:

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 (54).

By reversing the process, Schmitt avoids a complete overlap of the political with another category and thereby also avoids utilisation of the concept of humanity for a particular end. As Schmitt is ready to note, humanity is “not a political concept”, and “there are no wars of humanity as such” (55). Humanity’s historical/genealogical roots are in the 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” (*ibid.*). Outside this context, the term humanity is used only and

¹⁷⁷ Schmitt does not make this distinction, he only puts forward a ‘dangerous’ equation of the dehumanized enemy as simply “inhuman”; the citation from *The Nomos* above continues as follows: “By no means is it paradoxical that none other than humanists and humanitarians put forward such inhuman arguments” (Schmitt, 2006: 103). Cf. also Schmitt (2007b: 54-55), Douzinas (2007: 173-174) and Todorov (2014: 29-77). In a later work, Schmitt qualifies the unhuman as unperson: “If he discriminates within humanity and thereby denies the quality of being human to a disturber or destroyer, then the negatively valued person becomes an unperson, and his life is no longer of the highest value: it becomes worthless and must be destroyed” (Schmitt, 1987: 88, my emphasis).

¹⁷⁸ The politicisation of other domains has been discussed in Chapter 1. I will turn to the intensity of conflicts shortly.

specifically as a warning of the political utilisation, explicitly in warfare, of universalization of values for political gains. In this sense, the notion of humanity is 'politicised' and the enemy 'dehumanised' – which Schmitt characterises as an 'ideological' conception of humanity. On Schmitt's reversal of this standpoint, political conflict and thereby the enemy are 'humanised' – a 'self-understood' concept of humanity is instituted as an opposition to the 'ideological' conception.

Two philosophical problems

Schmitt's 'anti-liberal humanism' poses two philosophical problems with regard to the political/politics distinction. The first problem concerns the notion of intensity in his conception of the political, while the second problem is with Schmitt's insistence on the actuality of politics.

In his definition of the concept of the political, Schmitt repeatedly mentions that the relation between friend and enemy is one of intensity. The potentiality of conflict depends on the intensification of the relation between friend and enemy – the threat of actual conflict, with the possibility of the 'physical killing' of the other, depends on the level of intensity between the groups. However, a distinction is to be made between the intensity of the relation between the groups and the intensity of the conflict that emerges in light of the preceding intensification. The reason for this is that Schmitt relies on the intensity of conflict when embracing the notion of humanity, while his definition of the political as a friend/enemy differentiation only upholds the intensity of the relation.¹⁷⁹ This implicit differentiation is clear when Schmitt recounts the expediency of neutrality and pacifism (Schmitt, 2007b: 33-37). Yet, the two types of intensity are not necessarily compatible: the insistence on the possibility of conflict as a result of the intensity of the relation between friend and enemy stands in direct opposition to his insistence on recognising the enemy politically and applying a self-understood notion of humanity. The reason for this contrast is that if the relation between the groups is so intense that conflict is the only possibility, then more intensified relations will give rise to more intense conflicts reducing the self-understood notion of humanity to an ideological construct. For, the intensification of the antagonistic relation that grows from an appeal to other domains, suppresses the self-understood notion of humanity by an appeal to ideology. And yet, while it is clear that Schmitt insists on the potentiality of conflict as a result of the intensity of the relation between friend and enemy, it is equally clear that he is not ready to abandon the difference between the two notions of humanity that are instrumental to the intensity of conflict. The first philosophical problem is how to unite these two positions regarding intensity in Schmitt.

To clarify this problem, it is prudent to return to Schmitt's claim that the concepts friend, enemy and combat are to be understood in their "original existential sense" (33). The existential conception of these terms bears on the conditions under which a threat to our 'way of life' emerges. The implication of an existential conception of combat is that the intensity of the relation between friend and enemy functions

¹⁷⁹ Furthermore, if the perception of an enemy rests on the level of intensity, then Schmitt must concede that his later differentiation between "conventional", "real" and "absolute" enemy/enmity is superfluous. Cf. Schmitt (2004) and Hohendahl (2011).

according to the real possibility of conflict. As long as the *possibility* of conflict is given a priority over other forms of resolving the disputes – and Schmitt insists on the possibility of conflict throughout his treatise (28, 32-39, 45-47, 55-56, 64-65) – the notion of intensity becomes necessary for the concept of the political. That is to say, what governs over the outcome of the relation between the groups is a result of how intense their antagonism is perceived to be – i.e. Schmitt's conception of the political requires levels of intensity as a qualifier of possibility of conflict. The result of emphasising the *possibility* of conflict is therefore that the intensity of conflict is 'contaminated' by the intensity of the relation. However, if the intensity of the relation dictates the intensity of conflict, there would be no reason to distinguish between a self-understood and an ideological notion of humanity – an intense relation would result in an intense conflict; whereby, furthermore, a self-understood notion of humanity would not be satisfactorily different from an ideological notion.¹⁸⁰

On this account, it may seem that Schmitt's self-understood notion of humanity is not able to provide a sound theoretical alternative to the liberal ideological notion. However, it should be recalled that Schmitt equally emphasises that "it is by no means as though the political signifies nothing but devastating war and every political deed a military action" (33). That is to say, while it is certainly the case that Schmitt emphasises the possibility of conflict, he does not mean that all conflicts are to be resolved through violent combat. Maintaining the intensity of the relation as a theoretical framework according to which conflicts are viewed can also account for political prudence in "avoiding the war" (ibid.). In fact, a possibility of conflict need not remain as an *acute* possibility; and Schmitt admits to an 'a-political' world order without the concept of the political:

If the different states, religions, classes, and other human groupings on earth should be so unified that a conflict among them is impossible and even inconceivable and if civil war should forever be foreclosed in a realm which embraces the globe, 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 (53-54).

Even though Schmitt claims that the potentiality of conflict need not be acted upon, it nevertheless remains a possibility. Additionally, as long as the political is viewed in terms of intensity, it is equally possible for conflict to overflow from a self-understood conception of the enemy, into an ideological conception, which utilises all manner of measures to promote a specific end, ultimately dehumanising the enemy. The citation above, therefore, should be taken quite literally and not merely as a support for the ubiquity of the political. That 'this is not the case today' is nothing more than a statement on our current political situation – the possibility of conflicts is pertinent,

¹⁸⁰ It is important to emphasise the point that ideological conflicts follow when the political is subjected to the influence of value judgements. The intensification of the relation on which the especially intense conflicts rest, therefore, does not invariably engender an inhumane outcome. Such a distortion is not necessarily the result of intensification of the relation – combat may be extreme and unusually intense without being inhumane, because the political framework has not yet been transcended. That is to say, the 'contamination' of the intensity of conflict by the intensity of the relation does not necessarily lead to a degradation of the enemy into moral or other category, whereby the enemy's utter destruction is envisaged – an unusually intense combat is not necessarily an unhuman war of extermination.

and our task is to make sure they are not fought from an ideological conception of humanity.

The second philosophical problem is closely related to the previous one and concerns his insistence on the actuality of politics. Schmitt claims that “rationally speaking . . . the [friend/enemy] distinction still remains *actual today*, and that this is an *ever present possibility* for every people existing in the political sphere” (28, my emphasis); or, that the friend/enemy differentiation “is *actually present* or at least *potentially possible*” (36, my emphasis). Schmitt’s position regarding the actuality of the political has been addressed in Chapter 1. He maintains that he is not concerned with ‘metaphors and abstractions’ – that the actuality of the political demands a clarification of the concept; that he is not interested in “normative” and “pedagogic ideals”, but solely with the “inherent reality” (28). Claiming both an actuality of the political and the possibility thereof certainly need not be problematic. Political differentiation according to Schmitt remains an actual possibility because of the division in international relations into (nation-) states; or, alternatively “civil war” (32). Each state posits its own distinctive characteristics through which friend/enemy relations arise.

The problematic philosophical position is in claiming the independence of the political domain when Schmitt is concerned with the two notions of humanity. That other domains can potentially be politicised posits the potentiality itself as the political – the *possibility* of political differentiation is treated as the *actuality* of the political. That is to say, next to the antagonistic relation between friend and enemy, now also the potentiality of this relation is the definition of the political because this potentiality is present in other domains – the antagonistic character, as Schmitt notes, relies on these domains “for support” (26). The result of this is that the intensity of the relation becomes once again the focal point of the political. This is so because the intensity of the relation will dictate whether other domains have become political enough for a conflict to break out. However, while the intensity of the relation once again dictates the potentiality of conflict, it will also dictate the intensity of the conflict. To put it differently, the intensity of the conflict will not be limited as long as the intensity of the relation is the guiding principle of the political, because the intensity of the relation requires a politicisation of other domains whereby the autonomy of the political is reduced, and non-political categories used for political ends.

This is clearly not Schmitt’s intention; he *is* concerned with the normative characteristics of the political and the concept of humanity. Despite Schmitt’s critique of liberalism, his dual conception of (and attachment to) humanity leads towards a quasi-liberal position that aims to limit the scope of conflicts. His critique of the liberal conception of humanity is embedded in the liberal discourse – the self-understood conception of humanity applies to *all* of humanity. This conception of humanity, however, as previously argued, could not be reconciled with the democratic principle of demarcation that Schmitt applies to his view of associations. The limits that the democratic principle necessarily imposes on associations would not be able to sustain Schmitt’s concept of humanity as self-understood; only an ideological conception of humanity would be possible within a strictly democratic state precisely because the democratic unity, according to Schmitt, repels anything foreign to it.

