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How Values become Political?

Abstract: The aim of the article is to reveal the nature of political values. One group of theoreticians thinks that political values are derived from non-political spheres. The representatives of the other group hold the view that there are purely political values. These two different understandings are to be found in the works of Michel Foucault and John Rawls. Foucault thinks that any non-political value can be transformed into a political value, and Rawls claims that there are purely political values. Both of these positions face difficulties. Foucault cannot explain how non-political values become political, and Rawls cannot explain how non-political values can influence politics. To solve the problem of the origin of political values we have to turn to what Carl Schmitt calls the political. Without a definition of the political it is impossible to explain political values.

Keywords: concept of political, political values, Carl Schmitt, John Rawls, Michel Foucault

If we want to find an answer to the question "what separates politics from non-politics" our first task is to uncover the meaning of the nature of political values. An attempt has to be made to answer the question whether political values are only derivatives of values from various non-political domains, or, on the contrary, politics has got a fixed ground which allows for the transformation of values into political ones. The problem of the nature of political values cannot be discussed without at least a preliminary understanding of the nature of politics. The definition of political values has to take into consideration the autonomy of the political and also the fact that the political is always dependent on sources of meaning which in themselves are not political. The works of Carl Schmitt, John Rawls and Michel Foucault point the way to three fundamental strategies of analysis. Schmitt's conception is the most superior because it allows to explain the autonomy of politics, and its dependence on values from other domains of culture. The conceptions of Rawls and Foucault have to be considered as extremities. Rawls does not pay enough attention to non-political sources of meaning and Foucault is incapable of explaining what is specific to politics.

Politics without Values

The title of this chapter sounds like a repetition of the idea of Claude Lefort. This author said that politics in a democratic society can be described as an empty place (Lefort, 1988, p. 17). This insight can be applied to a broader understanding of politics. Modern political thinking begins with the theory of social contract. Representatives of this theory postulate a place without politics and with the help of it explain the emergence of political institutions. What Lefort is saying about democratic politics is also correct when applied to all politics. When modern authors are talking about political values, they have to imagine a place that exists prior to politics. Giovanni Sartori writes that "expression 'political behaviour' does not point to any particular type of behaviour; rather, it denotes a locus, a site of behaviour" (Sartori, 1973, p. 17). This proposition is similar to the thoughts of French artist Marcel Duchamp. He thought that objects become pieces of art only because they are situated in a place that can make them pieces of art – exhibitions, galleries or art magazines. Duchamp related the value of pieces of art with their entrance to exhibition hall or gallery. Sartori explains political values in a similar manner. If politics is an empty place where values from other spheres can migrate, a question arises – why values that enter the domain of politics should be called „political?"

The theory of social contract is based on the assumption that before politics there is a natural state which may be thought to be equivalent of an empty place. This metaphor has two different meanings – descriptive and evaluative. When we see a place that seems to be empty to us, the term "empty place" describes factual state of things. However, theorists of social contract are concerned not with space, but with time. When Thomas Hobbes is writing about natural state, he wants to show that chronologically it comes before the state of politics. Place becomes significant only because we cannot imagine time without place. The theory of social contract is not a product of descriptive thinking. The content of this theory is evaluative. Proponents of this idea have never seen a place without politics. They think that this idea can help to understand the nature of politics. Modern political thinking begins with the metaphor of empty place. This means that modern authors reject Aristotelian thesis that man by nature is a political animal and begin their thinking without any presuppositions. They talk about the absolute beginning of politics. This is a paradoxical undertaking. In order to understand politics, we are offered to step away from it into an empty place.

Kenneth Minogue writes that "politics is an activity without values of its own, and things which are widely valued in various cultures – things like truth, or human life – are politically valued only for their usefulness, which is often unstable" (Minogue, 1963, pp. 86–87). If we look at this reasoning and remember

the metaphor of empty place, we can say that politics has got only the kind of values it has brought from other places. Minogue points to two arguments that negate the idea of the autonomy of values. First of all, politics is always evaluated from the outside, and this is precisely what forms the understanding of values attributed to it. Secondly, politics is always directed to the goals that are beyond it. This shows that exteriority is more important in politics than interiority. If we look at both arguments proposed by Minogue, we can say that the values which are called political are borrowed from the spheres which are not political.

