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*Two Concepts of Politics, Two Histories of a Concept?*

**Two Concepts of Politics, Two Histories of a Concept?<sup>1</sup>**

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*Two Concepts of Politics, Two Histories of a Concept?***1. The strange concept of politics**

The history of the concept of politics still fascinates me after twenty years of study (cf. esp. Palonen 1985, 1990, 1998). Where does its strangeness, as compared with other concepts, such as state, society or party, exactly lie? As starting points for the present paper I would like to stress on the following four particular aspects of its history into account in order to understand the specificity of the concept of politics.

1) There is a remarkable continuity in the vocabulary. The ancient Greek *polis* has offered a vocabulary, which, despite the breakdown of the ancient city-republics, has been adopted – at least since the twelfth century (cf. e.g. Viroli 1992) – into all European languages. Neither the creation of the new concept of the state (cf. e.g. Skinner 1989) nor that of "native" neologisms in the new written vernacular languages have managed to replace the *polit-vocabulary*, as I shall call it. On the contrary, in languages such as Finnish, attempts to "translate" the term politics were abandoned in the early twentieth century in favour of using the word *politiikka*.

2) The continuity in naming has contributed to the hiding, or at least devaluation, of the replacement of the politics-as-discipline concept by the politics-as-phenomenon concept. I once suggested that this should be referred to as a "horizon shift" (*Horizontwechsel*) (Palonen 1985, 11-12-, 27-30), and I still find this term appropriate when speaking of such a categorical change. The closest parallel to this shift is what Reinhart Koselleck (1967, 1975) describes as a shift in the meaning of *die Geschichte* in German between 1760 and 1780 from a discipline concept to something that also is the primary "object" of the discipline, to "that what happens". This shift was accompanied by a grammatical shift: *die Geschichte* was turned from a plural into a singular noun. It is precisely the collective singular *die Geschichte* that makes the horizon shift visible. For politics, no equally clear signs are available, although the transition of *politics* from a plural to a singular term in English can be interpreted similarly. In both history and politics I find the horizon shift to be irrevocable: talking about politics as action before the shift requires a "translation", if one wants to do justice to the agents' own conceptual horizon.

3) A second qualitative change occurs within the horizon of the politics-as-phenomenon concept. It resides in the shift from a politics-as-sphere concept to a politics-as-activity concept. In an important article Koselleck has specified his views to concern, strictly speaking, a transition from one concept to another, although the vocabulary may remain the same (cf. Koselleck 1983, esp. 14-15). It is the formation of a new concept, and not its modification through reception, that is of primary interest to the historian (op. cit., 45). For my present purposes the most interesting aspect concerning politics deals with the "temporalization" (*Verzeitlichung*) of concepts, especially in the sense of reinterpreting

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spatial metaphors temporally, as is the case for example, in the concept of *Fortschritt* (cf. Koselleck 1972, 1980). It is my thesis that the transition from the spatial to the temporal dimension of meaning in the use of the concept of politics is the key to the shift from the "sphere concept" to the "activity concept" of politics.

4. According to my thesis, these two qualitative shifts in the conceptualization of politics are common to European languages and political cultures. The horizon shift from the discipline of politics to the phenomenon of politics has taken place both in French and in German since around 1800, and in English there are some signs of its existence in the eighteenth century. A similar shift also takes place in Swedish and Finnish. Around 1900 it had become anachronistic to speak of politics in the discipline sense: those who tried to do so encountered inconsistencies when speaking of "practical politics". Signs of a transition from the spherical concept to the activity concept can already be discerned in the first half of the nineteenth century in the work of some authors (Clausewitz, Tocqueville), but it is only around the turn of the century that this abstraction gains a more explicit role in the *polit-literature*. This move is by no means necessary, and the spherical concept seems to have remained the more common one even today, if it makes sense of speaking of concepts in terms of the frequency of their use.

In the present paper I want to discuss the third of these aspects in greater detail. My current major project consists of writing a comparative history of the formation of the activity concept of politics in five European languages (English, Finnish, French, German and Swedish) and in the European political cultures in which they were used (for an initial statement cf. Palonen 1999b). My thesis is that we can indeed speak of two different concepts of politics, which compete with each other in terms of legitimacy and prominence, although for the most part they are intertwined with each other in innumerable ways. The interesting question is, whether these two concepts concern two parallel dimensions of a common horizon (politics-as-phenomenon) or, rather, two qualitatively different degrees of abstraction in the attempt to understand the phenomenon of politics. Subscribing to the temporalization thesis, I support the second interpretation. Accordingly, I think that to speak of politics in spatial terms is merely a preliminary, often insufficient and misleading, way to understand many of the existing uses, in which different attempts to conceptualize politics in temporal terms have been presented.