In order to keep the dual conception of humanity and the normative attitude that aims to limit the intensity of the conflict, therefore, Schmitt must abandon the political as a democratic differentiating principle – and thus, embrace liberalism to a degree; or, alternatively, he must abandon the dual conception of humanity and admit that the concept of the political functions solely through the intensity of the friend/enemy relation. In either case, the political cannot be understood as removed from the actuality of politics: if liberalism is accepted, the political loses its differentiating characteristic, thereby losing its *raison d'être*; if democracy is accepted, the political would result in haphazard/random outbursts of intensity of relation between friend and enemy. In either case, the political remains closely tied to politics, not an ontological conception removed from the actuality of political discourse and decision, rhetoric and rationale.¹⁸¹

2. Mouffe and anti-humanism

Mouffe's starting point, as discussed in Chapters 3 and 4, is the fragmentation of society – political groupings are possible exactly because society is fragmented; and it is due to the fragmentation of society that antagonistic relations become necessarily present. The ascription of politics to outbursts of passion, rather than reason or even interest, plays a significant role – it is passion that arouses antagonisms. It seems clear, therefore, that a liberal conception of humanity should, at least at the outset, play no role in Mouffe's political project. On the contrary, Mouffe's idea of humanity in political discourse is similar to Schmitt's notion of 'ideological humanity'. Following Schmitt, Mouffe approvingly cites his critique of liberal "imperialist expansion" mentioned earlier:

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 (Schmitt, 2007b: 54; Mouffe, 2005b: 78).

Just like Schmitt, Mouffe recognises that liberalism's identification of its ideals with the universal ideals of humanity (an all-encompassing humanity) creates markedly intense relations with the enemy precisely because the enemy is no longer viewed as a human. On this basis, politics becomes concerned with moral categories – a conception of humanity replaces political categories with the moral ones. Such 'import of morality into politics' is of fundamental significance. Mouffe's political project, it should be recalled, revolves around 'freedom and equality for all' – a project aimed at extending the struggle for freedom and equality to a wider range of social relations (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001: xv). As a result of the import of moral categories, however, the encounter between 'us' and 'them' in the political sphere is no longer one between various interpretations of freedom and equality; rather, Mouffe claims, these notions become morally laden and the contestation over their interpretations less

¹⁸¹ For a related discussion, cf. Schmitt (2000), where he once again points 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 . . . distinguish their citizens politically from other persons" (10-13, my emphasis).

to do with politics and more with moral certainties. Freedom and equality as moral categories, instead of extending the struggle to a wider range of social relations, create fixed categories applied to fixed identities. That is to say, when moral categories supersede the political ones, the decision on friend and enemy will have a moral characteristic – good and evil will be the focal point of politics, instead of their political counterpart friend and enemy. This confusion of moral categories for political ones, furthermore, results in a different mode of action; the moral antagonists cannot be sublimated into political adversaries – “with the ‘evil them’ no agonistic debate is possible, they must be eradicated” (Mouffe, 2005b: 76).¹⁸²

The notion of humanity that is employed by the liberal tradition is viewed by Mouffe as solely ideological. Politics on the moral register divides any conception of an ‘us’ and a ‘them’ through an inclusion into rational humanity, or an exclusion to some form of “archaic forces” (72). Mouffe, therefore, correctly identifies the notion of humanity being used “as an ideological weapon” by liberalism (78). She thus stresses that the notion of humanity is a fictitious and even a mythical construction. What is more, this fiction may do more harm than good:

moral philosophy can do harm when it implies that there ought to be, and that there can be, fundamental agreement on, or even a convergence in, moral ideals – the harm is that the reality of conflict, both within individuals and within societies, is disguised by the *myth of humanity* as a consistent moral unit across time and space (Hampshire in Mouffe, 1993: 149, my emphasis).

The harm, in Mouffe’s words, is in “trying to erase the traces of power and exclusion”; or more fundamentally, by appealing to humanity, rendering plurality invisible and thereby denying entry to “the terrain of contestation” (ibid.). The liberal aspiration is to establish “definite principles and arrangements”, and to do so “once and for all” (ibid.). The liberal appeal to humanity, in other words, masks the reality of pluralism which is the basis of politics; and this reality, Mouffe claims, will have recourse to violent means, if it cannot voice its concerns over the contestable values of liberal democracy – freedom and equality.¹⁸³

In Mouffe’s adoption of Schmitt’s insight on humanity there is nevertheless one considerable deviation from his critique of liberalism, which, furthermore, leads to substantial differences regarding the implications of their respective characterisations of the political. Mouffe asserts that Schmitt “persistently [exposed] liberalism’s

¹⁸² It is not surprising, therefore, that at the State of the Union address after September 11th Bush had easily adopted a moral position in determining the Axis of *Evil*. Though the manufacture of public consent certainly plays a role (cf. Herman and Chomsky (2008)), Mouffe’s position is that manufacturing consent is possible because of the penetration of moral categories into politics. This is indeed to say that according to Mouffe the recent war in Iraq was not a political war per se (Mouffe, 2005b: 75). Next to the unusually long list of justifications for the war – which by the mere fact of their presence already direct us to the appeal to humanity instead of politics – the pressing concern of the pro-war movement was the moral obligation always present in the discourse. As such, by not designating a *political* enemy, the ‘allied forces’ were able to continue their brutal activities (in Abu Graib, etc.) precisely because the other was not recognised as human. More strenuously, Mouffe’s critique would amount to stating that such activities (in Abu Graib, etc.) are a necessary component, and thus not an isolated incident, of ‘politics on a moral register’.

¹⁸³ Or to put this claim more polemically, recall the ending of Foucault’s seminal *Discipline and Punish*: “In this central and centralized humanity . . . we must hear the distant roar of battle” (Foucault, 1995: 308).

pretence of complete inclusiveness and its claim to be speaking in the name of ‘humanity’” (Mouffe, 2005b: 78; 2005c: 247-248). As has been shown in the previous section, Schmitt indeed critiques liberalism’s pretence in the name of humanity; however, he also states that humanity is “not a political concept”, or that “there are no wars of humanity as such” (Schmitt, 2007b: 55). Moreover, Schmitt does not wholly detach himself from all conceptions of humanity, but rather maintains certain aspects of liberalism in order to propose an alternative conception of humanity as a ‘self-understood’ notion. At best, Schmitt’s critique of humanity follows a remarkably clear formulation – he attributes the term humanity to a repudiation of the aristocratic feudal system of privileges. In relation to the concept of the political, the idea of humanity arises from “a system of relations between individuals”, and for this reason it is not a political concept because politics can only happen between groups (ibid.).

However, the fact that the idea of humanity is not a political concept does not imply for Schmitt that it should be dismissed as a fictitious construct. As the distinction between the two conceptions of humanity – ideological and self-understood – indicates, the term humanity 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. Mouffe goes a step further than Schmitt by not only questioning the viability of humanity in the international and/or domestic arena, but also the very notion of humanity as a descriptive possibility. For Mouffe, humanity as a universal ideal loses any validity because it does not recognise the condition of plurality.¹⁸⁴ This final step is missing in Schmitt precisely because his treatise aims to minimise the intensity of conflicts. As proposed towards the end of the last section, Schmitt must either abandon the political as a democratic differentiating principle, or abandon his dual conception of humanity in order to remain consistent. Without a notion of humanity, however, Schmitt is unable to differentiate between the two types of intensity – of the relation and of conflict – and is forced to concede that the intensity of the relation would be the only determining factor of the possibility of conflict.

Mouffe seems to have taken the latter approach by subscribing to the idea that any notion of humanity would have detrimental consequences. However, such a position also brings with it a complication concerning the concept of the political. The identification of an ideological notion of humanity certainly remains of acute importance. However, by considering the notion of humanity as fictitious and mythical, Mouffe wholly neglects the self-understood notion of humanity that is present in Schmitt. This is a crucial point, because for Schmitt the concept of the political becomes necessary in order to deny the ideological notion of humanity by

¹⁸⁴ Note here once again the quick reference to barons Stein and Kleist in Schmitt: “the fanatical hatred of Napoleon felt by the German barons Stein and Kleist (‘Exterminate them [the French], the Last Judgment will not ask you for your reasons’)” (Schmitt, 2007b: 67). What stands out in this reference is not only that politics – i.e. recognition of the enemy – is deemed to be of fundamentally higher order than religion; but also that the universality of religion is being utilised for political ends. The Last Judgment here functions similarly to a notion of humanity – ‘our’ judgement stands on a different level than ‘theirs’; ‘we’ have moral superiority over ‘them’; ‘they’ are not (true) Christians as ‘we’ are. That this reference is perhaps not the best to prove Schmitt’s view of the political has been addressed in Chapter 1. In this regard, Mouffe may indeed be correct that any conceptual differentiation is fictitious and mythical.

embracing the self-understood notion. Neglecting the self-understood notion of humanity thus leads to an incompatibility between Schmitt and Mouffe. By abandoning the notion of humanity without reservation, Mouffe's conception of the political cannot sustain Schmitt's aims – namely, to reduce the intensity of the conflict; and it cannot do so precisely because there is nothing else to contain the antagonism. To be sure, Mouffe wishes her notion of the political to work as a method to avoid violent outbreaks by those oppressed under the current liberal hegemony. The claim made here is that this goal is unsustainable because, by abandoning the notion of humanity, Mouffe cannot differentiate between how intense conflicts are. By deeming the notion of humanity as fictitious, she renounces the framework according to which conflicts could be characterised as 'unusually intense and inhuman'. What we find in Mouffe, in other words, is the correct insistence that any conception of humanity serves to differentiate between various intensities of conflict. However, rejection of this notion does not thereby also contain or sublimate conflict; the intensity of the relation between groups dictates the outcome of conflicts.

