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Non-Schmittian Concept of "the Political"

Abstract: This article aims to present non-Schmittian ways of defining "the political" in Polish discourse on the theory of politics. The article consists of three parts. The first one briefly describes Carl Schmitt's understanding of "the political". The second one discusses various ways in which non-Schmittian approaches to the concept are identified based on four features (definitions that do not refer to conflict; definitions based on agonistic visions of social rivalry; the ones that focus on individuals instead of large social groups, and those which by referring to postmodernism, define new boundaries of the political as such). The third section provides a summary.

Keywords: "the political", Carl Schmitt, conflict, agonism

Introduction

The concept of "the political" has been increasingly discussed in Polish academic discourse over the past decades. It is associated not only with the attempt to define the object of study of political science but also with the characteristics of the phenomena that political scientists are interested in. Before starting any reflections on what "the political" is, however, it needs to be emphasized that this issue requires from the researcher not only a set of appropriate skills but also a special kind of theoretical and cognitive sensitivity, which allow us to look at

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phenomena that are often very abstract and difficult to define or describe. This is a demanding task, even for the most experienced political theorists and philosophers (Heller, 1990; Honig, 1992; Howard, 1989; 2020; Ingram, 2002; Laclau, Mouffe, 2001; Mouffe, 1993; 2005; 2013; Rawls, 1989).

The problem of "the political" has been addressed by Polish theorists of political science quite frequently, and the concept itself has been defined in diverse ways (Bieleń, 2018, pp. 121–134; Blok, 2009; 2021; Blok, Kołodziejczak, 2015; Czajowski, 2012; Karwat, 1991; 1996, pp. 107–135; 2010, pp. 63–88; 2015a, pp. 133–153; 2015b, pp. 33–49; 2018, pp. 15–41; Lewandowski, 2012a, pp. 135–147; 2012b, pp. 89–104; 2017, pp. 15–28; Minkner, 2014; 2015; 2017a; 2017b; 2021; Młyńczyk, 2014; 2015; 2018; Łukomski, 2013, pp. 227–238; Ozimek-Hanslik, 2016; Rubisz, 2015, pp. 130–145). Thus, this article is only one of many voices in the discussion on this issue. Its purpose is to present non-Schmittian reflections on "the political" in the studies of Polish political scientists, and in particular – theorists of political science. Given the nature of the problem presented in the article, it seems reasonable to define what is meant by "Schmittian" and "non-Schmittian" understanding of "the political" first. Carl Schmitt's definition of "the political" and the consequences of his treatment of this problem are crucial to begin with, therefore this issue will be addressed in the first part of the text. The next part of the article will present a non-Schmittian account of the political", which is characterized by reference to four main features, and it will also elucidate how Polish theorists describe it. The last part of the text consists of a summary.

"The political" according to Carl Schmitt

Carl Schmitt is one of the most frequently cited scholars dealing with the concept of "the political". Although he was forgotten for many years, mainly due to his difficult past, it seems downright impossible to define "the political" without referencing his ideas. Łukasz Święcicki (2019) presented a rather insightful analysis of how Schmitt's understanding of "the political" was applied by Polish scientists, referring both to the translations of many key publications of the creator of decisionism and the studies of Polish theorists that referred to his ideas. It is not only since the 1990s that the articles about Schmit have been written in Poland, but they were also written during the communist period, and even before World War II. Today, the Schmitt's ideas are discussed by, among others, Adam Wielomski (2011, 2017, 2019) and Arkadiusz Górnisiewicz (2020).

Conflict lies at the essence of Schmitt's concept of "the political". All political actions and motives can be reduced to the distinction between a friend and an enemy. And importantly, although "the political enemy need not be morally evil

or aesthetically ugly; he need not appear as an economic competitor" (Schmitt, 2000, p. 198), they can easily be identified with what is evil, repulsive, and threatening. Moreover, antagonism defined in this way refers only to a public enemy – for the enemy is never a private individual, but a group.[2] According to Schmitt, this is the essence of the situation in which the state is created. It is out of conflict, and out of the desire to realize and protect one's private interests (contrary to the interests of others) that the institutions of the state are created. The state, understood in this way, should be free from any processes contesting what is good or bad for it. Which is where, among other things, Schmitt's aversion to liberalism and parliamentary government stemmed from. When under threat, there is, in his opinion, no room for debate or voting – the interests of the state are always decisive. According to Schmitt, whoever can introduce a state of emergency, de facto exercises power. However, this state is introduced, in his opinion, by a single entity, a single ruler. The legitimacy of the introduction of a state of emergency is not subject to public debate.

Consequently, it was possible for Schmitt to separate "the political" from politics as such. This is because in a variant of liberal democracy politics usually means political games or a series of complex institutional links rather than a friend-enemy conflict. The latter is inherent in "the political."[3]

The friend-enemy category, according to Schmitt, can only be applied to what is political. It will not be found in economics, morality, or aesthetics. However, political conflict can involve the above-mentioned spheres, if only it becomes intense enough. The divisions can be generated by the spheres of economics, religion, or morality, but only when the dispute becomes strong enough to produce a friend-enemy dichotomy and a desire to annihilate one side by the other we can speak of a political conflict (Schmitt, 2012, pp. 24–314). Remarkably, the moment the dispute is made political, its source ceases to be important; for it is only the degree of its intensity that matters. "It is only the level of intensification of the conflict that makes it unresolvable in the area in which it arose and in which it eventually turned into a political conflict, and this is how the political is created. […] For the political to exist, there must be a conflict and

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2   Hence, although it is possible to love one's private enemy, this is not feasible with regard to the public enemy, and such is the political enemy.