What does this difference mean for the historiography of the concept of politics? The parallelism thesis would lead us to two separate histories of the concept of politics-as-phenomenon, one being concerned with the diversification of the concept in spatial terms, and the other with the qualification of the activity in temporal terms. I have no problem with accepting the legitimacy of an internal history of the spatial concept of politics –

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which also remains yet to be written – , but consider it as a preliminary step, as compared with the qualitative and temporal conceptualization of the activity of politics.

In this paper I will present a critique of the spatial concept of politics from the perspective of conceptual history. In a sense, I am writing a "party historiography" – in order to delimit the problematics of my major project. I shall illustrate the dead ends of talking about politics in spatial terms in three steps. Firstly, I will present examples of the differentiation of the spatial concept of politics by analyzing various spatial figures. Secondly, I will illustrate, with the help of some historically significant cases from legal language, the insufficiency of thinking about "the political" in terms of quasi-spatial demarcations. In the third step, I discuss the role of the main paradigm of the quasi-spatial demarcation of politics, the distinction between the "public and private sphere", as a criterion for distinguishing the specificity of politics. In the next chapter, I will call attention to the conditions of and moves toward making the conceptualization of politics intelligible in terms of politics-as-activity. Finally, I want to summarize my interpretation of the two conceptual breaks, the horizon shift and the overcoming of the spatial metaphors by the temporal in terms of the "rhetorical redescription" of conceptual change, by applying Quentin Skinner's recent work (1996, 1999) for my own purposes.

## 2. Figures of "politics-as-sphere"

The differentiation between the horizon shift and the distinction between the spherical and the activity conceptions of politics should be understood in a strictly analytical sense. Historically, of course, the rejection of the discipline concept was not achieved by a undifferentiated "politics-as-phenomenon" concept, but it was, rather, a kind of thinking in spheres that motivated the horizon shift. More specifically, if we can suggest any definite reasons for such a change as the horizon shift, they may somehow be related to the reality-references of the concept.

The problem with the early modern discipline concept was that its reference was no longer the *polis* or the medieval city-republic (cf. Viroli 1992), but the politics-discipline had become an umbrella referring to a complex with diffuse borders, composed of the phenomena of government, administration, finance, economics, foreign affairs, law, morality, society etc. This umbrella discipline did not thematize what was specifically "political" in the object-field. The horizon shift remained, even more than the case of *die Geschichte*, almost unnoticed by the contemporary agents, but we may imagine that it was the idea of understanding even "politics" or, perhaps in particular, the "political", in terms of a separate "sphere", that justified the new usage. I think the introduction of the "political sphere" can be understood as a move that was related to the somewhat earlier attempts to differentiate the religious, legal, moral or economic spheres, while, for

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example, the administration was not differentiated from politics until a later time (cf. e.g. Brückner 1977).

This historical sequence clearly plays a key role in the nineteenth century attempts to "define" the political "sphere": it is almost without exception undertaken by distinguishing it as something unknown from something better known. Politics in these definitions is presented as a kind of residual concept, which used to be defined as lacking something characteristic of the "already defined" spheres. Here, we can already see one of the great dead ends encountered by the spherical concept of politics. When attempting to define politics through interrelated concepts, such as "the state" or "the public sphere", the problem of demarcations to other "spheres" was only postponed, but not "solved".

What interests me in the historiography of the concept of politics-as-sphere is not its specific historical content, the dating of the changes and the differences between political cultures and other contextual "variables" in this respect. It is, rather, the rhetorical character of the space-constructions of politics. In this chapter I will merely "write out" some implicit assumptions in the spatial figuration, while not going into historical detail.

It is a well-known fact (cf. e.g. Meier 1980, Finley 1981) that the *polis* was itself based on a metonymic abstraction from the *Acropolis*. The extension of the meaning of the *polis* to other city-republics in the Hellenic and Roman worlds, despite all the differences between the Greek *polis* and the Roman *civitas* (cf. Arendt 1993), was based on an analogy in the spatial structure. The quasi-geographical, spatially limited basis of the *polis* made it possible to use the vocabulary of the politics-discipline in the medieval city-republics and to some extent even in the imperial and regional monarchies, from which the "states" were later formed. As the struggles between the early-modern states were, to a great extent, struggles on the borders, the spatial connotation was even stronger than in the *polis*, when "political" was understood to have to do with "states" or "governments".