Despite this deviation from Schmitt's framework, Mouffe remains a Schmittian at the core of the problematic of the concept of the political. In agreement with Schmitt, she identifies the root of unbridled violence in the liberal denial of politics through a conception of an all-encompassing humanity. She thus also accepts the liberal methodological flaw as outlined by Schmitt – that humanity is prior to politics. However, once the political is seen as our ontological condition, particularly intense conflicts remain an acute possibility, and they do so necessarily. Mouffe's aspiration to propose an alternative, therefore, succeeds only partially – the availability of an exclusively ideological conception of humanity remains a serious problem.

Moreover, such deviation from Schmitt's framework also indicates the inconsistency of her view of an association as fundamentally a liberal one. As discussed in Chapter 4, given Mouffe's insistence on antagonisms as ontological, there would be no possibility to maintain an association without the shared ethico-political values. In other words, in order to maintain her initial aspiration to reduce the intensity of conflict, sublimation of antagonism into agonism is only viable for the intensity of the relation between different groups. Mouffe insists that the "real confrontation" still takes place, with a key difference that it "is played out under conditions regulated by a set of democratic procedures accepted by the adversaries" (2005b: 21). Given the unpredictability of conflicts and the ever present possibility of their appearance, Mouffe must nevertheless admit that the intensity of conflict cannot be sublimated and that the intensity of the relation would dictate the intensity of conflicts.

A place for ethics

As noted in Chapter 3, Mouffe's agonistic model of democracy rejects the unity of politics and ethics. She alludes to this rejection briefly in *The Democratic Paradox*, while relating her work to other 'agonistic theorists', namely "those who are influenced by Nietzsche or Hannah Arendt, like William Connolly or Bonnie Honig. It seems to me that their conception leaves open the possibility that the political could under certain conditions be made absolutely congruent with the ethical, optimism which I do not share" (Mouffe, 2000: 107n; 2013: 15-18). Mouffe's 'pessimism'

could be stretched further: it could be argued that Mouffe is not truly ‘pessimistic’ of the possibility, but rather finds unqualified optimism unrealistic. Her critique is concentrated against the ‘Aristotelianism’ that has dominated the Western tradition by linking politics to ethics. Relying on Schmitt’s concept of the political – the political as a distinct domain – Mouffe could argue that the two domains cannot be congruent with one another, because they deal with different ontologies. Where the political is about plurality and groups, about “emancipatory discourses in which the plurality of the social takes shape” (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001: 5); ethics is individualistic, it is about the individual conception of the good. This may not resolve the problematic present in Schmitt regarding the intensities of conflict and relation; it does however strengthen the endeavour to detach from politics ethical presuppositions that could, and often do, lead to further escalations of conflicts.

Nevertheless, even though Mouffe’s position may intuitively sound plausible in practice, there remains a concern over the theoretical viability of her views. There remains a concern over the concept of the political as a construct for *political* reasons – a *political* decision rather than an inherent ontology. Because Mouffe views politics as a realm of passion and power, any ‘politicised’ conception of humanity would include these features. Ethical considerations on the value of humanity – that is, the disputable content of what constitutes humanity and what does not – are therefore only able to penetrate the political posterior to the ontologically present antagonisms. That is to say, the assumption that politics is ontologically instituted in antagonisms dictates the possibility of conflict. It is important to restate here that this position strongly deviates from Schmitt’s, for whom the concept of the political already marks a combination of ethical and political concerns; for Mouffe, the ontological reading of the concept of the political only makes it possible to have ethics as subordinated to politics.

Furthermore, a tension hard to alleviate seems to follow from Mouffe’s ‘pessimism’,¹⁸⁵ on the one hand, and her views on an association on the other. It should be recalled that when discussing associations, Mouffe stresses the importance of stable democratic institutions that foster agonism and the rejection of those groupings that would endanger these institutions in the political arena. This need for discrimination would be necessary to maintain the distinction between legitimate and illegitimate adversaries, and this discrimination would follow from political and not moral considerations: “Some demands are excluded, not because they are declared to be ‘evil’, but because they challenge the institutions constitutive of the democratic political association” (2005b: 120-121). It is not clear why or how such exclusion would follow from political and not moral considerations. An exclusion of certain demands is already an ethical position – a preference between forms of social intercourse that depends on value judgements would certainly qualify as ethical. Why a certain preference is ethical and not political cannot be clarified without recourse to

¹⁸⁵ By pessimism I mean both Mouffe’s own statement that she does not share the optimism of congruence of ethics and politics, and my extension of that statement following her theoretical position.

the contemporary *ethico*-political practice within the institutional settings of that particular association.¹⁸⁶

The seeming contradiction is telling of Mouffe's attachment to liberalism despite the overt critique towards it. Where Schmitt's attachment was apparent through a different conception of humanity, for Mouffe the attachment to liberalism is apparent in the consideration of the association under a set of liberal conditions necessary for political discourse. While claiming that society is fragmented and that the presence of the other is necessary for it to function as a *political* association, Mouffe is reliant upon liberalism to maintain the association's ethico-political bond. A conclusion that can be drawn from this is the interdependence of the two traditions – liberalism and democracy – and this would indeed be the purpose of acknowledging the democratic paradox. That is, acknowledging "the impossibility of establishing a consensus without exclusion . . . forces us to keep the democratic contestation alive" (2000: 105). However, as noted in Chapter 4, coming to terms with this contradictory nature of liberalism and democracy is not sufficient. Mouffe is forced to concede that political differentiation displaces liberalism because she views political antagonism as ontological.¹⁸⁷

Unlike Schmitt's conclusion, however, Mouffe's reliance on an ontological reading of the political may prove beneficial. For, by abandoning any pretence to liberalism in the conception of the political as ontological, and by regarding the political as a distinct domain, Mouffe would not only overcome the theoretical mismatch between liberalism and democracy, but would be able to maintain the political as the differentiating principle. The adverse outcome is, of course, the haphazard outburst of conflicts mediated by a weak adversarial model. The decision on the better of the two evils is perhaps best left to a *political* decision.

3. Arendt's humanity and a return to Machiavelli

It is to be expected that Arendt's notion of humanity is fundamentally different from both Schmitt's and Mouffe's. Where for them a conception of humanity comprises a detachment from the political – as its liberal anti-thesis – for Arendt the notion of humanity is of direct relation to the political. There is, of course, a strong deviation in their respective conceptions of humanity: for Schmitt, and to a greater extent for Mouffe, humanity serves as a conceptual tool which makes distinctions between groupings possible, and exacerbates the intensity of conflicts to a further degree. Devising a new conception for Schmitt – humanity as a self-understood notion – was

¹⁸⁶ It is therefore not at all surprising, unlike Mouffe claims, that the contemporary liberal-democratic Western European states quickly denounced the 2001 elections in Austria as extremist (Mouffe, 2005b: 66-68, 73-75; cf. also 2005a). They reacted under the same conditions that Mouffe envisages the agonistic association to act – rejection of those groupings that would threaten the 'stable democratic institutions'; and they have done so, furthermore, not through deeming those groupings 'evil', but under a political aegis of freedom and equality for all.

¹⁸⁷ As discussed in Chapter 4, this is indeed to make a strong theoretical claim that no elements of liberalism can be retained, because there remains a possibility of continuously further fragmentation; but also a weak practical claim that Mouffe is nevertheless attached to liberalism in her insistence on a shared ethico-political bond.

thus deemed necessary to curtail the especially intense conflicts. For the same reason of curtailing the especially intense conflicts, Mouffe rejects any conception of humanity. In Arendt, by contrast, humanity is a mark of similarity or commonness, the sharing of the world through which alone it is possible to relate to one another. As was shown in Chapter 2, Arendt emphasises speech as a means through which our shared humanity can come to the fore – “We humanize what is going on in the world and in ourselves only by speaking of it, and in the course of speaking of it we learn to be human” (1968: 25). While there is a fundamental difference between Schmitt, Mouffe and Arendt in their acceptance of humanity, however, they share the opinion that discourse plays a significant role in it – discourse either dissuades the members of an association of the humanity of the other, or it makes the alignment with the other possible.

Arendt’s claim is that the humanity of the other is disclosed through the political domain. In the initiation of any discourse, one has already accepted the other as part of humanity; reason, whatever it may mean, must at least include the conception of the other – with whom one reasons. It is for this reason also that Arendt does not speak of a common ‘human nature’, but rather emphasises a dialogical feature of the human condition. It should be equally recalled here that for Arendt a meaningful existence is one that does not merely succumb to biological necessity, but one that becomes distinguishable through its contribution to the world in fabrication and speech: “the foundation of a body politic was brought about by man’s need to overcome . . . the futility of human deeds. Outside the body politic, man’s life . . . was without meaning” (Arendt, 1961: 71).¹⁸⁸ As a necessary aspect of a political life, Arendt’s notion of humanity implies that its very possibility depends on the activity within the public space. It is not a characteristic of each individual by virtue of being born into a human species – or, to keep a close connection to Schmitt and Mouffe, by virtue of being born into/being part of one political grouping as opposed to another. Instead, Arendt’s notion of humanity is an active political effort immersed in ‘work’ – fabrication of the world. Furthermore, the fabrication of the world by itself, as discussed in Chapter 5, was not sufficient and Arendt’s emphasis on speech is of equal importance to her notion of humanity. It is through speech that the world is ‘shared’, which, as she notes, was already present in the language of the Ancients: “in Latin the word ‘to live’ had always coincided with *inter homines esse*, ‘to be in the company of men’” (73). The ability to disclose one’s views, opinions, arguments, etc., in speech would overcome the otherwise meaningless existence – “the common world, which remains ‘inhuman’ in a very literal sense unless it is constantly talked about by human beings” (1968: 24).¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁸ Arendt’s concern in this citation is primarily with the need for the public space and the creation of the body politic to achieve ‘immortality’; the reference to humanity that follows is, in my view, justifiable given Arendt’s ‘phenomenological’ background discussed in Chapter 2. Cf. also Borren (2010).