Having introduced the concept of political values, we could go on to say that these values are taken from other spheres of life. Politics is similar to a puppet government which is ruled by a foreign power. Such government presents itself as a sovereign source of all political power, but is in fact ruled by other political sovereigns. Minogue thinks that politics is incomprehensible without values that come from other spheres. Without them there would be nothing that could be called political values. This idea can be illustrated by a thought that Arthur Schopenhauer used on a very different occasion: "reason is feminine in nature; it can give only after it has received. Of itself alone, it has nothing but the empty forms of its operation" (Schopenhauer, 1969, p. 50). Politics has no values that belong exclusively to it, but is dependent on the sources of meaning which derive from other domains – morality, law, economy, science, technology, philosophy, religion, art, language, customs, and traditions.

Minogue thinks that politics has no autonomous values because they are intertwined with other values. According to him, political values can be reduced to values of other spheres. Minogue is talking about the reductive nature of political values. When we talk about political values, we need to understand that they are not what they seem to be at first sight. They are not autonomous values. We can say that the place of politics is always filled with values that are brought from somewhere else and that these values in turn become political only because they are transposed to the sphere of politics. Politics has no values that belong exclusively to it. If we look beyond the habits of everyday language, it is easy to see that "political values" come from a source which is not in itself political.

Minogue is not interested in the relationship between the autonomous nature of politics and the problem of autonomous political values. Failure to answer this question means that we cannot understand the nature of politics. How do we reconcile two ideas that contradict each other – the autonomy of politics, on the one hand, and the fact that there is no such thing as autonomous political values, on the other? Thinking about political values is closely linked to the question regarding the nature of politics. One version of politics is revealed to us when we think that political values are imports from other spheres of life. Very different view of politics, however, opens when we admit that it has its own irredu-

cible values, values that cannot be reduced to other spheres. According to David Easton, politics is "authoritative allocation of values for the whole society" (Easton, 1953, p. 129). The most important word in this proposition is „authoritative". Easton does not say that politics is a distributor of values. He is talking about an authoritative distributor of values that has values of its own.

Proposition that politics has no autonomous values seems to contradict our everyday experience. Our daily political life is unimaginable without thoughts about political values. This does not mean that we have to recognize a habit of language. Political philosophy opens up a perspective that everyday habits cannot open. The concept of political values creates an erroneous impression that we can find an autonomous substance behind it. If one looks attentively, it becomes apparent that this concept is only a tool that makes communication between people easier. Philosophical analysis shows that political values do not come from a source of meaning that is purely political. In the style of Benedict Spinoza we can say that politics is *natura naturata*, not *natura naturans*. This means that politics does not have autonomous values, but results from the values of other spheres being combined, separated, and adjusted. Even when, during revolutionary upheavals, politics seems to be the most important mover of societal life, values that it feeds upon are always rooted in a soil that is not political.

Moral philosophers reject attempts to reduce morality to something that is not morality itself. Majority of moral philosophers understand ethics as being autonomous. Ronald Dworkin writes that "morality is a distinct, independent dimension of our experience, and it exercises its own sovereignty" (Dworkin, 1996, p. 128).[1] This position cannot be applied to politics. Politics can always be reduced to something that is not politics. Philosophers of antiquity thought that politics is an integral part of moral philosophy; Christian authors argued that it depends on theology; modern political thinkers explained politics as a consequence of social contract; Enlightenment made politics a hostage of ideology; Marxists discovered that it was dependent on economy; conservatives argued that it derived from history; Friedrich Nietzsche configured politics as a form of the "will to power". During the revolutions there were many authors who claimed that politics is the prime mover of societal life. But after revolutionary periods people would find new kinds of dependence of politics. Western history of political thought is on the side of those authors who deny the autonomy of political values.

Any political value can be dissolved into many values that are not political. Democracy is a good example. Alexis de Tocqueville reduced this political regime to a variety of factors that are not political. Among them we can name

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[1]   See also Dworkin, 2011, pp. 23–96.

attitudes towards morality, religion, philosophy, science, education, affluence, marriage, art, crafts, upbringing of girls, eloquence of politicians, and habits of everyday socialization. Democracy seems to be autonomous value only as long it is not concerned about its own origins and circumstances that make its existence possible. When we look at the moral and cultural factors that made possible the rise of this political regime and its permanence it becomes clear that we are faced with one name that represents many values from different spheres. Tocqueville thought that democracy depends on what is going on in people's souls. This political regime is closely related with the attitude of citizens towards truth, good, beauty, faith, and economic utility.

