

“The time is coming when politics will have a different meaning.”

Hans Sluga

German in origin and educated at Munich and Oxford, I have been for some decades now a professor of philosophy at the University of California at Berkeley. My publications include a book on the historical origins of analytic philosophy (*Gottlob Frege*) and one on German philosophy and National Socialism (*Heidegger's Crisis*). I have written extensively on Frege and Wittgenstein and less extensively on various other philosophical topics, including some essays in political philosophy. From the beginning of my career I have been interested in both the analytic and the “Continental” side of contemporary philosophy and highly suspicious of the usual distinction between them. Above all, I see myself as a Europeanist concerned with a broad spectrum of European thought specifically from the nineteenth century to the present. My outlook is largely historicist though I appreciate the attractions of the timeless and apriori.

In recent years I have become increasingly interested in political philosophy as a domain where the empirical, the historical, and the philosophical intermingle. My focus on this field is to some extent due to my earlier preoccupation with Wittgenstein. I was interested in the question where one could go in philosophy after Wittgenstein, if one did not want to leave it at dealing endlessly with the conundrums he poses. In writing on political matters I have tried to make use of some of Wittgenstein's concepts, though not necessarily in ways that will be easily identified by others. Wittgenstein was, among other things, a deeply a-historical thinker. He once wrote: “What has history to do with me? Mine is the first and only world.” I have asked myself what a Wittgensteinian approach to philosophy might look like, if one were to give up that position. The attempt to answer that question got me to politics. It got me also to Foucault. I may be wrong in seeing a significant affinity between Wittgenstein and Foucault, but that possibility intrigues me and so I have been writing lately a series of papers on Foucault.

At a more ambitious level I have also been at work on a book on politics. I don't know exactly when it will be done. Every time I consider it finished, the material presents me with new questions. The paper I will be discussing with you is meant to be the first chapter of that book (or, perhaps, the second one). I can talk about what the other chapters are intended to look like. Despondent about the possibility that this book may never come to an end I have recently turned to work on a book on Wittgenstein to which I committed myself quite a few years ago.

The paper

The paper is, as I see it, a bit of an amalgam of history and philosophy. I am trying to tell a tale about how people came to think about politics in the course of the nineteenth century and why their concerns over politics initiated a twentieth century series of efforts to say something new about the concept of the political. The philosophical point I am trying to make in this way is that this developments signals a change in what politics is today.

I try to characterize this change in terms of the idea that politics is a domain of plurality but that what is considered plural itself changes over time. My idea is that the recent concern with the concept of the political will not issue in a definition on which we can all agree but rather in a multiplicity of contested concepts.

In developing these notions, I have drawn in particular on the work of Carl Schmitt, Hannah Arendt, and Michel Foucault and their writings are of immediate relevance to my text. What they say can help one to understand why the concept of the political has become an issue and what the implications of that historical fact might be. I am also interested in what Schmitt, Arendt, and Foucault write specifically about the concept of the political – though in a wholly critical spirit. My question is precisely why we cannot be satisfied with their attempted characterization of that concept. Behind all this lies a suspicion (already voiced in *Heidegger's Crisis*) that there is something inherently problematic in the philosopher's encounter with politics.

Some relevant sources for my paper are:

Hegel, "The State" in *The Philosophy of Right*

Joachim Ritter, *Hegel and the French Revolution*

Marx, *The Communist Manifesto*

Nietzsche, "A Glance at the State" in *Human All Too Human*

Nietzsche, "Discipline and Breeding" in *The Will To Power*

Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*

Hannah Arendt, "Philosophy and Politics" in *Social Research*, vol. 57, 1990

Hannah Arendt, "Introduction into Politics," in *The Promise of Politics*

Michel Foucault, Lecture 4, *Security, Territory, Population*

Michel Foucault, Lecture 12, *The Birth of Biopolitics*

Hans Sluga, "[Conflict is the Father of all Things](#)": Heidegger's Polemical Concept of Politics in Polt and Fried ed., *A Companion to Heidegger's Introduction to Metaphysics*

Hans Sluga, "[The Pluralism of the Political: From Carl Schmitt to Hannah Arendt](#)" in *Telos*, no. 142, Spring 2008