¹⁸⁹ Arendt continues: “For the world is not humane just because it is made by human beings, and it does not become humane just because the human voice sounds in it, but only when it has become the object of discourse. However much we are affected by the things of the world, however deeply they may stir and stimulate us, they become human for us only when we can discuss them with our fellows. Whatever cannot become the object of discourse—the truly sublime, the truly horrible or the uncanny—may find a human voice through which to sound into the world, but it is not exactly human. We humanize what

The importance of discourse in a conception of humanity is further elaborated on by Arendt in relation to truth.¹⁹⁰ In a brief analysis of two Roman statements, she notes that a notion of humanity – *humanitas* – refers to “the integrity of the person as person” and that “human worth and personal rank, together with friendship” should not be “sacrificed to the primacy of an absolute truth” (1961: 224). To be sure, the concern here is not with truth or its function, but with the notion of humanity that is revealed through discourse. The two statements are (1): *Amicus Socrates, amicus Plato, sed magis aestimanda veritas*; and (2): *Errare mehercule malo cum Platone . . . quam cum istis vera sentire*.¹⁹¹ The first statement shows the sacrificial stance for the sake of the truth. Within such a disposition, the possibility of public discourse is severely diminished, and truth prioritised over an understanding of a shared humanity – “for human worth and personal rank, together with friendship, are sacrificed here to the primacy of an absolute truth” (ibid.). In a very literal sense, to maintain Arendt’s terminological preference, the common world would be inhuman¹⁹² because it would lack speech – it would be a world of fabricated artefacts lacking human interconnectedness.

Arendt’s aim is to emphasise speech as something that makes the otherwise objective world into an intersubjective common experience. What is called truth here is best understood by Arendt’s insistence on the state of affairs rather than facts – the interpretation of the events, rather than conclusive historical truths. To be sure, Arendt does not deny that facts constitute the world; her concern is with the political experience that needs to be accentuated, rather than the objective reality. In her estimation, when factual truth is given a higher value than discourse and intersubjectivity, the unobjectionable evidence of phenomena becomes more important than the possibility of exchange among actors – statement (1) takes precedence over statement (2).

Of course, truth is not simplistically irrelevant, irrationality is not advocated; rather, it is only irrelevant insofar as the discourse that arises is of higher value than the resultant truth. Arendt’s claim is that politics becomes possible through discord, not through the factuality of converging opinions.¹⁹³ The “true humanist”, according to Arendt, is free from the coercion of “absolutes”, even from truth – be that a scientific, philosophical or even “the beauty of the artists” (1961: 225). In this sense, Arendt returns to the origin of politics as freedom – freedom to create something new precisely because truth no longer ‘coerces’ human conduct. Or, to relate this to

is going on in the world and in ourselves only by speaking of it, and in the course of speaking of it we learn to be human” (Arendt, 1968: 24-25).

¹⁹⁰ Similarly, in Schmitt a reference to truth is made by parliamentarism, cf. Chapter 4 and fn. 130.

¹⁹¹ These statements appear in Arendt (1961) and are translated as follows: (1) “Socrates is friend, Plato is friend, but truth is more of a friend” (my translation) and (2) “I prefer before heaven to go astray with Plato rather than hold true views with his opponents” (J.E. King translation). The first statement is possibly an adaptation from Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*, which, depending on the translation used, may express the sacrifice of friendship in favour of truth by philosophers – τὸ δὲ καθόλου βέλτιον ἴσως ἐπισκέννασθαι καὶ διαπορῆσαι πῶς λέγεται, καίπερ προσάντους τῆς τοιαύτης ζητήσεως γινομένης διὰ τὸ φίλους ἄνδρας εἰσαγαγεῖν τὰ εἶδη. δόξειε δ’ ἂν ἴσως βέλτιον εἶναι καὶ δεῖν ἐπὶ σωτηρίᾳ γε τῆς ἀληθείας καὶ τὰ οἰκεῖα ἀναιρεῖν, ἄλλως τε καὶ φιλοσόφους ὄντας: ἀμφοῖν γὰρ ὄντων φίλοιν ὅσιν προτιμᾶν τὴν ἀλήθειαν (1096a).

¹⁹² To be sure, this is not to be confused with Schmitt’s notion of inhuman.

¹⁹³ Cf. Arendt’s adoption of Machiavellian critique of the Church in Arendt (1998: 77-78).

Schmitt and Mouffe, the second statement, unlike the first, makes political discourse possible precisely because it does not restrict the notion of humanity to a specific grouping; the second statement quoted above is interpreted by Arendt thus: “In what concerns my association with men and things, I refuse to be coerced even by truth” (ibid.).

However, as was noted in Chapter 5, in this concern with ‘association with men and things’, Arendt is nevertheless ‘coerced’ by a dissociative element present in her view of associations. It may seem contradictory to claim an associative humanity, while simultaneously holding the view that associations are divided – that a principle of demarcation is necessary. A possible contradiction is in the obscurity of the relation: how does an associative notion – a claim that through discourse an all-encompassing humanity is possible – correspond with the dissociative notion – a claim that associations are built through exclusion on who does and who does not belong? The former would imply that, at least theoretically, there is a possibility of a fully inclusive association. The prerequisite for plurality that defines political life would thus be lacking, and, according to Arendt, the association would no longer be a political one.

Following this line of reasoning, however, would conflate ‘associative politics’ with ‘concerted action’, and thus disregard the meaning of humanity that is necessary for the function of the political association. What is associative in Arendt’s notion of humanity is that the possibility of association with various groups is extended through discourse. That is to say, the associative notion of humanity is not in all simplicity meant to surpass differences, but only to present the possibility of association with *any* group – instead of an attachment to a tradition, history, culture, etc., through which that group has sprung up. The conformity to the views of a particular association is precisely what is rejected by Arendt as a basis of association. At the same time, one should not disregard Arendt’s emphasis on ‘factual reality’ and the corresponding ‘fact of plurality’ – that is, factually, there is no real question of conformity within a political association simply because any political association is based on the plurality of individuals.

Arendt’s position on an all-inclusive conception of humanity thus stands next to her conception of a dissociative association – and thus not opposed to it as it does for Schmitt and Mouffe. She is attached to humanity insofar as the possibility of groups forming freely and ‘spontaneously’ – i.e. politically – never subsides from the actuality of politics, despite the historical tendency to dominate political subjectivity by enforcing notions of absolute truth. It is important to stress that even though the possibility of associations is extended by Arendt, in no sense is the possibility of violent conflict thereby also removed from politics. While Arendt holds that violent conflicts belong to a pre-political order, it is nevertheless the case that they do occur as a result of concerted action. She is, as argued in Chapter 5, unable to displace violent conflict from the political completely. Turning to Arendt’s conception of political foundations is thus pertinent in order to examine the implications these have on violent conflicts given the assertion that violence is pre-political.

A return to (Machiavellian) foundations

In order to appreciate the innovativeness of Arendt's associative notion of humanity, and in the process to resist the simplicity of referring to her as a merely associative thinker through her notions as 'acting together', 'commonality', or 'collective power',¹⁹⁴ it is important to pay attention to Arendt's preoccupation with the foundational act in/as politics. It is through her views on foundations that the role of the Latin category of *humanitas* – as it figures in the second statement of Cicero quoted above – can be understood in opposition to the Schmittian/Mouffeian version of the instrumental wielding of the notion of humanity.¹⁹⁵

Arendt's view proceeds from two relatively distinct moments in the concept of the political, even though these moments occur simultaneously. On the one hand, there is the factual moment or an event that can be understood as an 'authentic experience'; on the other hand, there is the 'continuation' of that moment through speech – an understanding that proceeds through various interpretations. It is not surprising that this double moment of the political has been characterised in terms of continuity: "Politics is continuous, ceaseless, and endless. In contrast, the political is episodic, rare" (S. Wolin, 1996: 31). Applied to the two moments in the concept of the political, the political is an authentic experience of coming-together in the public sphere, whereas its continuation through speech is politics.¹⁹⁶ In Arendtian terminology, the political is "spontaneous" – the very nature of spontaneity is that it is not 'philosophical', it requires no further thought than what is given and clear to the acting group of people in their interpretation of the world. In order to persist, this spontaneous moment requires reflection and understanding – it requires speech through which the humanity of the other is disclosed.

One can identify in Arendt's double moment of the political what she has termed in *On Revolution* as the "task of foundation", which furthermore always "seemed to demand violence and violation" (Arendt, 1990a: 38). The foundational act has traditionally, even in myths, been one of violence – and at least on the symbolic level a sacrifice has always seemed necessary for an understanding of progress.¹⁹⁷ In this

¹⁹⁴ Cf. Canovan (1995) and Villa (1996); Benhabib (1996), Orlie (1997) and Parekh (2008); and S. Wolin (1996) respectively.

¹⁹⁵ I will return to the differences in the three notions of humanity in the conclusion to the thesis.