Talks about democracy usually revolve around the values of liberty, equality, self-government, and civic activity. People tend to forget that all of these are subject to different interpretations. There was one understanding of democracy in the Soviet Union, and another after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Socialists, liberals, conservatives, and feminists have their own understanding of democracy. Discussion about democracy is a quarrel about interpretation of values that form the ground on which democracy stands. This can only be put to end by a strong-willed decision made by democratic majority. Democratic decision is right not because it is based on right values, but because it is accepted as the last decision. Citizens do not agree about values that form the basis of democracy. This shows the importance of non-political values. People of different moral, religious, and philosophical convictions propose different conceptions of democracy which are dependent on their understanding of values that are not political.

If we resume the reasoning concerning politics proposed by Minogue, we have to stress that the autonomy of politics does not have to be associated with autonomous political values. Immanuel Kant grounded the autonomy of politics not in values, but in the procedure by which these values are selected. He proposed a transcendental formula for public right which would enable the distinction between political and non-political values: "All actions affecting the rights of other human beings are wrong if their maxim is not compatible with their being made public" (Kant, 1991, p. 126). This kind of grounding of political values is one of the most popular. Today one can find it in the writings of liberal thinkers. Authors who belong to this tradition of political thought maintain that politics can establish its autonomy not by appeal to values, but by procedures in which these values are selected and justified.

Schmitt's Argument

Carl Schmitt defined the essence of politics in a way similar to Kant. He found *a priori* element and linked it to the changing forms of political experience. Schmitt gave the transcendental role to the distinction between friend and enemy. "The specific political distinction to which political actions can be reduced is that between friend and enemy" (Schmitt, 1996, p. 26). Schmitt thought that politics should not be linked to concrete values, but has to do with collectivities of people to whom friends and enemies exist. He made a distinction between politics and the political. The political exists in the realm of ontology, politics exists on the ontic plane. The former cannot be associated with any political values. This dimension of political life is unchangeable, not dependent on historically and culturally changing political values. Friend and enemy refer not to political values, but to the unchangeable element of political experience.

Schmitt proposed a conception which provides reliable guidance for our thinking about the nature of political values. One can disagree with his distinction between friend and enemy. However, the distinction between politics and the political is worthy of an investigation. Schmitt does not think of politics as an empty place. By introducing the concept of the political, he rejected the metaphor of empty place. Minogue thinks that political values are not autonomous, but he did not provide any explanation concerning the autonomy of politics. Arguments by Lefort and Sartori share the same weakness. These authors configured politics as an empty place, but they did not explain what makes this empty place political. It is hard to understand why the place designated to politics is worthy of the name "political." They do not indicate any criteria of politics which could explain the nature of political values. The fact that politics has no values of its own does not mean that it is not an autonomous sphere.

Kant thought that politics is unimaginable without the law which he presented as the main criterion of politics. Schmitt rejected this understanding because it is incompatible with his concept of the political. His argumentation focuses on the idea of the state of emergency. When the state of emergency becomes political reality, law loses its former power and becomes dependent on the will of the sovereign. Law cannot be treated as a foundation of politics, because there are situations when it depends on political will and not the other way. Schmitt thought that politics plays an important role, separates, concentrates and combines values. In his words, "political unity can contain and comprehend different contents. But it always designates the most intensive degree of unity, from which, consequently, the most intensive distinction – the grounding of friend and enemy – is determined" (Schmitt, 1999, p. 203).

Leo Strauss explained the meaning of Schmitt's teaching on the political and in some respects he made it clearer than the originator[2]. According to Strauss, Schmitt rejected the liberal philosophy of culture, which treats politics as only one province of culture among many others. In his words, "the political is a basic characteristic of human life; politics in this sense is destiny; therefore man cannot escape politics" (Strauss, 1996, p. 94). Schmitt wrote about the political that cannot be understood as a separate domain of culture. The political is a more fundamental phenomenon than any cultural values. Strauss explained Schmitt's theory by stressing the fact that the political comes before politics in a similar manner as the Hobbesian *status naturalis* comes before *status civilis*. This element of Schmitt's theory of the political opens up a path by which one can escape from turning everything into values.

Schmitt thought that the essence of the political not only guarantees the autonomy of politics but also allows us to understand it as a particular phenomenon of society. Alongside the unchangeable nature of the political, there exists an ever-changing aspect of politics which is determined by social and cultural circumstances. All political values can be reduced to values that come from other spheres. There is no such thing as purely political values that can avoid the influence of non-political sources of meaning. Things of this world have as many meanings as there are forces that can dominate them. By using this idea we can say that political values are dependent on the sources of meaning which by their nature are not political. As we try to understand politics, we need to see not only politics itself, but also moral, judicial, economic, scientific, artistic, and religious values.