The horizon shift is a metonymic operation: the object of a discipline was contaminated by its title, whereby a new conceptual space was opened. The separation of "politics" from other "phenomena" was accomplished by interpreting its status as a phenomenon, as well as by giving it a "space" of its own. Understanding the state names as the names of political agents, or the location of politics in definite place-names, such as *Westminster* or *Quai d'Orsay*, are further examples of a metonymic spatialization. The spatialization is also achieved also by the "climatic" oppositions, such as those between continental and maritime powers, or between city- and country-based politics.

The old doctrines, from Montesquieu's climatic theory to the early twentieth century geopolitics, took the spatial connotations of politics quite literally and used them as

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anchors, by which politics could be interpreted in quasi-naturalistic terms. To take just one quotation as an example of the insistence of the geographic limits of politics, let us mention the following comment by Stalin to Paasikivi in the Russo-Finnish negotiations in autumn 1939: "We cannot do anything for geography, nor can you" (quoted from Paasikivi's *Memoirs*, 1958, vol. I, 46; vol. II, 185, transl. KP).

Despite all the talk of a "return of geopolitics", I think we have good reason to deny the validity of this thesis. The facts concerning of the borders between states have not been widely altered, but their political significance is constantly changing according to political constellations and to the type of the political agent-constructions, such as states and alliances. In this respect, I think an important idea is suggested by Carl Schmitt in *Der Nomos der Erde* (1950): the land and sea wars of the *jus publicum europaeum* have been replaced by the air wars, for which no *Nomos der Erde* is available. This also means, according to Schmitt's later interpretation, the end of the *Epoche der Staatlichkeit* (Schmitt 1963, 10). Whether or not this is actually the case is irrelevant; I want to underline that the alteration of the political agent-construction simultaneously devaluates the political role of the "natural" borders.

The metonymic anchoring of politics to space is complemented by the use of spatial metaphors. Politics has been seen, for example, as an "area", a "domain", a "realm", a "field", a "sector", a "sphere", an "arena", a "stage", a "scene", etc. As compared with the metonymic use of spatial figures, the metaphoric one is more conscious of the constructed and rhetorical character of the "place in which politics takes place". I think it is worth questioning in greater detail the differences between these metaphors, their origins and their modes of use.

Perhaps the most neutral way of speaking about politics in spatial terms is to characterize politics as an *area*. In this figure there are almost no implications regarding its content, only the dimension of inclusion and exclusion. A conscious acknowledgement of the numerous different things to be found within an "area", as well as the disregarding of their significance is characteristic to the use of this figure. In this neutralized sense, 'area' is used, for example, in the name of the ETA, the common free trade "area" of the EU and the EFTA countries.

When speaking of the *domain* of politics, one is referring to the Latin word *domus*. It has clear implications for the internal structures of the space, referring to the transfer of "domestic" hierarchies to politics and thus presupposing politics to be something characterized by a "patrimonial" rule of a *dominus* (cf. Weber 1922, 583-586). In the *domain* the egalitarian internal structure of the *polis* is subordinated to the hierarchic structure of the *oikos*.

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somewhat similar are the connotations of the *realm*. Realm indicates the "imperial" character of the unit in question. Politics as a *realm*, in German as a *Reich*, implies the idea of a hierarchic plurality and, correspondingly, an opposition to republican and egalitarian concepts.

The English concept of a *field* has both older agrarian and newer "electronic" connotations, both of which have been used in the political sense. The agrarian metaphor refers to the division of fields amongst farmers and implies that "politics" is merely one of many fields, which must be distinguished from others with as clearly defined borders as possible, and which must be determined in its own specific content. The kinds of obstacles, advantages, pitfalls etc. that the field of politics contains, must be uncovered empirically, similar to the farmer's knowledge of his own field. The idea of a most detailed "mapping" of the field of the polity in each of the countries, analogous to the farmer's "cultivation of his field", was a key metaphor in political science during the phase of its world-wide establishment after World War II.

