ENEMY AND WAR
IN CARL SCHMITT'S POLITICAL THEORY

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Abstract

The subject of the following article are the basic concepts present in Carl Schmitt's political theory: concepts of enemy and war. The concept of the enemy is defined in the first part of the work in the context of coexistence with the concept of friend as the fundamental opposite of the theory of politics. The next part of the essay defines the concept of war, and then describes the right to war (*ius belli*) as a special right of the state. The last part of this paper deals with the particular concept of enemy, the internal enemy.

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Introduction

Carl Schmitt has in recent years become one of the most read and most broadly commented political thinkers. His work has become the subject of analyses both of the left side of the political scene, pronouncing an end to neoliberal order, as well as republicans (even if from *nomen omen* „Teologia Polityczna" [*Political Theology*]) voicing the need to renew the commonwealth. The works of Schmitt inspire on the one hand post-Marxists such as Chantal Mouffe (1999), which sees in Schmitt's theories a critique of liberal democracy as an instrumental system (see e.g. Engelking 2019), on the other hand conservatives and even few authors from monarchist[1] circles. The popularity of this author is visible both in post-socialist countries, which after the year 1989 have undergone social, economic and political change, as well as in liberal democracies of the Western world struggling with current problems related to their mode of functioning and the future of the welfare state, as well as issues of foreign policy. Among the latter, the most important might be considered to be: migration policy, the threat of terrorism or, more broadly, the finding of a suitable *modus operandi* in the post-modern world of global economic and political dependencies (Pawlik 2014, p. 55).

The statement might perhaps be true that this is a philosopher, whose thought responds perfectly to the crisis of liberal democracy as preached since at least ten years now (Maciejewski 2018) (with a certain dividing line formed perhaps by e. g. the world financial market crisis that began in the year 2007 and reached its climax in the years 2008-2009), looking at all the little subtleties of the world of liberal democracy and showing through with its inconsequencies and contradictions that undermine it. It is no wonder then that right-wing authors see in Schmitt the theoretician of the modern state of law, for

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[1] As for instance Adam Wielomski referred to in the further part of the paper.

which the liberal paradigm with his passion for individualism and human rights are fictitious, because the real foundations on which the state is based are illiberal and means rather unity, arbitral decisions, or leadership (Chmielniak 2010, pp. 62-63).

The subject of the present essay shall be key concepts present in political theory, meaning, the concepts of the *enemy* and of *war*.

The concepts of the *enemy* and the *friend*

The opposing concepts of the *enemy* and the *friend* are the essence of musings within the political theory of Schmitt. This is a fundamental differentiation introduced by the author of *Political Theology*, which boils down to all activities of political nature, relevant actions and their motives (Schmitt 2000, pp. 253-254). If morality encompasses the basic differentiation in terms of the dichotomy between good and evil, if economy has profit and loss, and aesthetics encompasses the opposition of beauty and ugliness, then the political sphere has the fundamental differentiation between the *enemy* and the *friend* (*Ibidem*). The uniqueness of this differentiation entails the fact that there are no other criteria of differentiation between a *friend* and an *enemy* other than those that lie within the political realm. In other words, these concepts cannot be brought down to differences found in other areas of human activity such as the already mentioned morality, aesthetics, etc. Of course, the enemy must also have an existential dimension, he must be alien and different, which sufficiently defines his essence (Rysiewicz 2010, p. 10).

The political differentiation is thus solely the determination of the level of intensity of a relationship or a separation, which translates to association or diffusion. What is significant is that, what is axiologically bad and aesthetically abhorrent may not necessarily be inimical in the political sense, and what is morally good and aesthetically beautiful does not automatically become friendly in the same manner. The

concepts of *enemy* and *friend* should thus not be treated metaphorically or ascribed with connotations related to images of morality or private tendencies or feelings (Schmitt 2000, p. 255). They have one specific „existential" sense, hence they refer to real enemies or friends existing in the world. A friend is somebody that supports us, but at the same time somebody who, together with us, forms a community of public character. Who then is the *enemy*? The *enemy* is also public, it is a group of people (in relation to which the reality of undertaking a fight is present) standing in opposition to a similar group of people. Hence, an *enemy* is not a competitor in the general sense, or an opponent towards whom one may have negative feelings. They need not be loved or hated, as this is of no consequence for the political sphere, to which this relationship applies. Hate or love are only substantiated in the private sphere (Schmitt 2000, pp. 256-257). A constituent property of political opposition is in turn its intensity. As Schmitt states, „Every specific situation of a difference is the more political, the closer it is to the critical point of distinction between a friend and an enemy" (Schmitt 2000, p. 257). In a state that may conduct policy in various areas: the religious, economic, social, etc., opposition and antagonism shall be the key factors for the purpose of determination of political applicability in all these cases.