Schmitt thought that values which are called political have to be understood as results of politicization and depoliticization. Any phenomenon in society can gain or lose political significance. The noun "value" can be very misleading. Politics is different from the political because it has no stable essence, it has to be thought through analogy with action, and not with substance. Values that fill the space of politics do not have substantiality that is attached to them. Any political value is related to other values. Political values exist only because of the confrontation that exists between the people who participate in politics. No political value can establish itself, but calls for the help of other values.

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[2]   In a letter to Schmitt Strauss wrote, "These formulations invite the misunderstanding that the political always presupposes the prior existence of human oppositions that in themselves have an unpolitical character, in other words that the political is something subsequent or supplementary. But if I have correctly understood your opinion – admittedly taken more from an oral exchange than from your text it leads precisely to the conclusion that there is a primary tendency in human nature to form exclusive groups" (Strauss, 1995, p. 143).

Between Two Extremities

What could be an alternative to Schmitt's thinking about political values? There are two alternatives. First of all, one can propose a different understanding of the political. Those who follow this path still follow Schmitt, but reject the distinction of friend and enemy, and propose another *a priori* principle. Prime example of this approach is John Rawls. His concept of political liberalism offers an *a priori* principle of politics. It would be hard to find another thinker who would have linked the idea of the autonomy of politics and autonomous political values so thoroughly as Rawls. Second alternative is associated with different explanation of the origins of political values. Michel Foucault is the most celebrated representative of this approach. This author explains any non-political value as a source of political significance. He makes no distinction between the political and non-political values. The difference between politics and other social activities becomes unclear.

Political philosophy of John Rawls is founded on strict separation between the political and non-political values. This author proposed one of the most radical versions of social contract theory. His "original position behind the veil of ignorance" enables us to find the basic principles of society while unaware of citizens' moral convictions, skills, race, gender, nationality, and social position. Not only the place prepared for politics becomes empty, but even individuals who design the social contract become empty. This is the triumph of the idea of politics as an empty place. Older social contract theories were limited to opposing political and non-political state. Rawls goes further. He constructs a space that has neither political nor even any other kind of identity.

Rawls is searching for intrinsic political values which would not be associated with values from other spheres and could not be reduced to them. This is a negation of the heteronomy of political values. Rawls is searching for irreducible political values which he deduces from "original position" and which do not depend on other values. He does not say that political values are absolutely independent of values from other spheres, but maintains that there exists a universal module which can be inserted into any moral, religious, and philosophical doctrine as their composite part. This universal module of values is compatible with different non-political convictions of citizens and must not be treated as a derivative of these convictions. This amounts to a statement that moral, philosophical and religious convictions can be eliminated from political liberalism.

Rawls defends position which does not admit the non-political origin of political values. However, this position is not without reservations. Rawls thinks that "political justice needs to be completed by other virtues" (Rawls, 1996, p. 21). Despite this clause, he elevates political justice above moral good and values

from other spheres. This means separating politics from non-political sources of meaning. Rawls quite openly defends the independence of politics from values of other spheres. Any intervention of the non-political values in politics is treated as unacceptable. Political values cannot be reduced to the non-political values as it was suggested by Minogue. Any ambition to enforce them by political measures is prohibited. Rawls wants to burn bridges that connect the political and non-political values.

Foucault represents inverse approach. He thinks that it is impossible to distinguish between the political and the non-political values. He states that "power is everywhere" (Foucault, 1978, p. 93). It means that political power has no fixed place, because it is diffused through the whole social body. As Foucault says, "relations of power are not in a position of exteriority with respect to other types of relationships (economic processes, knowledge relationships, sexual relations), but are immanent in the latter" (Foucault, 1978, p. 94). Political values are not exterior *vis-à-vis* non-political values but may be understood as their integral part. Rawls wanted to strengthen the autonomy of politics by separating the political and the non-political values. Foucault thinks differently. For him any social phenomenon is an integral part of political relations. In his opinion, there is no such thing as power in the proper sense. There are minor power relations that can be found in the way individuals understand themselves, in the family, hospital, university, economy, as well as other domains which *prima facie* do not seem to be political.

