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Jacques Derrida, “On Absolute Hostility: The Cause of Philosophy and the Spectre of the Political,” in *The Politics of Friendship*, trans. George Collins (London: Verso, 2005), 112-137

Originally Jacques Derrida, “De l’hostilité absolue. La cause de la philosophie et le spectre du politique,” in *Politiques de l’Amitié* (Paris: Galilée, 1994)

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This continues Derrida's critique of Schmitt's *The Concept of the Political* [1932]. All statements and quotations are summaries of Derrida's thought, not Schmitt's. For example, “Schmitt thinks x” means that Derrida says, in this essay, that Schmitt thinks x.

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- Epigraph from Freud conflating Empedocles' principles *philia* and *neikos* with *Eros* and *destructiveness*
- Traces a line from Nietzsche's “living fool” overturning Aristotle's “O friends, no friend” to “O enemies, no enemy” to Freud
 - Creates a sense of “vertigo”
 - Nietzsche quotation is from Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *Human All Too Human*, trans R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 149
- Asserts a hyperbolic origin to good and evil, common to both
 - “a hyperbole *qua* the difference between good and evil, the friend and the enemy, peace and war”
- Debates the optimistic and pessimistic poles of the statement
 - Optimism
 - Address is to one's friends (to announce there are no friends)

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- Announcing there are no enemies
- Pessimism
 - There are no friends
 - Bemoaning that there is no enemy

- “Would the ultimate of the ultimate be a theory of absolute ambivalence, in the Empedoclean tradition of Freud – that is, one hospitable to the death instinct?”
- These optimism/pessimism poles are now revealed to be quotations from Carl Schmitt
- “Schmitt resolutely affirms, more than once, that only 'pessimistic' thinkers of human nature are systematic, authentic, and coherent thinkers of the political fact [*la chose politique*] (Machiavelli, Hobbes, etc.)”
- “Their pessimism, from the moment there is no longer anything 'psychological' or moral about it, nevertheless consists only in the fact that they 'presuppose (*voraussetzen*) in truth ... only the actuality/effectivity or the real possibility of the distinction off friend and enemy (*die reale Wirklichkeit oder Möglichkeit der Unterscheidung von Freund und Feind*)' [Schmitt]”
- “We shall have to question the logic of this *presupposition*.”
- “can Schmitt be assured that a knowledge is 'right' or 'correct' (*richtige*) in acknowledging [...] that the conviction of possessing the truth, the good, the just, is what sparks the worst hostilities or that 'the war of all against all' is neither the unchained monstrosity of a delirious imagination nor the 'free competition' of bourgeois capitalism, but the 'fundamental presupposition of a specific philosophy'?”
- “Schmitt thinks there would be a difference between two forms of disagreement”
 - He appeals to Plato to do so “when he defines the enemy – in other words, the political”

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- Even in terms of civil war: “The body politic should, no doubt – but it never manages to – identify correctly the foreign body of the enemy outside itself.”
 - “It is impossible to *implement* the rigour of such a conceptual limit.”
 - “One cannot do what one says.”
 - “Neither what one says one will do nor what should be done”
 - “No *praxis* can correspond to indications contained in a *lexis*.”
- “the purity of *polemos* or the enemy, whereby Schmitt would define the political, remains unattainable.”
 - Even drawing a boundary “sharpens the cutting edge of this difference between *praxis* and *lexis*”

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- “Only the purely political can teach us how to think and formalize what is purely political.”
- Schmitt continually attempts to ground his definition of the political with “*concrete*, living and relevant pertinence”
 - “It is therefore all the more troubling that the meaning of *polemos* remains, as we have just suggested, both natural and blurred, naturally and irreducibly blurred.”

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- For Schmitt, the political is purely impure

- But the polemical sense remains pure
 - “Failing this, it could not be distinguished from anything from which it distinguishes itself”
 - “More precisely – and this difference is important here – the doubts must disappear not so much relative to the meaning of friendship or hostility, but above all relative to *who* the friend and enemy are.”
 - “If *the* political is to exist, one must know who everyone is, who is a friend and who is an enemy, and this knowing is not in the mode of theoretical knowledge but in one of *practical identification*: knowing consists here in knowing how to identify the friend and the enemy. The practical identification of self – and from one self to another – the practical identification of the other – and from other to other – seem to be sometimes conditions, sometimes consequences, of the the identification of friend and enemy”

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- Takes issue with synonymy of abstract and empty with spectral
 - Spectral being the term against which Schmitt makes concrete his definition of concrete
- Schmitt's discourse is contaminated by the performativity (self-constituting) nature of the political
- “But would Schmitt say, for all that, that his discourse on politics is of a *theoretical* nature, and that it is not affected by the polemical modality, and therefore by the performativity, whose incessant contamination he has, on the other hand, described? [...] We are not sure that he would.”

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- A theoretical (-logical) discourse is inseparable from a practical implementation, which is affected by the performative contamination
 - “the *politicological* or *polemological* project and the political-polemical engagement are indissociable”

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- Questions whether Schmitt considers his discourse to be “of the 'purely objective' or that of the 'purely scientific'”
- “Schmitt cannot analyse an 'everyday language' from the standpoint of a discursive instance that would be superior or foreign to it. The words and syntax forming the framework of his book forever belong to 'everyday language'. No refinement can extract them from it, if only because of the natural language in which they are found, which forbids any absolute formalization.”
- When Schmitt describes revolution and has to speak of the interior, thereby detracting from the *polemos*, he sees this as a weakening of the *state*, rather than the political
 - “Not of the political in general, but of this *State* form of the political that Schmitt intends to distinguish, whereas he often uses it as the *telos* or guiding thread of his definition of the political.”
 - Even though Schmitt warns, “On the very first page, there is a reminder that the concept of the State presupposes the concept of the political, not the other way round”

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- Schmitt therefore sees the State and the political as teleological poles and therefore “the State as the political *par excellence* – that which serves as an exemplary guide for the definition of the political.”
- Schmitt must therefore be seen in the “what he himself identifies as the German tradition of the doctrine of the State in its Hegelian form”
 - “With regard to society, this doctrine considers the State other than and superior to it”
- “the State presupposes the political, to be sure, hence it is logically distinguished from it; but the analysis of the political, strictly speaking, and its irreducible core, the friend/enemy configuration, can only privilege, from the beginning and as its sole guiding thread, the State form of this configuration – in other words, the friend or enemy *qua* citizen.”