For politics, however, the connotation of a *mine field* or a *magnetic field* is of at least equal importance. It illustrates a space with opposing *forces*, which are partly natural (as those in the farmer's field), partly human and intentional, indicating the plural and conflictual character of the political field, as opposed to that of the farmer, who encounters a mainly "natural" resistance. The metaphor of the field also presupposes an interconnectedness of the agents, their inclusion into a field or exclusion from it. Correspondingly, the use of this metaphor also includes the dangers of the destruction of the entire field of the polity.

The origins of the metaphor of the *sector* are, of course, geometric, referring to a kind of constructed, un-natural division of space. The term sector seems to imply a principle of differentiation between academic disciplines, in terms of a principle of systematic differentiation and concentration of activity to a distinct horizontal space. The sectoral division of the world into different topics and into corresponding disciplines has been a key intellectual principle of the nineteenth century culture. Perhaps the "classical political economy's" principle of the "division of labour" as a means of efficiency, according to Adam Smith's famous metaphor of pin manufacturing, has been used as a paradigm for a systematic sectoralization in the nineteenth century. Although the sectoral metaphor is a constructionist one, the paradigm is often connected to a quasi-naturalism based on its assumption of an objective division between the essences of things. In this sense, we can particularly understand the neo-Cameralist differentiation of the "policy fields" into ever more detailed sub-policies, in which the direction of the policy was supposed to be "found" by analyzing the character of the object. This quasi-objectivistic mode of sectoral

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differentiation can be found in the works on economic and social policy in the Wilhelmine Germany (for a critique cf. esp. Weber 1904 and 1917).

Referring to politics as a sphere (in a narrow sense) either closely corresponds to its characterization a sector or alludes to the history of the concept in a vertical sense. In the medieval Christian discourse, combined with the "Ptolemaian" astronomy, the world was divided into the sub- and supra-lunar spheres. The early modern politics-discipline was sometimes identified with the "lower" sphere and, correspondingly, the discipline of politics with a "worldly wisdom" (*Weltweisheit*, cf. e.g. Meyring 1965), an expression which can still be found in nineteenth dictionaries. This religious paradigm also has at least indirect implications in the later understanding of politics as a "sphere" that alludes not only to problems of demarcation, but also to tacit hierarchic dimensions – high vs. low, deep or superficial – which can be described roughly analogous to the old hierarchy of estates.

Understanding politics in terms of an *arena* refers to a consciously human-made space, to an architectural product. Its origins are in the Roman amphitheatres used for the struggles of the gladiators, but the metaphor was later demilitarized to include any sporting or artistic place of the performance of an activity of more or less competitive character. The architectural decisions to construct arenas are not merely matters of aesthetics or stylistics, but regulate the conditions and character of the competitive activity. Some speculations have even been made regarding the oppositions between conflictual and consensual seating orders in the plenary sessions of Parliaments (cf. Östergård 1989, Döring 1996). As opposed to the quasi-natural spaces of the polity, the *arena* metaphor already indicates the constitutive role of a plurality of agents and refers, at least implicitly, to the struggle or contest as a mode of the implied activity.

The space in question is even more clearly constructed when politics is referred to as a *stage* or a *scene*.) The ancient theatrical metaphors play an increasing role in the contemporary understanding of politics in spatial terms (for their use in the post WW II French discussion cf. Palonen 1990, 99-102). The "space" in these cases, even more than with the *arena*, is something that alludes to *action* as a qualitative criterion of politics. The spatial arrangements are, thus, intelligible only as restrictions, regulations, conditions and instruments of action. Thus, the constructed character of space turns it to a moment in the *performative* activity of politicking. In this sense, even more clearly than in the case of the *arena*, the theatric metaphors of *stage* and *scene* are only seemingly spatial and highly dependent on the temporal criteria of politics as activity.

Similarly, the metaphors of the *court*, *cabinet*, *parliament* and *forum* are not merely names for competing paradigms of political space. They refer to differences in the *number* of the



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political agents and to the corresponding criteria of closure in terms of the chances of acting politically. In addition, they are used as metonymies for certain *styles* of politicking (cf. Hariman 1995). The *court* alludes to the intrigues between a "given" leader and his/her followers, the *cabinet* to the negotiations within an "inner circle", the *parliament* to a persuasion of the opponents by means of speaking (*parler*), and the *forum* to an open and public place of struggle and controversy.