Foucault brings back to life the old distinction between the political and the social. Sociability is understood as a reservoir of meanings which gives life to politics and its ability to change. Aristotle was writing about *zōon politikon*. Thomas Aquinas changed this concept into *animal politicum et sociale*. Foucault fuses these two into one. It becomes impossible to say where politics begins and where sociability ends. Every social phenomenon is treated as political without any clear criterion that could permit us to recognize it as political. Foucault considered mental illness, prison, science, art, confession or sexual life to be a part of power relations. The way political institutions function does not reveal power relations existing in society. The concept of power incorporates what is happening in school, university, army, hospital, family, factory or prison.

Rawls and Foucault are representatives of two different conceptions of politics. These different conceptions negate each other. The aim of Rawls is to make politics an autonomous part of social life which is independent of values that derive from other domains. Foucault has different intentions – he wants to show that politics is greatly dependent on the sources of meaning that are not political. It is impossible to reconcile these two different positions. Rawls would never say that power is everywhere, and Foucault would never talk about purely politi-

cal values. Rawls defends the idea that politics is autonomous. Foucault wants to show that political values are heteronomous. He thinks that political power extends to spheres of life that are not political.

Without going into more subtle polemics, one can affirm that there is an internal contradiction in the theory of Rawls. He seeks living political philosophy, but at the same time he wants to restrict the impact of cultural values on politics. He thinks that he has found a perfect solution for political problems. However, there is no reason to think that if moral, religious and philosophical convictions of people changed radically, political liberalism would remain the criterion of the political. Georg Hegel would say that Rawls wants to outsmart the „cunning of reason". He begins by postulating politics as an empty place and ends with an iron curtain which separates politics from that which is not politics. His political liberalism is reminiscent of mediaeval metaphysicians' *substantia prima*. Richard Rorty is wrong by claiming that John Rawls "helped undermine the idea of transhistorical 'absolutely valid' set of concepts which would serve as philosophical foundations of liberalism" (Rorty, 1989, p. 57). Rawls proposes "absolutely valid" understanding of politics. His conception of public reason only adds to the dogmatic core of the theory of political liberalism.

Foucault faces different problem – he cannot explain the autonomy of politics. His fusion of political and social is so solid that it becomes hard to understand what politics is. After reading his works, one is left to wonder what politics is and what makes it different from other spheres of social life. Statement "power is everywhere" does not clarify anything about the nature of politics. Foucault does not propose a concept of politics that would allow us to recognize political and non-political phenomena. It becomes unclear when and how we can use the concept of politics. Foucault dispersed politics through the entire social fabric. He had to pay a big price for it – politics became hardly recognizable. Equated with everything it became nothing. Foucault is superior to Rawls when one needs to understand the non-political sources of politics, but he cannot explain the autonomy of politics and the concept of political values. Rawls made his political liberalism into a fortress of politics, which can function regardless of the changing attitudes of citizens in morality, religion and philosophy.

Conclusion

Schmitt proposed a conception that allows one to avoid the extremes of Rawls and Foucault. This author asserts the autonomy of politics and explains how the non-political values become political. His transcendental criterion of the political allows us to understand the appearance of political reality and also expla-

ins how the non-political values are politicized. From this point of view there is no fundamental difference between Schmitt and Foucault. They both are perfectly aware of the non-political sources of political values. But Schmitt avoids the problem of the nature of politics which continues to haunt Foucault. The lesson of Schmitt is that when we want to understand the nature of political values we have to see the unchangeable criterion of politics and changing values from other domains.

Schmitt explains politics in terms of the nonpolitical values and can describe it as a completely autonomous realm. He allows us to bring all two perspectives together. When we say that politics has no autonomous values we cannot stop at this statement. We have to propose a concept of the political. Politics is not an empty place. Even if it is understood like that, it has its own nature, which Schmitt described with his concept of the political. Values from other spheres become political only because of the nature of politics. The metaphor of empty place seems to be inappropriate in considerations about politics. People by their nature are political animals. This means that politics comes before space in which man appears.

Foucault does not suggest a criterion by which we could recognize political phenomena. The political liberalism of Rawls leads to another extremity – it becomes impossible to explain how non-political values enter politics. By saying that politics has no autonomous values we admit that values come into the empty place that is reserved for politics from outside. However, we have to remember that the empty place of politics can be associated with it only because it has certain characteristics. These qualities can be described as a transcendental criterion of the political. It is not necessary to state in the way Kant does that reason is a repository of pure intuitions, categories, concepts and ideas. It is sufficient to admit that political experience has *a priori* condition. If we had no transcendental criterion of the political, we could not explain why values can become political.

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