¹⁹⁶ To be sure, this distinction between the political and politics is unnecessary for Arendt, and is used here only in order to clarify the relation with Schmitt and Mouffe in their conception of the political as distinct from politics. What is called 'the political' in Arendt is indeed episodic and rare and its counterpart of 'contemporary politics' is indeed continuous and endless. Arendt's notion of politics, however, is only meant as an authentic experience – what is deemed endless and continuous endeavour are 'labour' and 'work', or bureaucratic machinery as the state apparatus, all of which may certainly be necessary conditions for politics, but not politics of themselves. There is, in other words, no need to differentiate between the political and politics, Arendt's own emphasis on a lost experience of politics is theoretically sufficient. In this sense also, the foundational act is both: a pre-philosophical moment, as well as the thought-provoking moment for all future action – though neither of these moments has to be differentiated in terms of the political/politics distinction.

¹⁹⁷ For instance, in Greek mythology Κρόνος overthrows Οὐρανός and Ζεύς overthrows Κρόνος; or in Biblical reference Cain slays Abel. In the latter case, it is possible to ascribe this symbolism to nothing more than a conjecture regarding some historical narratives: an agricultural settlement (Cain) is only possible by violently abandoning the old ways of pasture (Abel). And these means have to be violent, for a settlement quite literally cannot be nomadic. In the first case, however, the symbolic overthrow is according to psychoanalytic insights of Freud and Lacan; thus, an overthrow of the 'father' who is not

section in *On Revolution*, Arendt is strangely drawn to Machiavelli and in particular to his ‘recourse to God’. The foundational act is always coupled with the creation of new laws – “of devising and imposing upon men a new authority” (ibid.); and yet these same laws were to fit with the tradition of authority as an absolute.¹⁹⁸ It is thus that the revolutionary minds have always grappled with the problematic of permanent foundations. The two moments of the foundational act were to be understood in a manner of continuity, an appeal to permanence in earthly affairs, a political theology. And yet, it is clear to Arendt that such a desire for foundations is futile, precisely “because power under the condition of human plurality can never amount to omnipotence, and laws residing on human power can never be absolute” (39).¹⁹⁹ Machiavelli’s task of foundation thus runs into a complication because his ‘realism’ sharply contrasts with his ‘recourse to God’. The presence of omnipotence in the foundation would directly negate any understanding of the human condition of plurality. What is more, the desire for permanence of the foundation is, according to Arendt, what led Machiavelli to his views of necessity for violence in the foundational act. It is not, once again, his ‘realism’ that draws the conclusions of necessity for violence in foundations, but rather “his futile hope that he could find some quality in certain men to match the qualities we associate with the divine” (ibid.).

So far, regarding the foundational act, Arendt’s views on the necessity of violence are unsympathetic to Machiavelli. However, she returns to Machiavelli in *The Human Condition* and once again in the *Lectures on Kant*. In the former she observes that Machiavelli, in the often cited passage, “dared to teach men ‘how not to be good’” (1998: 77);²⁰⁰ and in the latter she cites his “I love my native city more than my soul”

a father at all – in both cases, neither Οὐρανός nor Κρόνος behave as fathers, unlike Ζεὺς, who throughout the *Iliad* is referred to as ‘Father Zeus’. The reference to Freud is not incidental, for in his myth of the primordial father (*Totem and Taboo*), as Borch-Jacobsen interestingly notes, the myth itself functions as a myth of *the myth*: “Freud was well aware that the dominating, jealous male of the Darwinian tribe is no Father, which is the whole reason why Freud in his narrative felt the need to have him finished off by his fellows: since his power resides in strength alone, he still holds no real paternal authority, and so sooner or later, in his logic of the natural state, he must be forcibly overthrown. Thus it is only *after* the murder, *after* having killed and devoured their tyrant, that his murderers submit to him, by virtue of a guilt and an obedience enigmatically described as ‘retrospective’ (*nachträglich*). The ‘Father,’ in other words, appears only after the fact . . . The ‘Father,’ then, in this strange Freudian myth, emerges only as myth—the myth of his own power, and the power of his own myth” (Borch-Jacobsen, 2003: 94).

¹⁹⁸ Cf. Arendt’s concern with totalitarian regimes, whose function is precisely in the attachment to an absolute/truth rather than interpretation. “Whatever our convictions and hopes concerning human nature may be, all our experiences with these regimes indicate that, once they are firmly established, factual reality is a much greater danger to them than an innate yearning for freedom. We know this from the Stalinist measure to deport the returning soldiers of the Russian occupation army *en masse* to concentration camps because they had been exposed to the impact of reality; as we know it from the curiously complete breakdown of Nazi indoctrination after Hitler’s defeat and the automatic destruction of his fictitious world. *The point is that the impact of factual reality, like all other human experiences, needs speech if it is to survive the moment of experience*, needs talk and communication with others to remain sure of itself” (Arendt, 1958: 25, my emphasis). For this reason, again, a totalitarian regime is not a political one.

¹⁹⁹ One could recall a similar critique towards Plato discussed in Chapter 2.

²⁰⁰ The actual passage reads: “A prince therefore who desires to maintain himself must learn to be not *always* good, but to be so or not as necessity may require” (Machiavelli, 1882: 51, my emphasis).

(1992: 50).²⁰¹ In both cases, Arendt's concern is with the foundational act and the moral dilemma of resistance. She is concerned, in other words, with the question of agency in the public space when confronted with 'evil'. To teach men 'how not to be good' is meant to separate sharply the political and the moral domains. The corruption of the Church and its teaching of doing good and not to 'resist evil' would result in nothing more than (according to Machiavelli) "wicked rulers do as much evil as they please" (1998: 78). Hence also Machiavelli's insistence on the separation of the Church from the public affairs. The good, as much as the evil, have strictly speaking no place in the public realm – "either the public realm corrupted the religious body and thereby became itself corrupt, or the religious body remained uncorrupt and destroyed the public realm altogether" (77). Moral categories are necessarily absolute, and therefore cannot be open to public discourse. Machiavelli's teaching 'how not to be good' is thus not a mark of cunning or intrigue, but rather that one should leave behind all adherence to absolutes in their entry of the public space.²⁰²

And yet, the task of foundation is not simply one of violence, but rather violence becomes a necessary mode of resistance: "If you do not resist evil, the evildoers will do as they please" (1992: 50). In her *Lectures on Kant*, Arendt does note the disagreement between Machiavelli and Kant, and specifically that for Kant "evil by its very nature is self-destructive" (51). This disagreement, however, is inconsequential with regard to violence and the public space. Even though Arendt is concerned with the moral aspect, the public space does not disappear from her concerns. Kant's remark is thus also read in an interpretative way as pointing towards the public space of contestation. For as she notes earlier: "Publicness is already the criterion of rightness in his [Kant's] moral philosophy . . . Private maxims must be subjected to an examination by which I find out whether I can declare them publicly . . . Morality means being fit to be *seen*" (49). Arendt's concern with morality here is thus deeply rooted in the distinction between the private and the public – resisting evil will most likely result in being "involved in evil"; and yet, the activity in the public space is of fundamentally greater value than the individuals' care for themselves. "Machiavelli's 'I love my native city more than my soul' is only a variation of: I love the world and its future more than my life or myself" (ibid.). It is in this sense that the disagreement on evil is of little consequence to the public space – as long as it is seen as a space where private moral concerns have no home.²⁰³

²⁰¹ This same citation comes in passing also in Arendt (1990a: 37), where Arendt condemns Robespierre's regime. See also (285-286).

²⁰² Cf. also Marchart: "It is apparent for Sartori that, in the history of political thought, the first 'hard and fast separation' of politics from other spheres of action occurred with Machiavelli. It was there that 'politics established itself as being different from morality and religion'" (Marchart, 2007: 11). Arendt's use of Machiavelli in these passages points to the same understanding of the political as an autonomous domain.

²⁰³ Though strictly speaking Arendt is not concerned with either of the intensities as applied to Schmitt and Mouffe, one could nevertheless apply a similar analysis to her work – all the more so because her work is concerned with violence in the political realm. The view of publicness and violence in Arendt's reconstruction of Kant and Machiavelli thus could function as a basis of interpreting the two intensities observed in Schmitt. There is a certain similarity of analysis between Arendt and Schmitt, as both require an autonomy of the public domain: moral concerns are to be left out of the public space. Precisely because there are not meant to be any moral perceptions in the public realm, the relation between antagonists cannot become too intense – all relations are strictly political. In other words, for

In Arendt's discussion of foundations, we thus return to the distinction between private and public realms. It is through this interrelation between the public and the private realms that the task of foundation is viewed not only as to found a strictly *political* association, but to establish in that association a space that embraces humanity not merely as a private matter, but one that is open to the public eye and is 'seen'. Such humanity is not an all-encompassing humanity that functions according to the liberal tradition, but one that is strictly Roman in its origin. Arendt summarises the significance of humanity as a public endeavour in her *laudatio* to Karl Jaspers. By *humanitas*, the Romans

meant something that was the very height of humanness because it was valid without being objective . . . *Humanitas* is never acquired in solitude and never by giving one's work to the public. It can be achieved only by one who has thrown his life and his person into the 'venture into the public realm' – in the course of which he risks revealing something which is not 'subjective' and which for that very reason he can neither recognize nor control. (Arendt, 1968: 73-74).

Arendt's notion of humanity thus gets its meaning only by acknowledging its publicness. While she is not critical of the liberal notion to the extent of Schmitt and Mouffe, and indeed does not foreclose the possibility of applying *humanitas* to all, she is nevertheless not attributing all of humanity with it. It is through a public political engagement, through the affirmation of the public realm, that humanity is disclosed. It is a political notion deeply rooted in the activities of the public realm, and thus not a derivative of biological sameness.