This simple illustrative analysis of the figures of understanding politics in spatial terms thus leads to the questioning of the possibility of the spatialization of politics. Analogously to Koselleck's analysis of the temporalization of the meaning of originally spatial concepts, we can speak of the use of spatial figures as indirect and implicit indicators of the quality of politics as activity. If we take Pocock's formula of politics as "dealing with the contingent event" (1975, 156) as a key idea of politics, the various modes of using quasi-naturalistic metaphors or metonymic naturalizations in politics are to be seen as attempt to reduce the contingent element in politics, which, however, constitutes its *raison d'être*. The more constructed and consciously metaphorical the use of spatial figures of politics become, the more *Spielraum* for contingency is opened. At the same time, however, the spaces are also rendered dependent on the qualifications of politics as an activity.

### 3. The "political" as a demarcation criterion – aspects of legal disputes

One of the reasons for the introduction of the differentiation between politics and other concepts was the realization that "political" motives or principles could make a difference in certain legal questions. A main topic in the thematization of the political in terms of a quasi-spatial differentiation has been to mark the peculiarity of "political" crimes, prisoners, refugees, asylum-seekers etc. In the development of international law, the distinction between "political" and "legal" questions was a highly debated topic in the early twentieth century. Especially in Germany, the "political" character of associations was similarly a highly disputed matter with important consequences for both individuals and for the character of these associations. I shall now discuss – largely on the basis of my previous analysis (Palonen 1985, 1990) – this problematic from the viewpoint of demonstrating how a differentiation in terms of a spatial metaphors leads to a dead end in the use of the political as a criterion in legal disputes.

An important problem in sectoral differentiation is the dualism between a comprehensive and exhaustive system ideal of classification, as opposed to the additive and stepwise practice of differentiation. Ideally, a system should be exhaustive, which, viewed from the opposite angle, implies the ahistoricity of the classification used: after the system is completed, no real changes within it are legitimate, only its replacement by another

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system. This system ideal of human sciences was strongly criticized by Max Weber in his *Objektivität* article as something neither realizable nor desirable (cf. Weber 1904, esp. 181-184). In accordance with Weber, I remain unconvinced of all attempts to "put politics in its place" in systemic approaches of classification, and I consider the example of politics to be a test case against such approaches

For an historical approach operating with primary sources, the additive and stepwise study of the problems of demarcation between the fields or differentiation between spheres seems to be a more promising alternative. It always produces specific historical "results", which can be further discussed and analyzed. However, the additive character of the distinctions must revert to some of the previous examples of "fields" as given, as the "solid" background from which the still unclassified phenomena are now to be distinguished. A certain paradigmatic foundationalism in the sense of distinguishing between "basic" and "derivative" phenomena seems to be presupposed also in this type of classification.

Discussing the relations between the legal and the political in juridical discourse is so asymmetric that the legal forms the paradigm and the political – within this discourse – supplies the "anomalies". In terms of the understanding of the specificity of the political this constellation of juridical discourse does not offer anything of great interest, for the entire aim of the dispute has been to either subsume the anomaly under the paradigm or to normalize the exceptional, without need to question the normal. With regard to the history of the concept of politics it is the insurmountable difficulties of doing so that are the focal point in this juridical discourse.

The problems of political crimes and political refugees as something worthy of receiving special attention was considered as problematic only in the aftermath of the French Revolution. The principle of the non-extradition of political refugees was first adopted in to a country's legislation in the newly founded state of Belgium in the 1830s (cf. van den Wijngaert 1980). In general, at least in West European countries, "political prisoners" enjoyed certain privileges that were not afforded to the "merely criminal" prisoners.

Among the first treatises on the subject are two books written by French historian and politician François Guizot in 1821 and 1822, the first dealing with "political justice" and the other with the death penalty *en matière politique*. In his understanding of *la politique* the horizon shift has already taken place: the word clearly refers to an activity, not to an "application of the principles of a discipline into practice". Guizot's main problem is, however, how to deal with *la envahissement de la justice par la politique* (1821, 32). He distinguishes between *l'ordre moral* and *l'ordre politique* (op. cit., 17). This is interpreted as a conflict between the normative criteria and the requirements of the *raison d'Etat* in the

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relations between states. Concerning the death penalty, Guizot distinguishes between different aspects in the use of the term "political" in legal discourse: *crime politique, délit politique, procès politique, péril politique* (1822). He does not search for administrative errors, but asks for "la situation et la conduite dans les causes de rébellion et de complot" (1821, 54), and differentiates, thus, between political and administrative measures. Unlike the jurists of the next decades, Guizot is also interested in the qualification of politics as an activity and as a criterion of governance: "Il ne s'agit plus de savoir, qui gouvernera, mais comment on gouvernera." (1822, 168)