3   The noun "the political" (*das Politische*) is derived from the adjective "political", but it does not have the same meaning. Created in 1927 by Schmitt, the concept of "what is political" differs from the meaning of the term "political". For example, to describe the former, the word *das Politische* is used in German, *le politique* in French, and *il politico* in Italian. Many times, however, when the adjective is transformed into a noun, in both French and Italian they usually refer to "the (political) man" or "the politician". They are also often used interchangeably with the word "politics" (*die Politik*, *la politique*, *la politica*) without any semantic difference, which is not quite right. After all, politics is something different from "the political". In fact, it seems that it is German language (native language of the creator of the term) and Polish language that have the appropriate terms for naming what Schmitt meant.

a person who is 'competent' to make a sovereign decision" (Drałus, 2012, p. 134). It is worth recalling here, for example, Polish discussions and disputes over abortion, in vitro fertilization, or (closer in retrospect) the debates over COVID-19 vaccination. Although these issues did not originate in the sphere of politics, the degree of their intensity made them political.

Schmitt's idea represents the broadest understanding of "the political" of all that we can find in academic discourse or the literature on the subject. Arguably, it is an ontologically open concept. It does not delimit the object of conflict drawing attention mainly to the degree of intensity. The intensity and the definition of the relationship through the dichotomy friend–enemy[4] is – in my view – also the most challenging element of Schmitt's "the political".

Non-Schmittian understandings of "the political"

To define a "non-Schmittian" understanding of "the political" in a relatively coherent way, we should start by identifying some basic features of this category. Considering the above reflections, we can postulate that if we were to understand "the political" differently from Schmitt, then we should define it in four diverse ways that differ from the Schmittian's idea.

First, "the political" can be defined without reference to conflict. Since the essence of the definition of "the political" according to Schmitt is conflict, any "non-Schmittian" account should be characterized as non-conflictual, or referring to Aristotelian ideas of politics, understood in terms of concern for the common good.

Second, our definition of conflict itself can be different from the one suggested by Schmitt. The essence of Schmitt's understanding of "the political" resides in his own specific definition of conflict, understood as conflict between a friend and an enemy; intense conflict aimed at the physical annihilation of the other party; and conflict between large social groups. However, it is possible to point to conflicts of political nature whose goal is not the annihilation of the opponent.

Thus, it seems that it is not entirely possible to separate the interpretations of "the political" that refer to conflict from those that are non-Schmittian. There still

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[4]   This assumption, together with the belief that political conflict presupposes the possibility of physical elimination of the opponent, poses a rather serious problem. "The political" precedes the state. It is, as it were, a condition for the constitution of the state, which is formed after the enemy is eliminated. The emergence of the state, therefore paradoxically, implies the end of "the political". Moreover, according to Schmitt, political disputes cannot arise within the state, since they would thus generate the formation of a group of enemies that should be eliminated from the game. This, in turn, would generate a problem for the sovereign. Such understanding of "the political" may generate some problems, especially for political scientists.

may be understandings of "the political" that are simultaneously non-Schmittian and conflictual. Conflicts can take other forms and do not always need to be characterized by antagonistic relations; not always along friend-enemy lines; and the enemy does not necessarily need to be identified as a group. Therefore, the non-Schmittian view of the political may still be a concept that refers to conflict, but not to antagonism and not to conflict of such a high level of intensity. In the earliest attempts to describe politics, made by the ancient Greeks, we can find the idea of so-called "healthy rivalry" or "noble competition", which, although presupposes conflict, does not associate it with annihilation, but with competition, which ultimately serves the community as a whole (Biały, 2018, pp. 15–28). These relationships are not antagonistic, but agonistic. The terms "agonism" and "agon", derived from ancient reflections, signified a type of culture typical of the Greeks, based on the spirit of competition and the desire to achieve victory over the opponent. Since the turn of the 20th century, the concepts of agonistic democracy were discussed by, among others, a Swiss historian Jacob Burckhardt and a philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche. In addition, agonism was also referred to by Hannah Arendt, who pointed out that the role of public activity is to bring immortal fame. The ideas inherent in the agonistic understanding of conflict can also be found in the publications of postmodern authors – Michel Foucault and Jean-François Lyotard, who referred to this idea while identifying their concepts of power and contention, respectively (Biały, 2018, p. 11). As the following sections of the article will show – these ideas are also referred to by Polish theorists.

Third, a non-Schmittian understanding of the political does not need to refer to relations between collectives or large groups. Indeed, it can refer to what is characteristic of individuals and derive the essence of the political from it. In this view, "the political" is understood as an indelible space of functioning of each individual – for no matter how intricate definitions of "the political" academics may create, it is always the individual who remains their final reference point. In such conceptions of "the political", a significant role can be played by researchers associated with political anthropology who do not focus on the functioning of institutions or bureaucratic structures, but bring such concepts as symbol, time, memory, practice, imagination, or discourse to the debate (Krzysztan, 2016, p. 15).

Fourth, a non-Schmittian understanding of "the political" can derive from the questions characteristic of postmodern thought, that is the questions about the new boundaries of "the political". It is both significant and interesting that the creator of decisionism, although much older than postmodern classics, became an inspiration, and his works a point of reference, for the theorists associated with postmodern political thought. He was referred to not only by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, but also by Slavoj Žižek or earlier by Michel Foucault. Typically for postmodern thought, they also pointed to the role of discourse – for

everything political happens (or can happen) within the discourse, which permeates various spheres of human activity. The political according to Schmitt assumed the differentiation of politics from other spheres of human activity. This distinctiveness, however, leads to a problem or even a kind of paradox. For, on the one hand, Schmitt emphasized this distinction, and on the other – he pointed out that a political dispute (on the friend–enemy line) can appear in any area, for example, economic disputes can take on a political character. Moreover, it also seems problematic that where political conflict arises, politics in the sense of "public policy", that is the English term "policy", disappears. Nowadays, these issues are particularly relevant, as the line between "the political" and "the non-political" is increasingly fluid and difficult to define. Which is why the reference to postmodern thought in considering non-Schmittian understandings of the political seems most appropriate.