All political issues are in fact, according to Schmitt, *polemic* in their significance. This means that they refer to specific and real situations of opposition, remaining in a close relationship with them. The ultimate consequence of the existence of such a situation is the unification of people according to the criteria of *enemy* or *friend*, a farther consequence of which may be the emergence of a revolution or war. The moment the situation of opposition would vanish, all concepts related to the political sphere, such as the state, republic, society, absolutism or dictatorship would become devoid of content, hence – incomprehensible (Schmitt 2000, p. 258).

Moving further, the existence of an *enemy* (hence, a *friend* as well)

is in a sense constitutive for the existence of a nation in itself, which, should it want to retain its political being, cannot forgo the determination of who in such a situation would be its enemy, and who would be its friend (Schmitt 2000, p. 281).

The concept of *war*

According to Schmitt, in order to be able to speak about politics in the first place, the real possibility of a struggle must exist (this struggle most commonly taking place between states or empires). *War* is defined as an armed struggle between politically organised formations, or – in case of civil war – armed struggle within an organised formation (Schmitt 2000, p. 261). *War* or struggle does not mean here a competition in the symbolic or spiritual sense. It is founded on the principle of enmity, as it entails the negation of a different being, and has very real significance, the core of which is the possibility of physical annihilation of another human being. *War* is hence the final stage of incorporation of enmity.

On the political level, the decision as to who is the enemy is made much earlier. On the battlefield, when representatives of two armies stand in opposition against one another, the difference between friend and enemy is not a political problem any more. *War* is not, however, the essence of politics, it should be rather treated as a unique, extraordinary situation. Relations between nations are often rather different than warlike, moreover, the avoidance of war may at a specific moment constitute a reasonable political strategy. A war concluded with a victory, or an efficiently conducted revolution, however, is in no way the incorporation of an ideal society. Significant here, however, is a certain reality of a common conflict that constitutes the mode of human thinking and action (Schmitt 2000, pp. 262-263).

A world, in which the possibility of *war* would become limited, for instance, due to the domination of pacifist ideas, would be a world, in which the differentiation between enemy and friend would cease,

hence, it would be devoid of politics. Schmitt does not devote his energy to whether the world quoted above, devoid of politics, would be a required world or not. This example, however, permits the understanding of the core of *politicality*, of political capacity, hence, the real possibility of unification of people according to the differentiation between friend or enemy. This is a difference that reasonably substantiates the necessity to sacrifice one's life or kill others (Schmitt 2000, p. 264). *War* as the ultimate political tool has hence its sense only if the world would include a difference between the enemy and the friend or at least, if the emergence of it is possible.

The criterion of the enemy and the friend is, according to Schmitt, the sole criterion leading to the political unification of people, in the end leading to the emergence of *war*. All kinds of oppositions of economic, cultural, religious character do not yield sufficient grounds to wage war. These motives are, in essence, significantly weaker from the criterion of politicality – the division between friend and enemy. Every opposition of the indicated character (economic, religious etc.), is ultimately transformed into political opposition, if it is intense enough to lead to an actual division of people between enemies and friends (Schmitt 2000, p. 266).

The right of *war*

The moment the enemy is identified – the state may, according to its own decision, commence struggle with them. *Ius belli* is a particular entitlement of a military organisation being an expression of political unity. *War* on the other hand stems also from a specific nation's will to fight for its independence and existence. Secondary are in this regard technological means that are used to conduct a war, the mode of organisation of the army or the perspectives of victory. Waging war is related to one other particular right of a state, it being the right to dispose of human life. This is twofold in character: on the one hand, a

state organisation demands from its citizens, in a time of war, to be ready to sacrifice their lives, and on the other hand, for them to be ready to take away the lives away from people fighting on the side of the enemy (Schmitt 2000, p. 276).