Guizot's discussion indicates the problems in the use of the "political" as a criterion of demarcation. Was, for example, the "political" character of the motives of a certain "criminal" act more important than that of its consequences? That question was actualized, for example, by certain terrorist acts committed toward the end of the nineteenth century, and their "political" character was denied by many specialists of international law (cf. Grouchon 1892). Paradoxically enough, in their self-identification the antiparliamentary left also denied the "political" character of their own activity (cf. e.g. Sorel 1898) – although they hardly would have denied the enjoyment of the privileges of "political prisoners". Further problems arose, for example, regarding the rights of acknowledged "political refugees" concerning the legality of their political activity while in exile.

The Geneva Refugee Convention of 1950 still refers to *political asylum*, and the German *Grundgesetz* of 1949 gives it the status of a constitutional right. In practice, the principle has been watered down, partly due to an extensive use, and although the principle is still upheld as valid, additional obstacles have been posed against its use.

As a politico-juridical dispute which includes the different possibilities of interpreting the role of the "political" in the case of asylum-seeker, I shall mention a hijacking incident (treated in detail by Riila 1993). In 1990, a Soviet citizen, Michail Varfolomejev, hijacked a plane landed at Helsinki Airport and requested for "political asylum". This obliged the Finnish government to face with having to make an ambiguous decision. As a conscientious objector, Varfolomejev had committed a courageous political act in the Soviet Union and was for this reason subjected to severe "political persecution" and treated as a lunatic, which also meant the loss of elementary human and civil rights. On these ground his defenders in Finland also supported his plea for political asylum. This was opposed by the argument that hijacking itself is a "non-political crime", and it was this position that the Finnish government finally accepted. Varfolomejev was extradited, although certain possibilities of having his case followed by the Finnish authorities.

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The Varfolomejev case clearly illustrates the basic asymmetry of the "legal vs. political"-distinction in the conventional juridical discourse. A specific convention of international law (the declaration of hijacking as "non-political crime") was held to be more important than any substantive criterion of the political, related not only to the intentions of the agents, but also to his previous political acts and his status of being subjected to "political persecution". The convention serves the juridical purpose of distinguishing between "political and non-political crimes", in some manner or another, in order to make a legal decision (cf. Schmitt 1912). For this purpose, the changes in the understanding of the "political", especially the acknowledgement of its role as a "dimension of person", as Sartre once put it (1964), did not play a role in the final decision. In addition, the decision was supported by political expedience, i.e. by the Finnish authorities' fear of being faced with a wave of Soviet asylum seekers. This combination of a narrow legalist argument with an obvious motive based in the *raison d'Etat* also illustrates that – unlike the suggestion by Guizot and later writers – the distinction between legal and political does not correspond to the one between normative law-abiding and teleological expedience. "Purely legal" decisions may also contain a significant political aspect – without becoming less legal as a result.

The use of spatial figures as a criterion of demarcation between the political and other phenomena requires not only strict borderlines between the concepts, but also their exclusivity. This is clearly upheld in the asymmetric use of the "political" in traditional legal discourse. A curious example of this ideological faith in the force of law as something above politics can be found in the attempts to define "non-political questions" in the Hague peace conferences of 1899 and 1907, as well as in the early League of Nations. As Hans Morgenthau reports, the aim was to define a list of "non-political questions", which therefore could have subjected to international jurisdiction, but it was impossible to reach a consensus about the list, and a vote regarding which questions were "non-political" even took place (cf. Morgenthau 1933, 27-32). Considered as a rhetorical situation, it is quite obvious that it is hardly more possible to obtain a consensus about the non-political than about the political, even within juristic discourse. For any attempts to claim that certain questions are non-political can be turned into a challenge to find counter-evidence in order to demonstrate that they are in fact political in one respect or another. In the early work of Hans Morgenthau (1929, 1933) we can also find a convincing defence of the argument in favour of the converse side of the debate, namely, that the "political" character of a dispute does not prevent its submission to international jurisdiction.