Non-conflictual approaches to "the political"

There are certain Polish political theorists who have discussed the concept of "the political" in a non-Schmittian spirit, as they do not refer to conflict (neither in antagonistic nor agonistic terms). For instance, the concept of the field of politics by Zbigniew Blok, who began his reflections on the political by referring to the ideas of John Rawls and his views on how to define political justice, may be an example. Blok also pointed out that today it is extremely difficult to separate what is political from the spheres unrelated to politics. Some social relations, which until recently would have been attributed to the private sphere, nowadays take on political characteristics, and power relations (specific to politics) appear in various areas of human activity. Blok has suggested an interesting distinction between "the political" and politics. The former can be attributed to the species-specific, biological characteristics of humans, who are capable of perceiving threats and opportunities, separating enemies from friends, and thus understanding the environment in which they live. This is, it can be suggested, a biological variant of the political, also inherent in Schmitt (Minkner, 2015, p. 56), although this is where the similarities between Blok's proposal and the idea of Schmitt end. Politics, on the other hand, is understood as a product of the social (not biological) nature of human beings. It results from the human ability to organize and live in more or less homogeneous societies (Blok, 2009, pp. 38–39).

Later on, Blok focuses on the spheres and mechanisms responsible for the creation of political phenomena. According to him, it is not possible for the scientists to predict political future without recognizing the above-mentioned spheres and mechanisms. Having reviewed the definitions of politics understood as a specific type of human activity and as a specific type of social

relations, Blok pointed out that these two types of definition seem to be insufficient for a precise characterization of what we call politics or what we define as "the political". The essence of politics and "the political" is more than that, for it is such an entity that can be considered from two perspectives, either as a type of activity or as a type of social relations (Blok, 2009, p. 63).

Consequently, to go "beyond the definitional deadlock", Blok distinguished four types of social activity, whose interactions result in political phenomena understood in terms of space – in this way, the approaches to politics relating to both activity and specific types of relations were combined. These four types of activity include: economic activity (economic society), state activity (state society), informational and education (ideological society), and civic activity (civil society). In the future, two additional spheres (related to the development of the information and consumer society), named by the author also as fields of politics, will be distinguished (Blok, 2009, pp. 64–72).

These four fields are referred to as first-level fields of politics, which in turn, when, for example, economic and state activity overlap, form second-level fields (e.g., economic and state related); and when three types of activity overlap – third-level fields form (e.g., economic, state, and civil society). The core of politics, on the other hand, is the space formed from the overlap of all types of activity. The position outside the intersection of the four fields is taken by the so-called marginalia – activities, which are outside politics, but which in favourable circumstances, in the right place and at the right time, can create a separate field of politics. New fields of politics can consequently create a new, but socially relevant type of activity, which previously remained politically irrelevant, but can acquire political significance when the time and place are right (Blok, 2009, p. 85). Blok implies that what is political (the field of politics) remains heterogeneous, complex, and multifaceted. Consequently, also the theories of politics can only be applied to a selected fragment of political activity.

Another example that is worth citing here is the concept of the political by Mirosław Karwat (2015a; 2015b). Although it is to some extent inspired by Schmitt, it is still considered to be a non-Schmittian idea. "The political" is the objective content of a given phenomenon, which results from the correlation of four essential properties: the clash of interests and aspirations of large social groups, the macro-social scope and society-wide significance of this clash, the integration of social groups in opposing the environment and from the adaptation of group particularism to the conditions of society-wide integration, and the adaptation of national particularism to the requirements of universal security and universal interests. Moreover, all these conditions can also be accompanied by a subjective sense of "the political", which, however, does not further the analysis of the objective conditions of the political. According to Karwat, "the political" is primarily relational and conflictual in nature – it is not related to a single clearly defined political sphere but to the intertwining of "politics'" and "non-politics"

and the interdependence of various "non-political" spheres, which can only create the political as a result of their interaction (Blok, Kołodziejczak, 2015, p. 21). We can see the reference to Schmitt in the antagonistic relationship of political actors, however, this idea does not involve a single dominant, privileged actor that Schmitt wrote about. This concept does not imply that in order to solve the dispute the enemy must be eliminated, which is what, in my opinion, distinguishes it from the ideas of Schmitt as well.

The essence of Karwat's idea is the interdependence, the syndromatic nature of "the political". He also points out that researchers often define and distinguish "the political" from "the non-political" without realizing that this performative act itself is already political.[5] The very recognition of certain phenomena as political is already of political nature. Therefore, it also entails the distinction between the political seen as an autonomous/independent property and the political seen as an attained property. The latter appears when the feature of being political is intentionally attributed to something. This is an extremely interesting approach, not only because the attribution of a political feature may in some cases depend on the individual actor's interpretation of the term "political", but also because of the fact that phenomena that are originally non-political can, as it were, "become infected with 'the political'" through relations with what is political, and also because two originally non-political phenomena can generate a political phenomenon when combined (Karwat, 2015a, pp. 133–153; 2015b, pp. 33–49).