Such disposal of human life may also be seen in other communities, e. g. religious ones. The church may demand its followers to give their lives for the faith, however, the motivation of the individual sacrificing their life in such a situation may differ significantly – in this case, the goal would be the individual salvation of one's own soul. In case of sacrificing one's life for the state, we are dealing with a sacrifice for the benefit of the community; hence, a sacrifice that is strictly political in character. Just like political would be sacrifices in course of religious wars or crusades, where an enemy is clearly defined (Schmitt 2000, p. 279). War, as was stressed earlier, is, however, a unique situation. The fundamental task of the state is primarily to protect the peace on its territory. This is also a necessary condition of the prevalence of legal norms that function in a normal situation, losing their validity especially in unique situations.

The concept of the *enemy within*

The issue of assurance of peace within the territory of a state organisation is tied by C. Schmitt also to the concept of the *enemy within* (*hostis*), hence, to those members of the community, the behaviour, judgements or actions of whom may lead to violations of social order. The rule of determining the *enemy within*, as described by Schmitt, aimed at the strengthening of political unity, had historically emerged in the majority of states – it was present in the Greek Republic, in Roman law, as well as in France in the time of the Revolution (Schmitt 2000, p. 276).

Persons considered *enemies within* could experience various consequences: the prohibition of association, the takeover of goods,

being stripped of the right to hold public offices or being banished from the community (Schmitt 2000, pp. 276-278). The result of consequences used against the enemy within (e. g. having them considered damned) could be the emergence of civil war. Civil war, as Schmitt puts it, equals the dissolution of the state, as this is the end of a territorially closed, organised unity that is not available to politically alien entities. On the other hand, the emergence of civil war might be related to any sort of situation, in which a political force would emerge that would gain great popularity, that would be able to guarantee to society more safety than official state authorities. In such a case, the submission of the citizens would be directed at specifically this force, and not the weak state that would be unable to provide safety. The relationship of submission and protection is, in view of Schmitt, a constitutive relationship for the functioning of the state, or, more broadly, for any relationship of subordination that finds its source in natural laws (Schmitt 2000, p. 284).

Conclusion

The concepts delineated by Schmitt encourage deeper reflection in particular in the contemporary world, quite frequently referred to as „postpolitical", in which the labels „politician", „political" or „politics" are frequently treated pejoratively. Politicians themselves decline to categorise their actions as political, referring to themselves as technocrats and summarising their activities to administrative work devoid of deeper political meaning. On the other hand, these concepts might be considered significant for the Western world after the Cold War era, which for the last decades has been searching for its identity, experiencing in recent time a phenomenon that could be referred to as the decomposition of the set social order. This shines through for instance in the deep structural changes within the European Union (*vide* the decision of the society of the United Kingdom to exit EU

structures during a referendum) or the recently popular forces that even if are not some forms of nationalism *sensu stricto*, then at least groups stressing issues of identity. It seems that, maintaining all proportions and a distance to historic context of the emergence of the concept of Schmitt, the thought accentuating the common good as a fundamental good is a significant counterweight to the liberal paradigm as reigning for the recent decades, now experiencing its crisis. Liberal democracy, with its inherent individualism as well as the depoliticised world of concepts, in which the concept of *war* was replaced by a term rather linked to the area of business, *competition*, was indeed one of the main areas subject to criticism of the mentioned thinker (Lewandowski 2017, pp. 18-19). Schmitt criticised the systemic omission of state and politics in liberal thought, instead of which glorified were ethics and the economy (hence, the mentioned business world) (Schmitt 2000, p. 241).