The discussion of political prisoners, refugees and asylum-seekers seems to refer to an obvious asymmetry in the attitudes toward the use of the "political" as a criterion. Those who potentially enjoy its advantages seem to advocate a "broader" conception of the

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'political' than the "authorities", who make their decisions in the name of states. The defendants and their advocates have a vested interest in the extension of the interpretation of the range of the "political", while the prosecutors do their best to reduce its range. The history of the spatial concept of the political within juridical language could, to a considerable extent, be written as a struggle of interests between the parties, in which the changes in the judges' decisions indicate a shift in balance. The innovations and reorientations in the extra-judicial conceptual debate are either rejected or accepted slowly and reluctantly, when not threatening other purposes.

Nevertheless, this picture is also overly simplistic. For there exist other occasions in juridical discourse, in which the "political" is used as a label of denunciation or exclusion. Clear cases of this are the Prussian law of associations from 1850 and the *Reichsvereinsgesetz* of 1908. The *Reichsvereinsgesetz* in particular used *politisch* as a criterion of association in order to exclude both women and young people – with no right to vote – from membership (for the juridical debate cf. Geffcken 1908, Pohl 1913, for women's associations Evans 1976, for the youth's associations Korn 1922, cf. Palonen 1985, 45–49). Similarly, in France the legal regulations to distinguish political associations from others was also a highly contested topic after 1848 with similar consequences for women's and young people's participation (cf. Huard 1996). It is easy to find analogous situations, in which the appeal to be *political* is used as a label of denunciation that worsens a defendant's position before courts and authorities – and this is not restricted to totalitarian and authoritative countries.

The entire discussion of the "wide or narrow meaning" of politics or the political is, beyond the clearly asymmetric juridical discourse, also paradigmatic for the understanding of politics in terms of spatial metaphors. The controversy over the concept is reduced to just one dimension, namely the question of whether whether the concept should be understood in a wider or narrower sense. Perspectives which thematize other aspects of the concept are either excluded as improper or reinterpreted in terms of their "contribution" to the debate between the extensive and reductive use of the concept. A "common core" of all the conceptions of politics setting the terms of the discourse is presupposed in this kind of controversy.

#### 4. The public vs. the private sphere

The obvious candidate for the "common core" of all conceptions of politics is, of course, the identification of politics with "the public sphere". Especially in the Anglophone debate, the venerable conceptual pair of private vs. public still enjoys such a high degree of prestige that all conceptions of politics more or less have to legitimate themselves in relation to it. It also has strong arguments on its side, ranging from the the *polis vs. oikos*

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distinction and the Roman and Common law traditions via the eighteenth century political economy, nineteenth century sociology and *Staatslehre* to the contemporary criticism of state socialism and the apology of the market. However, as an historian of concepts, I want to underline that each of these variants includes a different interpretation of the conceptual pair, and their differences are not simply reducible to the width of the public sphere.

I have, of course, no need to deny the practical significance of this distinction, for example, in terms of legal studies, or even that in some cases it nicely distinguishes the political from the non-political. My points are on a different level. I want to insist, firstly, that the distinction should not be interpreted as an objective or quasi-natural measure for demarcating the political. Secondly, that the distinction is almost empty concerning the qualification of politics, and, thirdly, that it makes no sense to reduce the available variety of suggested qualifications of politics to this one single dimension.

The historical and linguistic variety in the private-public distinction, when used as a demarcation criterion of the "political", is so massive that any attempt to deproblematize it presupposes, once again, a common "core" that is sheltered from historical variation and political controversies. To assume such a "core" presumes, more or less explicitly, that such a division is based "on the very nature of the things". Identifying the criterion of the political with the distinction of public from private relies, thus, in many cases on an essentialist view of concepts as "reflections of reality". Against this view we can argue, from a nominalistic perspective, that concepts and classifications are always human inventions, and as such they could always be otherwise. Concepts cannot be "taken out of the nature" or judged simply by "their correspondence with reality". The very figures of "nature" and "reality" are constructions.

Although the public-private dichotomy is bound in various ways to legal and administrative practices as well as to the traditional political institutions, there is, thus, no reason to consider it as a quasi-objective criterion for politics. It is easy to find counterexamples against it. Not everything that is *public* is political *per se*, and additional distinctions have been necessary in order to distinguish between politics and administration, *Politik* and *laufendes Staatsleben* (Schäffle 1897) etc. When, for example, the Finnish political scientist Jan-Magnus Jansson argues in his textbook (1969, 56) that the activity of a doctor caring for a patient in a state hospital is political, while that of a doctor in a private hospital is not, he hardly convinces the present-day Finnish readers, as I noticed in the political science entrance examination at the University of Jyväskylä in 1994. Some readers even indicated that the relationship between a doctor and a patient is always a power relationship, and is thus political, according to Jansson's substantial criterion. In this sense, a good case could be made to support the argument that not

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everything public is necessarily political and not everything private is necessarily excluded from politics.