It should also be mentioned here that, as Karwat pointed out, a conscious researcher will always distinguish between a phenomenon that is originally political (due to its inherent distinctive features) and one that is contextually political, namely, its character results from specific circumstances and a "given" political status. This does not mean that the latter type of the phenomenon is "less" or "differently" political. However, a phenomenon is not labelled as a political one because of its characteristics, but due to its relations and interdependence with other phenomena (Karwat, 2015b, pp. 46–47).

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[5]   It is worth pointing out here that this view is also expressed by Andrzej Jabłoński, Janusz Golimowski and Zbigniew Blok. The belief that there is a single, clearly identifiable subject of study in political science seems, in their opinion, difficult to maintain, due to the fact that political phenomena may refer to both politics and other spheres (see: Jabłoński, 2012, p. 31; Golinowski, 2011, p. 23; Blok, 2009).

Conflictual but not antagonistic approaches (agonism)

The discussion of agonistic definitions of "the political", should start by recalling the assumptions of Laclau and Mouffe (2010). These researchers, who like Schmitt opposed the liberal understanding of politics and the political, tried to reconceptualize Schmitt's main categories so that they could be used against him ("to think with Schmitt against Schmitt") and referred to his understanding of "the political" based on conflict understood in terms of agonism but not "antagonism". However, it is worth pointing out here, referring to Jacques Derrida's idea of deconstruction, that thinking "with Schmitt against Schmitt" may no longer be thinking "Schmitt" at all. As Derrida pointed out, deconstruction involves a double deconstructive reading of any text, discourse, or institution (Devetak, 2006, pp. 242–243). The first reading is usually a commentary or repetition of dominant interpretations and merely generates the effect of stability. In other words, the dominant interpretations are just repeated or the mechanisms through which the text, discourse, or institution becomes coherent and logical are presented. The reader faithfully reproduces the dominant version of events by building on the same assumptions and repeating the same steps of argumentation. The reading provides such an understanding of the text as is characteristic of most of the audience, indicating the so-called "minimum consensus" on the basis of which we understand the text. In the second reading, however, it is necessary to go beyond reproducing the dominant version of events. The second reading "should destabilize the dominant interpretation of the text; it should acquire the ability to be outside of the text; beyond its repetition and interpretation based on another text created in the same tradition" (Filary-Szczepanik, 2014, p. 137). The text should be contrasted with itself – its meaning, intended by the author, should be confronted with what can be seen as its linguistic consequences.

Thinking "Schmitt against Schmitt" was intended to be the second reading, it was meant to show the internal elements of inconsistency, tension, or crisis. It was supposed to indicate which elements of Schmitt's text supplant the internal tensions and inconsistencies in order to create a homogeneous and continuous text as a result. However, this is already the work of the one who reads the text for the second time, so this "reading Schmitt against Schmitt" may be an attempt to think against him. However, as mentioned before, it may no longer be a "pure Schmitt" reading.

The concept of agonistic democracy and Mouffe's way of defining "the political" seem to be quite popular with Polish political scientists. Filip Biały (2018) is the author of an exhaustive study devoted to the idea of agon. In his study, we can find not only references to the idea of Mouffe, but also the whole history of agonism, going back to antiquity. Moreover, his work also refers publications of William E. Connolly (1991) and Bonnie Honig (1992), which is not very frequent in Polish publications (Minkner, 2017b).

Filip Biały pointed out that today's theorists often refer to the concept of agonism, and this is not without reason. First, (Nitschean) agonism is contrasted with an open *life-and-death* conflict. The rivalry seems to mitigate extreme antagonism. Second, rivalry requires a relative balance of competing forces. This is guaranteed by the mechanism of exclusion. Third, the exclusion mechanism serves as a guarantee of the permanence of rivalry, providing, along with the rivalry, a rationale for action. The end of rivalry consequently brings about disengagement in public affairs, which is what Mouffe warned against, and so did all the scholars who pointed out that the standardization of political agendas under modern democracy impacts on the decline in political participation. Fourth, competition not only leads to the formation of common ground for the interaction of competing parties, but it also helps to establish a measure of excellence. This measure becomes the building block of a shared world and a recognizable sense (Biały, 2018, pp. 26–27). Mouffe noticed that "liberal democracy requires consensus on the rules of the game, but it also calls for the constitution of collective identities around clearly differentiated positions and the possibility of choosing between real alternatives" (1993, p. 4).

Agonism can be treated as an attempt (or a manifestation aiming) to tame antagonism made in search of alternative ways how to survive under conflict. "They" in agonism denote our 'constitutive outside', conditioning our possibilities. As Mouffe pointed out, "We" are not just the realization of dichotomies, but a complex structure in which the multiplicity of individuals determines the infinity of relations with others. "Conflictual consensus" is the essence of modern democracy and agonistic relations are the measure of its (modern democracy) existence. A friend-enemy relationship would lead to its destruction (Gmurek, 2016, pp. 151–152).

Following Mouffe, Biały also mentioned the possibilities of including the concept of agon in the field of international relations. The idea is strongly related to the concept developed by Schmitt and the proposals formulated by him in 1954 for the development of world order. According to Mouffe, the domination of the United States, and the lack of recognized, political channels of protest against it leads to the outbreak of extreme methods of contestation of the Western control on the rest of the world. These methods include various acts of terrorism that humanity has had to face since the beginning of the 21st century (Biały, 2018, p. 68). The remedy proposed by Mouffe is to take her idea of the organization of the state to the international level – to provide an opportunity to express diverse voices within global civil society. Presented by Mouffe's, the agonistic vision of world order stems from two assumptions she proposes. The first one is the recognition that the world is not an universum, but, as Schmitt suggested, a pluriversum (Schmitt, 2006, p. 243). The second assumption that follows from this is that in a pluralistic world it is impossible to get rid of antagonisms by unifying the international order according to the Western model. Conse-

quently, we should aim to create recognized channels of expression that will oppose the hegemony of the neoliberal model of globalization (Mouffe, 2005, pp. 152–153). The target world order, therefore, cannot remain unipolar, it should take on a multipolar form (Biały, 2018, pp. 72–73).