For Arendt the notion of humanity thus becomes necessary not only to contrast between intensities of violence, as it does for Schmitt and Mouffe, instead it acquires a particular function through which the association extends its political character. By identifying humanity with extension of discourse in the public realm, Arendt simultaneously identifies it with her conception of the political that is based on plurality and speech. This identification, as noted previously, cannot remove the possibility of violence from politics. However, without aiming to encompass all of humanity, *humanitas* cannot be utilised for particular ideological aims – in fact, it curtails the possibility of violence precisely through its limited applicability. The "'venture into the public realm,' in which *humanitas* is acquired, becomes a gift to mankind" (74).

4. Conclusion

This final chapter has shown that an emphasis on the democratic demarcation, as discussed in Chapters 4 and 5, is never fully abandoned by Schmitt, Mouffe and Arendt. Even though each scholar has claimed an association to follow from a dissociative stance – though to a lesser degree for Arendt than for Schmitt and Mouffe

Arendt too there seems to evolve a conception of the political that mediates violent outbursts by reducing any recourse to moral/economic/etc. categories. However, this concealed normativity of the political – i.e. the aim to reduce the intensity of conflict – equally forms the tension in her work between the liberal and democratic traditions. For Schmitt the two intensities were not compatible on the account of his insistence on the political – the relation between friend and enemy is one of intensity; even though Arendt does not insist on the intense relation between friend and enemy, she nevertheless holds to the democratic demarcation which ultimately cannot maintain her liberal notion of humanity.

– there nevertheless remains a certain liberal associative element in their body of work. It is certainly the case that ‘difference’ remains the focal point of politics and on this aspect all three scholars agree that politics is to be understood as an *autonomous* domain of *contestation*. As Arendt points out, the tradition in political philosophy has largely followed Plato’s aims to reconcile ‘differences’ and thus limit the scope of political action. Nevertheless, as this chapter has shown, ‘difference’ is not the sole concern of these scholars and ‘commonality’ – i.e. some notion of ‘humanity’ – always penetrates the otherwise autonomous domain of politics.

In the first part of this chapter, the claim was made that Schmitt’s concern with the political rests on an ethical assumption: he aims to reduce the intensity of conflict. Yet, this position stands in a contradistinction to the often-repeated claims made by Schmitt that the concept of the political is that of an intense relation between friend and enemy. The claim put forward was that Schmitt’s insistence on the political as a manifestation of the intense relationship between friend and enemy cannot be reconciled with the goal to reduce the intensity of conflicts. The two intensities cannot be upheld at the same time; and in order to remain consistent with his aims Schmitt would have needed to emphasise one over the other.

This problematic relation between the two intensities – of the relation and of the conflict – has surprisingly gone unnoticed in Schmitt scholarship. Chantal Mouffe’s adoption of Schmitt for her political aims thus also remains unaware of this tension and therefore reproduces the tension between the liberal and democratic traditions. She thus aims to renounce any attempt at a reconciliation between the ethical with the political and states this optimism to be partially responsible for the contemporary political ills. Thus, Mouffe wholly rejects any notion of ‘humanity’ in political discourse and points to its pernicious effects in global as well as local political practice. Nevertheless, she attaches great importance on a common liberal framework that would maintain the association intact. Mouffe is thus forced into a contradictory position of accepting both ‘humanity’ *and* democratic demarcation – an untenable position, as argued in the previous chapter.

In the last part of this chapter, Arendt’s concerns with the tradition in political philosophy have been revisited with the aim of linking her notion of humanity to her conception of the political. In this regard, Arendt’s ethical considerations of the political diverge from Schmitt and Mouffe insofar as her notion of humanity aims to strengthen ‘difference’ rather than ‘commonality’. Unlike Schmitt and Mouffe, therefore, Arendt’s notion of humanity does not unite differences – her emphasis on humanity is instead what makes dissociative politics possible. Arendt’s aims with the political are thus also different, as she does not aim to reduce the intensity of violence. This position, Arendt would note, is already concerned with morality – which, by revisiting Machiavelli, and according to Arendt, does not conform to the autonomy of the political domain.

Conclusion

My aim with this research has been threefold. First, in order to understand what is meant by ‘the political’ I critically examined the political/politics distinction in Schmitt, Arendt, and Mouffe. I have thus claimed that the political should not be viewed as an ontology of antagonistic relations as separable from the actuality of politics. Second, I have claimed that the schematic distinction between associative and dissociative traits of the political inadequately capture the differences in Schmitt and Arendt, and are indeed both present to some degree in both authors. Third, the concluding chapter has addressed the notion of humanity as a multifaceted notion utilised for justification of war in Mouffe, for curtailment of the ferocity of wars in Schmitt, and for political distinction in the public realm in Arendt. The three aims, furthermore, are intertwined – conclusions on one of the issues necessarily impose on the conclusions of another. This concluding chapter aims to give a summative overview of the arguments presented and conclusions drawn.

1. The purpose of politics in the political/politics distinction

As has been shown throughout this thesis, the question that is addressed by the scholars operates on different levels of political philosophy. It is indeed the case that all three try to find an answer to the question ‘What is the political?’, but nevertheless, they approach the issue from different positions. As argued in Chapters 1 and 4, for Schmitt the question is set upon a historical narrative of a democratic principle – it is aimed at overcoming the turmoil that internal fragmentation brings with it. For Mouffe, as argued in Chapters 3 and 4, the question is settled as an ontology – there is no escape from the political as such; an appeal to plural and radical democracy is meant to remedy a status quo. As shown in Chapters 2 and 5, for Arendt the question is aimed at recovering specific instances that lead to an open-endedness – a Schmittian appeal to unity is exactly the reason for turmoil, Arendt would claim. As the three scholars view the political, their respective associations take shape to produce an answer to the dissatisfaction with the contemporary practice of politics. Chapters 4 and 5 have thus shown that the political/politics distinction does not offer a helpful framework in the matter; quite the contrary, separating the spheres in such a rigid manner would make their endeavours futile. Certainly, such rigidity is only present in Mouffe, whereas for Schmitt and Arendt the political actuality – i.e. politics – plays a predominant role in shaping the associations. Their proposals, therefore, are of a different order: concrete normative claims set at the background of historical narratives by Schmitt and Arendt, as opposed to descriptive ontology by Mouffe; the political as shaping actual politics by Mouffe, whereas the reverse for Schmitt and Arendt.

One can observe a curious outcome from asking ‘What is the political?’. For both Schmitt and Arendt, the political serves as a desired state of politics; because actual politics is ‘dubious’, something lost must be retrieved in order to make it less so – a transformation of politics is thus sought in the concept of the political. For Arendt a ‘true’ political experience is intersubjective discourse – “for the Greeks the essence of friendship consisted in discourse. They held that only the constant interchange of talk united citizens in a *polis*” (Arendt, 1968: 24); for Schmitt a ‘concrete’ and ‘existential’ political experience revolves around the decision on the friend/enemy – “The concern here is neither with abstractions nor with normative ideals, but with inherent reality and the real possibility of such a distinction” (Schmitt, 2007b: 28). As they formulate the concept of the political, the answer to ‘What is the political?’ remains within the sphere of politics. Thus, as concluded in Chapters 2, 4 and 5, there is also no end or aim of politics.

Chapters 3 and 4 have shown the opposite to be the case for Mouffe, for whom the very question ‘What is the political?’ pertains to an already present actuality – the political is to be subverted or sublimated, and our aspirations should focus on a particular form of politics. The resulting association thus also takes the notion of politics as opposed to the political – not antagonistic combat, but agonistic conflict is the desired end. The transformation of the political into politics becomes the aim of political action – to transgress all possibilities of violence that are ingrained in the concept of the political, to define ourselves in the ontological condition through our enemies; it is a means to an end – not an experience. Mouffe’s notion of ‘hegemony’, as argued in Chapter 3, is therefore meant to overcome a specific form of politics, which in her view subverts violence in a less ‘effective’ way than would an acknowledgement of inherent human antagonisms. Consequently, even though Mouffe aligns herself on the left (even as a post-Marxist), the aim of politics is not to further these ends; quite the contrary, politics is an arena for strife – it is antagonistic, but without a clear purpose for antagonism.

For Mouffe, furthermore, and as shown in Chapter 3, antagonism and the resultant agonistic association does not have a purpose other than sublimation of an inherent human drive – it is neither a descriptive elucidation of what type of association we have and how to overcome it, nor a prescriptive view of why a certain type of politics is better suited to a specific aim. She does claim, of course, that agonistic pluralism would subvert violence; however, as argued in Chapter 4, it is not exactly clear how her proposal is going to achieve this aim – how does fostering agonism remedy disgruntled groups by setting them up against one another? And, more importantly, it is highly doubtful that that would be a desired end at all – an endless strife with no purpose other than to foster further strife. Mouffe’s inadvertent result is precisely the futility of tackling the innumerable conflicts. ‘Why bother’, one may ask, ‘if antagonisms are so inherent in us that, if not today, then some other day, if not here, then somewhere else, conflict upon conflict as actualisation of an inherent antagonism?’ To be sure, Mouffe may be right, and she certainly does not stand alone in this view. From Hobbes onwards it is clear to some scholars that man is not to be trusted – that given his ‘inherent nature’ he will oppress the other for his gains.