An issue worth also looking at is the specific pragmatism of the musings of Schmitt, shining through for instance in the separation of political issues from moral issue, whereby the political thought of Niccolo Machiavelli comes to mind, who also prioritised political goals aligned with the good of the state over the ethical dimension of political activity. It is not an accident that C. Schmitt saw that if any fragment of *The Prince* by N. Machiavelli „(...) would show true affect (...)" (Schmitt 2016, p. 29), then it is related to strong abhorrence, or even hatred against politicians who, having difficulties making specific decisions, are not able to finish the issues they have started, being „(...) half cruel, half virtuous(...)" (Schmitt 2016, p. 29). Another sign of the mentioned pragmatism or political realism is the conviction that it is naive to think that „(...) a defenceless nation is surrounded solely by friends" and that in turn „(...) the enemy can be moved by the lack of resistance" (Schmitt 2000, p. 284).

Some of the main theses preached by Schmitt raise doubts, for instance, the conviction that one of the constitutive components of

political association is the right to demand from members of the community the readiness to sacrifice their own lives fighting the enemies of the state. This attitude was criticised by, for instance, Leo Strauss, referring to Thomas Hobbes, according to whom the state may only demand that the state may only demand from an individual conditional subordination that does not stand in opposition to the will to retain one's own life (Strauss 2008, p. 63). The concept of decisionism itself also seems to be questionable; its authorship is ascribed to Schmitt (Wielomski 2007, pp. 183-184), and according to it the act of will of the political sovereign, from which a political decision stems, is so strongly legitimised solely through the existence of a superordinate authority that it is not preceded by any sort of norm. This may be an extreme example of separation of political issues from moral issues.

Disputed is also the issue of impossibility of bringing politicality (understood as the dichotomous division into friends and enemies) to other areas of human activity. Strauss also indicated this, stating that in subsequent centuries, the object of struggle between people is usually that which is considered important. Hence, in the 16th century theology was considered to be this area, to be followed by metaphysics. In the 18th century morality was the most important, in the 19th century this turned into economy, whereby now we have the time of technology as the main object area of the twentieth century (which, it may seem, lasts until now – author's remark). Politicality that, according to Schmitt, would not have its own object area, and is only characterised by intensity, cannot hence be the „core of an era". Politicality hence ultimately depends on what people consider to be important (Strauss 2008, pp. 70-71).

Undoubtedly, the world described by Schmitt was a world far from his expectations, a world in which the most fundamental questions were avoided. In this sense, Schmitt's thought may be treated as a part of the mainstream of culture criticism characteristic for either Thomas Mann

or Ernst Jünger, if we assume that its common part is a contestation of what is found.

Keeping all proportions, one can risk venture a statement that today's world is somewhat reminiscent of that of a hundred years ago. The economic and migration crises that started the 21st century resulted in an increase in support for newly established parties often described as "populist" (e.g. *Podemos* in Spain, *Syriza* in Greece, *Alternative für Deutschland* in Germany). It seems that the conflict constituting the political axis in Carl Schmitt's theories is also today the main core of political behavior (Lewandowski 2017, pp. 16-17). It is therefore not surprising that such a broad reception of Schmitt's work, which was mentioned in the introduction of this essay.

Despite everything in Poland, Schmitt's knowledge does not match the importance of this author in Western countries. On the one hand, this may be due to dozens of years of real socialism, which naturally hindered reaching the works of Western thinkers, on the other, the frequent connotation of Schmitt with national socialism, which was often both the beginning and the end of discussions about this author (Święcicki 2017, pp. 235-236). It is enough to say that the first text of the Schmitt in Polish did not appear until 1987 (Święcicki 2017, p. 237).

Returning, however, to the critic of the liberal democracy of Schmitt, which has made him so popular nowadays. It seems that the very concept of politics based on the conflict between friend and enemy denies the foundations of liberal democracy such as cooperation, partnership, etc. At the dawn of politics lays the potential for war, which gives the whole definition of the situation described by Schmitt the character of waiting for the conflict to break out (see Skarżyński 1996, p. 52). This anthropological pessimism (Wielomski 2017, pp. 75-76) of Schmitt seems to assume that one cannot subordinate social life to an individual who is obviously imperfect, torn apart by emotions, while focusing on building a strong state, to some extent responds to the

needs of today's world seeking a political *modus operandi* after years of domination of liberalism.

On the other hand, however, one should not forget that liberal democracy has been experiencing a permanent crisis since its establishment, and yet, despite its numerous critics, it is still ongoing. Perhaps this permanent crisis leading to its redefinition and change, constitutes its identity and means internal strength.

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