This can happen by recognizing that a plurality of "just" forms of society is legitimate, among which liberal democracy is only one possible variant. This "creates conditions for an agonistic coexistence between different regional poles with their own specific institutions" (Mouffe, 2008b, p. 466).

An interesting critique of the concepts of Laclau and Mouffe was also presented by Karol Morawski (2016; 2018, pp. 89–104). Interestingly, the author also adopted a deconstructionist strategy of reading (second reading) in his work, which is expressed, among other things, in the statement: "[in] this sense, I read the texts of Laclau and Mouffe, as it were, against them, i.e. not only do I follow the issues presented there, but I also ask them questions […] which Laclau and Mouffe either do not directly pose, or do not answer" (Morawski, 2016, p. 12). Other researchers who also referred to Mouffe's concept of "the political" in their publications include, among others: Małgorzata Borkowska-Nowak (2017; 2021) or Remigiusz Rosicki (2014).

Additionally, also Kamil Minker (2014; 2015; 2017b; 2021) developed the concept of the political defined by Mouffe. In one of his articles, he asked to what extent the concepts of Mouffe and Laclau can be considered scientific (Minkner, 2017b). After all, the theorists themselves have always described their ideas as politically engaged because they point to specific solutions to political problems with a left-wing premise. However, Minkner stressed that almost all knowledge is ideologically conditioned and motivated by a particular set of values, but this does not negate its cognitive value. Moreover, the ideological content does not contradict the cognitive value but rather co-creates it.

Minkner (2017b, pp. 53–74) considered the ontological and epistemological positions of the concept of agonism by Mouffe and Laclau, and although they may not raise great doubts at the first glance (for we are dealing with post-structuralism and the cognitive interpretivism determined by it), it is worth emphasizing that post-structuralism allows "opening" the concept of "the political" and power a bit further. Power relations, as in Schmitt's works, become dispersed and detached from the sphere of politics. They can move into all possible spheres of social reality: knowledge, language, subjectivity, family life, and private relations. At the same time, however, to uphold the scientific and cognitive value of Mouffe's concept, Minkner stressed that it was the researcher herself who decided to cut herself off from postmodern assumptions that heralded the end of liberal democracy. As she pointed out, her ideas can be successfully classified simultaneously as modernist and postmodernist ones – after all, she did not reject democratic values, but proposed a specific way to realize them.

Minkner's extremely interesting reflections led him to advance the thesis that ideological commitment co-creates the scientific value of the concepts of Mouffe and Lanclau, which on the ground of Polish political science seems to be an important step in theoretical considerations. While the interpretive tradition has many supporters among Polish political scientists, the postmodern thought or the one that refers directly to poststructuralism does not have so many sympathizers (Minkner, 2017b, p. 71).

One of Minkner's publications takes up another important notion, namely that of "the political" defined by Mouffe as concerning world politics, that is, the idea of agonism transferred to the space of international relations, which the author tries to combine with the assumptions of cosmopolitan democracy. As mentioned earlier, Mouffe criticized cosmopolitan democracy as an idea which universalizes the only model – that of Western democracy and tries to impose it on other cultures, leaving no room for pluralism. By acting in this way, the proponents of the idea of cosmopolitan democracy "eliminate the possibility of agonistic dispute, legitimate disagreement and thus create a space facilitating the appearance of the form of antagonism characterized by violence" (Mouffe, 2015, p. 33–34). For Mouffe, the cosmopolitan consensus is only a facade. Hence, the international order should be as pluralized as possible, with a plurality of voices expressing the interests of different communities. Even democracies should be differentiated according to the specifics of their local conditions and cultural contexts. A good example here is the idea of human rights, which, according to the Western viewpoint, are supposed to be a guarantee for the preservation of dignity. Nevertheless, in other cultural circles something else may constitute this guarantee.

We should, however, ask whether it is possible to use Mouffe's assumptions to formulate the idea of global order. Minkner tried to follow that, based on the ideas of Tamara Caraus, Christof Royer, and Sjors Borrit Wijlhuizen, among others.

The former pointed out that the institutions of cosmopolitan democracy are necessary to enable different actors to express their views on a global level but based on a common set of norms and principles (firstly, actors need to separate themselves from local and national affiliations, which gives them a chance for emancipation, for identification with others at a higher level) (Minker, 2021, p. 202).

Minkner, following the idea that both democracy and cosmopolitan democracy are not finite projects, but are still in the process of being developed, noticed that the merging of an agonistic vision of international relations is possible after first accepting a minimum set of principles of a cosmopolitan order – which will never be a finite project anyway. It is not an end at all, but only a means to an end, which is the radical pluralization of global democracy, but within the framework of its common institutions. Agonistic conflict is only possible within a cosmopolitan global order that simultaneously provides both basic principles and the

opportunity to challenge them. The problem with a multipolar world is that we are dealing with a reductionist pluralization of hegemony. However, it is not until individual poles have emerged within a higher-order hegemony that it will be possible to create a truly agonistic global order that can effectively deal with various global threats. Hence, as Minkner suggested, agonists should not reject the suggestions of various improvements to international organizations or criticize such ideas as that of a world parliament (Minkner, 2021, pp. 206–207).