Perhaps this is indeed the case. However, as pointed out in Chapter 3, such a claim would be located on the ontic level and not an ontological one.²⁰⁴

Arendt's final words in *On Revolution* are of acute concern here: τον βίον λαμπρόν ποιείσθαι.²⁰⁵ As shown in Chapter 2, politics is more than a mere instrument; it does not serve as a function, an algorithm that may provide us with a result – it cannot be viewed as a machination that subverts antagonisms. It is not by chance that in her analysis of the American Revolution Arendt's emphasis shifts from politics to individual sentiments of the Founding Fathers – “those who . . . had been ‘called without expectation and compelled without previous inclination’ discovered that ‘it is action, not rest, that constitutes our pleasure’” (Arendt, 1990a: 34). An association that makes such an experience possible cannot be one based on a command-and-obey system; nor can it be one that envisions politics as an administrative bureaucratic machine, even if the function of that bureaucracy is to subvert violence. Unlike Mouffe, however, the purpose of endless strife is not more strife but life itself – “We humanize what is going on in the world and in ourselves only by speaking of it, and in the course of speaking of it we learn to be human” (1968: 25). However, as shown in Chapter 5, the possibility of violent strife remains an acute possibility in Arendt. Arendt's objective of political action as experience concedes to a futility of an endeavour to eliminate violence through an administrative/bureaucratic functioning of politics.

2. The lack of ‘associative’ associations

The purpose of politics is not specific to subversion of violence – violence is certainly the guiding thread in the analysis of the three scholars, the ultimate normative position from which their analysis originates. The course that is taken, however, differs considerably in their respective associations. As argued in Chapters 1, 3 and 4, this is especially true of Schmitt and Mouffe, whose associations become deeply intertwined with a violent dissociative stance towards the other – the enemy is always present, the association always exclusionary, the purpose of the enemy is defeat (though *not* eradication). ‘Our way of life’, our difference, is guaranteed by the enemy's presence – and yet, it is this presence that is resisted to the extent of possible violent conflict.

²⁰⁴ Ultimately, her elucidation of the political ends with fostering the liberal-democratic hegemony, rather than advancing a ‘socialist strategy’. This is perhaps the most inadvertent outcome of the co-authored *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*: it does not prescribe a *socialist* strategy, the analysis presented guides *any* strategy. Precisely by rejecting the ‘economism’ of Marx, the proposed strategy falls prey to the ‘neutrality’ of liberal political economy – that is, rather than stipulating the neutralisation of *political* economy in liberalism, it claims Marx' analysis as economism.

²⁰⁵ This citation from Sophocles that ends Arendt's *On Revolution* is unfortunately abridged – it should read as follows: τον βίον σπουδάζομεν λαμπρόν ποιείσθαι. Arendt's omission of σπουδάζομεν is unfortunate, as it points to her bias towards intellectualism in politics. Her insistence that political experience is spontaneous and pre-theoretical/pre-philosophical proves to be incorrect, for in order ‘to make life bright/glorious’ one needs to ‘study’ it and not merely relegate one experience after another. To put it somewhat differently, Arendt's anti-intellectual bias towards politics proves to be problematic not simply because the Greeks did not agree, but especially because she did not agree with such anti-intellectualist move herself. As the following citation from MDT shows, one needs to *learn* to be human; and even though our humanity is disclosed through speech, the learning does not happen while speaking.

A paradoxical dual constitution of the enemy is thus established: the enemy as someone who, on the one hand creates, and on the other jeopardises, our identity and our association.

Conversely, the dual constitution of the enemy also demonstrates that without an enemy there is no association as such. Within the narrative set by Schmitt and Mouffe, it is not possible to form associations without a presence of the other – an external group that guarantees an association is necessary. Accordingly, as shown in Chapter 1, for Schmitt this is the case in order to create a homogenous identity of the association, to create a sovereign embodiment with which the homogenous whole would coincide. As shown in Chapter 3, though in Mouffe's view no homogeneity would ever be possible on account of plurality, the symbolic order is immersed in power relations. It is in this sense that Schmitt insists on the equal treatment of the equals, and indeed that unequals are not to be treated equally. Additionally, for Mouffe the treatment of those who jeopardise our way of life – the very fabric of a democratic association – is not to be on grounds of equality.

As was shown in Chapter 5, it is peculiar that Arendt's 'associative trait' of the political is also exclusionary. Though the stipulation of 'self-exclusion/self-inclusion' into an association may ameliorate Arendt's dissociative trait to some extent, her view remains of a political association that also excludes on grounds of equality. In contrast to Schmitt, the exclusion is not based on the existential threat; and in contrast to Mouffe, the exclusion is not based on the possibility to disrupt the association – in fact, it is quite possible that such a disruption would constitute the very notion of authentic politics: a spontaneous creation of something 'new'. It is in her notion of authentic political action that we can discern the dissociative element: for Arendt the creation of spaces for action only permits a certain type of action – excluding, as it were, on the ability to leave 'private' concerns when entering the political domain. In this, Arendt's participants of an association are equal insofar as they have left their private concerns behind when they entered the public domain.

But what to make of an association that is not truly associative? We could, perhaps, refer to our associations as factually (and symbolically) dissociative. As shown in Chapter 4, for Schmitt the possibility of a fully inclusive association is denied on the factual and normative basis – he does not aim for a fully inclusive association other than an embodiment of the sovereign will in matters political. But not everything is political for Schmitt, nor should everything be political – the homogenous association is only homogenous in order to maintain a cohesive unity in resistance to the other. As was shown in Chapter 1, social concerns, economics, morality, etc. are to remain outside of the political realm; quite strictly, this type of unity – an appeal to a total state – is to be equally repelled. Schmitt's notion of association thus never leaves the political realm – and the political realm is always to remain autonomous.

The aims of Mouffe and Arendt in this regard are fundamentally the same – the autonomy of the political realm is to be guaranteed by exclusion of other domains onto politics. As shown in Chapter 3, for Mouffe the autonomy follows Schmitt's – to leave moral, economic, etc. concerns outside the political domain. Wars justified on moral/economic grounds are thus not political wars. Politics justified by exclusion on the basis of race, origin, religion, etc. no longer signifies politics either. Mouffe's

insight is precisely that we are entering an age of seemingly political endeavours without political content – politicians and policies without political content and politics. ‘Seemingly’, to be sure, precisely because the liberal aspect in them is already within a certain symbolic framework of power relations – according to Mouffe, there is no neutral/apolitical position. For Arendt, the reminder of the social ‘blob’, as discussed in Chapter 2, suffices to convince the lack of the political content.

There is furthermore another similarity between the three scholars concerning the outcome of ‘apolitical politics’. In Arendt, there certainly is a critique of private/social interests entering the public realm. But most concrete is the fear of a bureaucratic machinery, which, as argued in Chapter 5, quite literally results in “the rule of nobody” (Arendt, 1998: 45). The usurpation of social concerns onto the political realm, a ‘representation’ of the social will by a bureaucratic machinery, is precisely the origin of the phenomenon most deeply feared in the twentieth century political discourse: totalitarianism. A similar concern is shared by Schmitt, and was addressed in Chapter 1, in his conception of the total state, one that consumes everything social into political, and thereby is no longer in a position to recognise the enemy as an enemy – or indeed, as a *political* enemy.

Furthermore, there is equally a concern over the state of an apolitical association – i.e. an associative association – that was addressed in Chapters 1, 4 and 5:

The acute question to pose is upon whom will fall the frightening power implied in a world-embracing economic and technical organization. This question can by no means be dismissed in the belief that everything would then function automatically, that things would administer themselves, and that a government by people over people would be superfluous because human beings would then be absolutely free. For what would they be free? This can be answered by optimistic or pessimistic conjectures, all of which finally lead to an anthropological profession of faith (Schmitt, 2007b: 57-58).

Schmitt’s fear is certainly not shared by the liberal counterpart – as the market is able to stabilise itself in the long run, so too would the associative association. In the contemporary political climate, with the newest wave of the industrial revolution – inaptly called Information Age – there is once again the belief in the possibility of complete automation: artificial intelligence, machine learning algorithms, internet of things, blockchain technology, etc. – what else do these point to other than a new belief (‘anthropological profession of faith’) in complete autonomy from human interference? Certainly, on these grounds it is easily possible to dismiss these worries of the past as outdated. If anything, technology opens possibilities that have always been unimaginable, some even outside of human cognition until their arrival.

And yet, the problematic becomes clearer once we try to answer Schmitt’s question, ‘For what would they be free?’ We saw with Arendt, in Chapter 2, that politics is about freedom – that there is indeed no other kind of politics other than freedom; and perhaps even as far as that there is no other kind of freedom than political freedom. Equally for Schmitt, as has been emphasised in Chapters 1, 4 and 6, politics is to be found in the concreteness of the current state of affairs – if the ‘frightening power’ is not in the sovereign embodiment of the homogeneous association, then it rests outside of the sovereign will. As stipulated in Chapter 4, Schmitt’s fear is precisely over the constituent and constitutive powers – over sovereignty and sovereign decision. This is indeed to say that if organisation of society, technical or otherwise, is no longer

with the sovereign embodiment of the people, there can be no talk of a political association as such.