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- However, for Schmitt, the truly real possibility of combat is found in internal conflicts, which “win out in terms of 'intensity' over the unit of community on which the foreign affairs are based.”; civil war
 - This is justified (the alignment between external and internal war) by seeing internal conflict as a war between a state and a state-to-be

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- “In both cases, it is an armed combat. In view of killing.”
- “The death of a *human being*, thus implied in this concept of the enemy – that is, in all war, exterior or civil war – is neither natural death, since the enemy must be killed, nor murder, for wartime killing is not seen as a crime. The war crime is something else again; it would consist of transgressing this law to revert to the savageness of a violence that no longer respects the laws of war and the rights of people”
- Three logical chains from this:
 - 1.) “One can infer symmetrically that there is no friend without this possibility of killing which establishes a non-natural community. Not only could I enter into a relationship of friendship only with a *mortal*, but I could love in friendship only a mortal at least exposed to so-called violent death – that is, exposed to being killed, *possibly by myself*.”
 - 2.) “But to this logic one can, precisely, *oppose opposition*: what is true of the enemy (I can or I must kill you, and vice versa) is the very thing that suspends, annuls, overturns or, at the very least, represses, transfigures or sublimates friendship, which is therefore simultaneously the same (repressed) thing and *something altogether different*.”

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- 3.) “Let us not forget that the political would precisely be that which thus endlessly *binds* or *opposes* the friend-enemy/enemy-friend couple in the drive or decision of death, in the putting to death or in the stake of death.”
 - Then posits the “step beyond the political” as a way of loving (*philein*) bound to life
 - “If a choice between these three hypotheses and these three logical chains were simple

or clearly possible, we would make that choice, we choose one immediately. In this very place.”

- “Hence we must be patient at the crossroads and endure this *undecidable* triviality. Without it – and this is the thesis and the decision – no decision would be possible, nor ever any friendship. There are we. In this very place? No, there.”
 - Deferral of decision leads to friendship

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- “Just as hostility is entirely dependent on the *real possibility* of this putting-to-death, so also, correlatively, there is no friendship independent of this deadly drive – which is not necessarily to say, this criminal drive.”
 - This requires a pure hostility, that is devoid of individual affect
 - “The realization [of this violence] is not the actualization of a possible but something altogether different: the radicalization of a possible *reality* or a *real possibility*.”

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- “Sometimes the political is a particular and grounded stratum”
 - “you may love your (political) enemy; but you will not love him politically, you will love him from another angle: as friend, lover, neighbour, human being – the political should not be confused with something else, etc.)”
- “Sometimes the political, *qua real possibility*, invades the entire fundamental or grounding stratum of existence, whether individual or communal”
- “All the eventualities we have just summarily considered would then be excluded or contaminated in advance by the real possibility of the very thing from which they are cut.”
- The strategy of presupposition is, therefore, to concretely ground each aspect of reality so as to allow a differentiated analysis of terms such as “nation” which are pluralistic (each nation, defines it differently)
 - “In some of its features, it could be analogous to Heidegger's existential analytic”
 - “This said, it always demands that the presupposition of *real possibility* or *eventuality* be *present* in a determined (*vorhanden*) mode. And this presupposed presence is that of political decision: the decision deciding who the enemy is.”

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- “War has its own rules and perspectives, its strategies and tactics, but they presuppose (*voraussetzen*) a political decision (*politische Entscheidung*). They presuppose, in fact, that this decision, naming 'who is the enemy' (*wer der Feind ist*), is preliminary.”
- The impossibility of the neutral in the political

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- “For Schmitt, the criterion of the friend/enemy distinction does not in fact entail that a 'determined people' should have to be for all eternity the friend or the enemy of another. This suggests that the

'decision' we have been talking about is not linked to communal appurtenance, is not caused by it, even though the decision reaffirms appurtenance."

- The exception is the rule.
 - The real possibility only arises occasionally, yet it sets the rule

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- War and killing are such exceptional states and therefore the "decisive ordeal"
- "it is the improbable situation, and no other, which, exceptionally, *qua* exception, unveils the essence, the centre and the heart of things"

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- BUT now: the fewer wars means the more exceptional they are
 - This means that the more hostility abounds and the more politicized the environment is
 - leads to "*having to measure politicization in terms of the degree of depoliticization*"
 - "The less politics there is, the more there is, the less [sic] enemies there are, the more there are"

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- "We are simply formalizing a principle of ruin or spectrality at the heart of this discourse on the political, a discourse of madness allied to an excess of common sense."
- A world without the possibility of war would be a world without politics
 - but this is inhuman: "the inhumanity of a world without war"

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- War intersects the three criteria of "*reality, possibility, presence*"

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- For Schmitt, war always has a meaning and no politics has meaning without war
- War does not have a telos in the sphere of moral or religious ideas, but in itself

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- Derrida suggests that Schmidt's need for a war which kills individuals but horror at a war that annihilates a people or state, needs to see the possibility of the latter

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