The political as a sphere of individual activity

The joint publication edited by Bartłomiej Krzysztan, Wojciech Ufel, and Mateusz Zieliński, begins with a provocative sentence: "The political is a man" (2016, p. 11). As the authors, self-described as a "publishing collective", explain that in the endless chain of references attempting to define and delimit "the political", a man appears as a recurring topic.

In view of the above, we should cite one of the co-editors of the volume, who postulates the need to move away from the positivist view of political science and "the political" as such. Recalling the socio-political transformations that have been taking place in Europe and around the world since the 1990s, the author stressed that the ambiguity of political, social, and economic processes, together with the unpredictable multiplicity of their possible interpretations, have made it impossible to put the very concept of "the political" into an unambiguous and rigid definitional framework anymore. The level of complexity and multiplicity of processes that can be observed today on a global scale makes it impossible to analyse them based on a single, universal model. Hence, it becomes necessary to look at the micro-scale and analyse cases individually. Thus, the author suggested not only focusing on individual case studies but also moving away from the methods derived from the positivist paradigm. The latter, typical of some political scientists seeking to distinguish their discipline based on a clearly defined subject matter and method, seemed to dominate in recent decades and validate the scientific value of political science (Krzysztan, 2016, pp. 19–34).

Krzysztan, pointing out that "the basic political lies in the street, in social speeches, in civil society organizations, in citizenship, in deliberation, in symbolism, in memory, in unconstituted, unspoken, unspecified elements" (2016, p. 17) proposed a completely different approach not only to "the political" itself but also to the political science as such. The latter, he believes, should be based on the critical attitude of researchers and their constant doubting. Doubt means denying objective truths or the existence of a single, objective social reality. Consequently, the author postulates that political phenomena and "the political" itself should be studied using the perspective of an anthropologist. This perspective

offers researchers two new possibilities. First, anthropology offers a micro approach, which in consequence means that virtually anything can be the subject matter for a political scientist. Thus, "the political" (which the author defined as power relations) can manifest itself in any aspect of human activity (not just politics), even in the least obvious, every day, and symbolic contexts (Krzysztan, 2016, p. 25). Krzysztan thus follows the ideas of Clifford Geertz, who pointed out that "small facts speak to large issues […], because they are made to" (1973, p. 23, cited in: Krzysztan, 2016, p. 25), as well as the theorems of William I. Thomas and Florian Znaniecki (Krzysztan, 2016, p. 25). Moreover, the author pointed out quite unequivocally that this constructivist-interpretive approach, despite being able to offer a very rich and diverse perspective, is still rarely present in Polish theoretical reflection. Secondly, anthropology can offer political scientists a completely different, non-positivist, methodological perspective. Interestingly, although this perspective, derived from anthropology, breaks with Cartesian dualism (culture/nature; rationalism/irrationalism; subjectivism/objectivism), it does not entirely reject the achievements of the Enlightenment. Thus, researchers using political anthropology can study "the political" both by methods characteristic of positivism and those invoking hermeneutics. Moreover, they can perceive and analyse it in every sphere of human activity, not just in politics. After all, referring to the ideas of Mouffe, Krzysztan postulated that "the political" should be seen everywhere where power relations occur, and not only conventional, institutional politics. Thus, he returns to what Mouffe, following Martin Heidegger, referred to as the ontological level, as opposed to the ontic level. "The political" occurs at the former (ontological) and politics at the latter (ontic). Polish political science remains preoccupied with the analysis of phenomena specific to the ontic level, while the essence of the political is at the ontological level.

While presenting the concept of "the political", which primarily refers to the activity of individuals, we should also mention the studies of Łukasz Młyńczyk (2014; 2015; 2018), and in particular his monograph *Między kreatywnością a próżnowaniem. Polityczność dwóch typów idealnych* [Between Creativity and Leisure. The Political of Two Ideal Types] (2015), in which the author attempted to juxtapose two concepts – creativity and leisure, used increasingly in public debate. Together with "the political", they are also occupying more and more space in the discourse of Polish political scientists.

Thus, Młyńczyk made an initial assumption about the importance of an individual in all political processes and the concept of the political as such. Interestingly, already in the introduction" to the monograph, he noted that two categories (creativity and leisure) will be identified in it, but they will only take the form of Weberian ideal types. Consequently, the monograph no longer attempts, for example, to indicate the reasons for the appearance of these two types of activity in the public space. This is because, by definition, ideal types do

not materialize and remain only a "possibility of incarnation" (Młyńczyk, 2015, p. 10). However, from the perspective of the presented article, it is important to acknowledge Młyńczyk's attempt to characterize what is political and create a brief description of this type of activity. The author remarked that politics is an activity that "concerns living organisms, but the literal understanding of a man and human beings is complemented by a specific reading of the classes of social phenomena as the counterparts of biological organisms. *Homo politicus* becomes the reincarnation of *homo sapiens*, but not in Aristotle's literal understanding of its function" (Młyńczyk, 2015, pp. 11–12). "The political" expresses itself in action, which, embedded in numerous social contexts, remains first and foremost a purposeful action, and purposefulness is described precisely by using the categories of leisure and creativity. Purposeful action, as the author pointed out, is best realized through the exercise of power, nevertheless, it is only one of the possibilities.

Creativity and leisure remain inseparable from "the political", although not through their opposition. Młyńczyk pointed out not so much to "the non-alternativity of the mere pursuit of leisure or creativity or just such a choice, but to the inevitability of their political entanglement, since the point is reached at which each successive decision receives ontic political features" (2015, p. 180). The essence of "the political" and, consequently, the political entanglement of individuals is, C. Schmitt himself pointed out, still a decision, but not about the dominant "we/they" division, but about the necessity of ontological self-identification, resulting in the possibility of realizing goals that become unquestionably political (Młyńczyk, 2015, p. 181). For it is possible to indicate a certain point (known to humanity as the highest degree) from which the categories of creativity and leisure acquire a new political dimension. This is because an individual can no longer realize their goals without moving to the political. To realize what rational choice theory calls maximum utility, an individual can no longer stop before the threshold of the political. It must become politically entangled, and afterwards each successive feature acquires ontic political qualities.