3. Politics of humanity

The consequences of the dual constitution of an enemy is curiously overlooked by Schmitt and Mouffe – but only to the extent that it is possible to question the possibility of reconciling this dual constitution. They overlook it precisely because of their insistence on dissociation. Schmitt's emphasis on the homogenous identity of the association, its coincidence with the sovereign will, recognises only difference – 'unequals are not to be treated equally'. Nevertheless, the association itself leaves open the possibility of an apolitical/pacified world – opening with it the possibility of "all humanity and the entire world" (Schmitt, 2007b: 57). Certainly, Schmitt does not aim for such homogeneity, he recognises that the "political world is a pluriverse, not a universe" (53); the possibility of an apolitical/pacified world is only theoretical. There is no such possibility in Mouffe; for her, as for Schmitt, the association is always exclusionary – the difference is in the possibility of an apolitical world. As argued in Chapters 3, 4 and 6, Mouffe's denial of this possibility, the resort to an ontology of the political, forecloses the possibility of a fully inclusive association – no longer is it possible to create an ethical world order, no longer a unity of humanity. Humanity will play only one role – a discursive persuasion towards an inhuman treatment of the enemy.

We are thus confronted with a predicament regarding Schmitt's view: what is the role of 'all humanity and the entire world' in an otherwise dissociative political theory? The answer put forward in Chapter 6 is in the 'ideological' notion of humanity that Mouffe borrows from Schmitt. After all, identifying a specific notion has always led to another one: a traditional use is preferred, or a 'true' meaning is sought – in either case, two notions emerge which have little in common other than their name. Thus, Schmitt identifies two notions of humanity: in contrast to 'ideological' humanity stands 'self-understood' humanity – of which the latter is *political* and the former is used in political rhetoric for apolitical purposes. For Schmitt, the normative aspiration to curtail violence is found in the latter notion of humanity, while the former notion is rejected; for Mouffe the notion humanity is only ideological and is to be repelled. How the enemy is treated and approached, for Schmitt, depends precisely on the type of notion used; for Mouffe no second notion exists other than ideological.

As Chapter 6 continues, Arendt's position on humanity does not follow a similar analysis. She is certainly concerned with humanity as a discursive notion – our humanity is disclosed in speech. However, her main concern surprisingly remains with traditional philosophy – 'surprisingly', precisely because of her anti-intellectualism in politics. Her concern with humanity is in the possibility of extending plurality – plurality as the human condition, as a condition of politics as such. We thus see a peculiar notion of humanity that does not aim, as it did for Schmitt and Mouffe, to unite 'all humanity and the entire world', but rather one through which conditions for difference are created. Differences, to be sure, specifically in a political sense; Arendt's aim, just as that of Schmitt and Mouffe, remains to create an autonomous

political field – one in which there is no place for moral, economic, etc. categories. We thus witness an equally *political* position from which Arendt's analysis proceeds. The autonomy of the political domain remains autonomous insofar as the purpose of speech is to foster difference.

4. An attempt at reconciliation

The conclusions drawn from each scholar regarding the three aims is by no means a settled one. It is indeed the case that the three conceptions of political, the views on association, and the notions of humanity, cannot be easily reconciled with each other. Nevertheless, in this final section an attempt is made not so much to reconcile these positions, but frame a preliminary conception of the political that utilises the strengths of each individual conception regarding the political/politics distinction, the views on association, and the notion of humanity, drawing from the conclusions just presented. In this regard, while my intention thus far was to withhold, to that extent that it remains possible, from presenting personal views and opinions, this final section withdraws from that intention.

In regards to the first aim, Mouffe's conception of the political stands at odds with those of Arendt and Schmitt – precisely because she abstracts the political from the actuality of politics. This is not to say that her conception is thereby also less fruitful theoretically; it does however lead to a conception of the political that is at odds with her intent – namely, to offer a strategy to contemporary political ills. Furthermore, the abstraction of the political from the actuality of politics also leads to grave theoretical complications concerning the proposed sublimation of the ontological antagonisms. Because of this shortcoming, Mouffe's conception of the political, while leading to fruitful theoretical discussions, cannot be reconciled with her professed aims of practicality. More strenuously, one is left with a sense of powerlessness in the face of the ontological antagonisms precisely because the ways of sublimation of these antagonisms remains underdeveloped in her conception of the political.

By contrast, rooting the political in the actuality of politics, as explicitly noted by Schmitt and implicitly by Arendt, leads to a greater understanding of the antagonisms – though of course not in an unequivocally ontological sense. Neither Arendt nor Schmitt give a definitive account of how to overcome violence; violence remains a possibility within the framework of their distinctive articulation of the political. However, while all three scholars aim to advance a conception of the political that would minimise the outbursts of violence, the accounts of Schmitt and Arendt are better suited precisely because they remain in the field of actuality. This is not to say that theoretical elucidation is never sufficient – quite the contrary, theory is of utmost importance to practical solutions. The claim made here is solely that a theoretical elucidation must remain within the ontic level and cannot be abstracted onto an ontological one. Such abstraction, as proposed by Mouffe, imposes a condition that forms an additional barrier to the aims of freedom and equality, rather than giving the theoretical tools to minimise the extent of democratic demarcation.

A similar claim could be made regarding the fruitfulness of distinguishing between dissociative and associative traits of the political. While academic literature often

draws on this distinction, in particular separating a Schmittian dissociative conception and an Arendtian associative conception of the political, the distinction itself does not sufficiently capture the continuities and dissimilarities present in the way Schmitt and Arendt envision associations. The crucial continuity, and one that is explicitly noted by Arendt, is that of sovereignty. Liberal theories that tend to disavow discourses of sovereignty thus miss an insight that can be drawn from asking what conclusions can be drawn by looking at associations – namely, that associations are never associative and always retain elements of dissociation. These elements, as noted previously, are found in the dual constitution of the enemy as someone who produces our identities, but also as someone who jeopardises them.

Moreover, the elements of dissociation do not only become visible through an explicit recognition of the sovereign embodiment. The sovereign can be explicit in the form of a governmental institution; but it can also be implicit in the form of unwritten rules or even customs and mores. What the three scholars have in common is thus in recognising the limits of complete inclusiveness in matters political. Delimiting the political domain and consequently setting it apart from other domains necessarily leads to a demarcation within the political association. While the articulation of this demarcation differs between each scholar – for Schmitt it is a demarcation on the basis of equality, for Mouffe a demarcation on the basis of shared ethico-political values, and for Arendt a demarcation on the ability to distinguish between private and public – it is nevertheless shared by them. To put it differently, restricting the content of political discourse by definition results in a dissociative conception of the political.

Finally, what can be said of humanity always depends on the actuality of politics. The concept of the political does not *prima facie* entail a notion of humanity. Despite the inclusion of a self-understood notion of humanity as a curtailment of the political by Schmitt, the thoroughly inductive experiences, which incidentally align with Mouffe's observations, deem this notion but a fanciful exhibit of hypocrisy. Moreover, while Arendt's notion of humanity extends the content of the political, and indeed leaves the political space open to entry, it too succumbs to actuality of politics being exclusionary. To put this in Arendtian terms, political theory is about freedom and equality – and despite Arendt's endeavour, for as long as we deem freedom and equality to be political, they remain irreconcilable. To be sure, by no means is this a cynical conclusion. Rather, it only reiterates Schmitt's point of view – a world without politics is one of an all-inclusive association:

It is conceivable that such a world might contain many very interesting antitheses and contrasts, competitions and intrigues of every kind . . . 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, 2007b: 35, 53-54).

Postscript

I started the thesis with a rather sentimental request to keep in mind Nancy's emphasis on the date. The 'situation of the earth and humans' in Nancy is not substantially different from Schmitt's emphasis on 'our own historical situation' – but what is our situation? In my 30 years, the 'situation of the earth and humans' has undergone two drastic events – at least, two that stand out for me – a highly educated, middle aged male, born in what is classified as a 'rogue state' – the 'ideal terrorist'. In 1991 the collapse of Soviet Union proclaimed the end of history. History ended, of course, until it began again – in 2001 with the collapse of the two skyscrapers in New York. Perhaps history never ended as such, how could it without knowing how to pause? There is no need to revisit Nancy's list again – which, just as a reminder, was written in 1995, right in the heat of this 'inter-rerum'.

But what is our situation? Numbers may speak clearer than lists and words. In the past 30 years, 'bloody conflicts' have cost more lives than concentration camps in Nazi Germany – 14.7 times more than Auschwitz, 3 times more than the Shoah, and roughly 1.5 times more than all the victims of the Holocaust. Seventeen-million-and-seven-hundred-thousand. I am being conservative here; not, to be clear, because overstating the numbers is a sure way to lose your audience; but precisely so as not to shy out on the numbers of the Holocaust. Were they murdered as systematically and ruthlessly as the victims of the Holocaust? Certainly not, but I doubt it matters to those who picked up arms in resistance.

So what is our situation? The friend/enemy differentiation follows from an intense enmity – an enmity so intense that *politically* a conflict between them becomes possible. When one kills, the other takes up arms in resistance. Is violence really circular? Perhaps; though the worry is misplaced on the circularity rather than legitimacy. Is it necessary to overcome evil? Perhaps; though again, evil has no place in political conflicts. It is certain that there are some who cannot await the afterlife and would gladly see this earth and the humans in it – 'our situation' – disappear. Is there still time for sentimental requests when the situation itself is at the brink of disappearing? Perhaps not; but I can imagine no better time for such a request.

In my previous pieces, I have often, perhaps foolishly, referred to Xenophanes: "Even if a man should chance to say something utterly right, still he himself knows it not – there is nowhere anything but guessing". Foolish, perhaps, because knowledge of the gods is not to be compared to knowledge of politics; or foolish, perhaps, because truth/knowledge has no place in politics. Instead, I ask, once again: what is our situation?

Contra contemporary communists, I restate the last thesis on Feuerbach:

Die Philosophen haben die Welt nur verschieden *interpretiert*; es kommt aber darauf an, sie zu *verändern*.

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