New boundaries of the political – postmodern approaches

The last theme inherent in non-Schmittian approaches to "the political" deals with its new, contemporary limits. This matter *problem has come up* in academic discourse along with many others that postmodern thought has brought to theoretical-political reflection (Bauman, 2007, p. 7). These questions were born out of the negation of the importance of grand narratives, out of the negation of the so-called "core of politics" (Beck, 2002), out of reflections on post-politics and post-democracy, and out of reflections on a reality in which there are no

enemies, and everyone can define themselves and their identity (Rancière, 1998, p. 102). We are dealing not so much with a fluid reality, as Zygmunt Bauman (2007, p. 7) pointed out, but also with fluid politics. According to Bauman's idea, the fluidity of everything brings the modernity of the turn of the 21st century into a qualitatively new phase, namely postmodernity. Interestingly, as Lech Rubisz suggested, for Schmitt the aforementioned fluidity or dispersion was a characteristic feature of the non-political. Considering the main ideas of the presented article, this issue is worth mentioning. While Schmitt recognized the tendency for dispersion (and warned against it) of only one aspect of social reality, namely, power and politics, Bauman noted that almost all aspects of social reality undergo dispersion or dilution. Moreover, politics itself, following the metaphor of liquidity, is nowadays spilling over into more and more areas, which previously did not belong to the sphere of politics (Rubisz, 2015, pp. 130–145). As Rubisz pointed out: "The same mechanism has worked in the case of politics as in the case of modernity. Thinking, action, and institutions forming its solid core, were diluted by the liquidity gene" (2015, p. 142). We can venture to say that Schmitt's darkest scenario has come true – not only politics but the entire social reality has been dispersed. It is difficult to find any boundaries in it, including those which could help to distinguish what is political.

At this point, it is worth recalling the publication of Remigiusz Rosicki (2014, pp. 71–81), who pointed out that defining "the political" and determining its boundaries happens at the final level of resolution and justification and is the responsibility of the researcher. This is because it is the latter who determines what lies within the boundaries of "the political" and what lies beyond them. According to Rosicki, "the political" is nothing more than a constant necessity to choose and decide. However, he takes the position that it is impossible to find the objective truth; for the world of politics is constantly socially and discursively constructed. Thus, research activity will never be free of value judgments, and there is no such thing as a "neutral research worldview". Therefore, a researcher should always remain critical and aware of his own ignorance. Being against dogmatic ways of defining the political, Rosicki advocates openness to new approaches to "the political" and the achievements of other disciplines (such as sociology, psychology, or law), which can contribute to the construction of a new, innovative paradigm of political science and thus to the development and progress within the discipline as a whole (2014, pp. 80–81).

The same line of argumentation is followed by Paweł Dybel and Szymon Wróbel, who have developed an extremely interesting reflection on the new boundaries of "the political", while pointing out that it is not an ethically neutral issue. For it is not just a question of cognitive science, but also a question in which a considerable amount of moral sensitivity is reflected. According to the authors, it is no longer a question about the characteristics of the political alone; but a question about the political sensitivity of the one who asks it (Dybel,

Wróbel, 2008). This is due to two reasons. First, it is difficult to compare the concepts of politics and "the political" to concepts relating to material reality. Second, the boundaries of the concept of the political have never been as blurred as they are today – for politics, according to the aforementioned researchers, has reached the limits that may transform its nature (Dybel, Wróbel, 2008, p. 53).

In the volume mentioned above, the authors referred to many thinkers, philosophers, and theorists, including Michel Foucault, Giorgio Agamben, and Antonio Negri, among others, and pointed out that contemporary political thought focuses on the questions of power, but not so much over man (a social being), but on power over population, over biological life, over naked life, and the relationship between *bios* and *zoe* (Agamben, 1998, p. 8). It is because the domains of power and social life are now including the themes once pertaining to life in its biological sense. The question of when life begins has become relevant in politics today; and thus, whether abortion or euthanasia might be permissible and lawful, whether body modifications, artificial insemination, organ transplantation, gene therapy, or embryo cloning are permissible. In addition, the questions about human identity, the processes of constructing it, or the questions of belonging have also become political. These are the areas where, in the opinion of contemporary philosophers, power is realized – although Foucault treated these problems differently than Agamben, Žižek, Negri, or Michael Hardt. The aforementioned philosophers, however, always asked about the relationship between power and human life, the relationship between the species dimension and the social dimension, or, in other words, the relationship between nature and culture.

The insights related to new definitions of conflict or war are also interesting and worth mentioning here. For these are no longer Schmittian understandings (referring to friend-enemy antagonism), but ones that understand conflict itself and even war rather as something imagined, played out in people's minds. Hobbesian war, for example, is for Foucault merely "a face-making duel: – a duel in diplomatic terms, played out between equals. For if, to use Schmitt's categories, either side proved stronger, the fate of the dispute would remain virtually a foregone conclusion. Similarly, a state of emergency is a permanent state in which power is realized, and it is impossible to say when it will end. The enemy is not a specific, clearly defined entity, but a certain way of life that can be resisted, for example. War is, so to speak, a way of governing the state, but also the very creation of ways of life. It is the creation of a subject, which is then controlled (Dybel, Wróbel, 2008, p. 60). Modern war is a global war, which has also become a technology producing and reproducing various aspects and styles of life.

In such reality, the access to knowledge and information plays a significant role. Jakub Jakubowski addressed the latter in his article (2014, pp. 58–68) while pointing out the importance of communication processes in determining what is political. And although the communication process itself is not political, it is

(following the idea of Karwat) likely to become politicized under certain circumstances. Having in mind the assumption about the relationship between power and knowledge, specific to postmodern thought, we can assume that the process of communication plays a huge role in determining what is political. Moreover, with universal access to information and the mediatization of politics, the information itself often begins to "absorb its own content" (Michalak, 2012, pp. 89–104). Every piece of information that is passed on is simplified and filtered by the relay, while the media and journalists engage in so-called "overproduction" which often renders it meaningless. As a result, the content of politics and the definition of what is political is further liquefied.

The notion of liquidity and the resulting problem of defining what is political are present in Polish theoretical reflection (although perhaps we should use the term in "postmodern theoretical reflection"), not only in the work of Dybel and Wróbel, but also in Minkner, among others. Additionally, Minkner discussed the issues of transhumanism, that is, the relationship between man and machine or robot, and posthumanism. The representatives of posthumanism ask some questions anew, the questions about the relationship between humans and animals, plants, or things, and point out that man has ceased to be the most important entity while breaking with the Cartesian belief that consciousness is the core of identity. Moreover, posthumanists also accept that a human body can be manipulated and, thanks to technological advances, some of its elements can be replaced with prostheses, for example. The issues raised by transhumanists or posthumanists seem to be far from the question of the political. Nevertheless, whenever we ask about human life (when it begins and when it can be ended) or about the control over it (who exercises it, how and with what techniques), we ask about "the political" and its new definition. What is more, whenever we raise questions about the tension between nature and culture, or the relationship between humans and animals or plants, we also ask about "the political". However, posthumanism also contains ideas typical of the traditional understanding of "the political" – for it asks about power, control over society and the conditions of emancipation. This demonstrates its connection with the new definition of the political even more emphatically.

Paweł Ścigaj (2020) also discussed the limits of the political, referring to the role of "zombies" in politics. Although it rather seems to be a part of contemporary popular culture, the concept of "zombies" is also present in the academic debate on politics or international relations (Drezner, 2011). A zombie is a metaphor that can refer both to imperialism, colonialism, slavery, or racism, to direct threats to life (annihilation, natural disaster, epidemic), and to symbolic threats. The category of zombies is used to refer to things which are difficult to name nowadays because they are simultaneously alive and dead – such as the state (Beck, Beck-Gernsheim, 2002) or international organizations (Gray, 2018). It is a rather bold category, evoking a variety of associations, but hence memorable and

provocative; it requires a great deal of imagination from the researcher and the ability to think in abstract terms. Being able to ask questions not only about life but also about the entities that are difficult to categorize unambiguously as either living or dead can undoubtedly prove useful in the process of determining what is political. After all, the fear of total annihilation, defeat, or simply of an unpredictable future has always been a part of humanity. The category of the living dead does not only provide a tool to describe contemporary threats to humanity, but it also allows us to name concepts, ideas, or theories that have not been refuted yet, but no longer work (Ścigaj, 2020, p. 177).

Summary

The questions asked today by political scientists primarily concern possible definitions and new boundaries of "the political". Importantly, these questions are formulated at the time when the boundaries of politics itself are getting blurred, and the concept of "the political" was created, after all, to preserve the boundaries of politics and separate what refers to the power from what does not. The premise of Schmitt was to defend politics from all that democracy brought, in his opinion, namely the increasing involvement of citizens in the matters of the state and the increasing overlap of public and private spheres. Nowadays, not only are we dealing with blurred boundaries between "the political" and "the non-political", but also with the increasing "politicization" of the elements that in Schmitt's time did not belong to the sphere of politics. Which is why any attempt to define "the political" seems to be an almost unrealistic undertaking. When everything seems fluid and there is no single dominant interpretation of sociopolitical reality, trying to redefine something that has always remained difficult to grasp seems to be an extremely challenging, if not futile, task.

The lack of boundaries of "the political" that we can observe today seems to stem primarily from the consequences of globalization, which has led to an important paradox in the research area of interest. Globalization does not so much abolish all boundaries, but rather declares war on them, and the essence of "the political" (still as seen by Schmitt) was a war declared against the lack of boundaries. Consequently, two features inherent in contemporary considerations of "the political" can be pointed out. First, it is a term that is still contested, and its meaning is not clearly fixed. "The political" seems to have no boundaries nowadays, and everyone can define it differently. Consequently, the term cannot help to determine what politics is or define the subject matter of political science. It can only supplement the meaning attributed to politics, but how it supplements it is also up to the researcher. Both politics itself and "the political" remain ambiguous and normatively not indifferent. We live today in the world in which

the cacophony of different ideas and lifestyles has become a part of everyday life (Tokarski, 2018). Humanity is now defined primarily by diversity, manifested in the infinite number of possible answers to the questions of who we are, where we come from, how to organize life, or when it begins and ends.

The second feature that emerges from a review of the various definitions of "the political" is a kind of asymmetry. "The political" is combined with other spheres of life (including economy, culture, or religion), but it does not remain in a balanced relationship with any of them – hence the mentioned asymmetry. It is not a direct result of the inherent characteristics of "the political" and politics, but of their relative autonomy from other spheres. It does not mean "inequality", but rather "imbalance" or "lack of symmetry". Asymmetry can be understood as a stronger version of the relative autonomy of politics. Politics is autonomous and therefore its relations with other activities are "asymmetrical". This seems to be the source of much of the term's appeal.

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