The aforementioned example already indicates the second aspect in the use of the public-private distinction as a criterion for the political. What, exactly, are the reasons for identifying the political with the public. Let us leave out the dictionary usage, in which – in English, although hardly in the other languages – "political" is often used as an adjective referring to "the public" as well as to "politics". In the work of such famous authors as Hannah Arendt (1958/61) and Michael Oakeshott (1975), it rather seems to me that the point of this identification is not to qualify politics by the criterion of the "public sphere". On the contrary, both of them qualify it through certain criteria of activity and then restrict its range of reference to the public sphere. Thus, they do not deny that activity could also be conducted in the "private" sphere, but they consider such a use of the concept as somehow "derivative" or "improper".

Insofar as the criteria of plurality and contingency are presented by Arendt and Oakeshott as appearing most clearly in the public sphere, this delimitation appears less as a criterion of the political than as a paradigmatic space, in which the qualifications of the political have the best chances to become realized. My point is that in this manner they introduce a requalification of the public in order to meet the substantive criteria of the author's conception of politics as activity. This requalification can be interpreted as an indirect means of determining politics by the qualifying type of activity. In order to make the identification of the political with the public less empty, the authors are obliged to "politicize" the concept of the public according to substantive criteria referring to an activity and not to a demarcation between spheres.

Furthermore, the use of the public-private distinction as a criterion for demarcating the political from the non-political presupposes that the question can be answered as a "yes-no" question: things either are political or they are not. Its proponents admit that there are borderline cases in which it is difficult to give a definite answer, and even that the frontiers between these spheres are particularly diffuse or difficult to determine. Nevertheless, the clear-cut distinction of political from non-political remains the ideal.

The question not posed by these writers is: in what respect is a phenomenon "political"? Those advocating demarcation can qualify the core and periphery of the concept by distinguishing the "proper" or "ordinary" meaning and the "derived" or "wider" meaning of politics, allowing the latter to also extend beyond the public sphere. They use a kind of elementary dictionary paradigm of meaning in order to neutralize new and unconventional uses of a concept as something improper or at least secondary. This is the



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mechanism which attempts to keep the meaning non-linear and subsume the other dimensions to this one.

This standpoint does not necessarily presuppose an essentialist view on the concepts, but rather a conventionalist one: "The ordinary usage" becomes the main authority, and it is assumed that this is the one found in documents such as elementary dictionaries, encyclopaedias and textbooks. Its no wonder that the "definitions" of politics in these kinds of texts used to appear as boring and repetitive. There are, however, no grounds to assume that the "definitions" in these kinds of sources do correspond to the everyday usage of the polit-vocabulary among politicians, journalists etc., a topic which has seldom, if ever, been analyzed in detail. Excursions into the everyday usage in past times illustrate that at least since the early twentieth century, the insight that politics is highly ambiguous concept, *chamäleonartig*, as the Austrian jurist Adolf Merkl put it (in VVDStL 1931), began to increase. At least in the German case, after World War I, no unitary tradition or convention regulated the usage of the polit-vocabulary (cf. Palonen 1985, 160-162).

Thus, in the twentieth century, politics has become a "contested" concept, and the controversies surrounding it are by no means reducible to struggles on the borderline between the public and the private sphere. The lack of a unitary tradition and a shared convention also enable the proposition of candidates for a "new concept of politics" in the shadow of retaining contact with some aspects of the older usage (cf. Skinner 1974). Weber's *Politik als Beruf* (1919) remains cautious, and Weber himself probably underestimated the novelty of his own conception of politics. It was Carl Schmitt and his *Der Begriff des Politischen* (the first article version was published in 1927) who was probably the first to suggest a conscious break with the tradition, when declaring in the first sentence: "Der Begriff des Staates setzt den des Politischen voraus" (Schmitt 1927/1932, 20).

With his famous *Freund-Feind* distinction, Schmitt, however, remained attached to the traditional view in another respect. He attempted to replace the plural and ambiguous linguistic practices with a new and unitary paradigm, which he claimed should in the future to be followed as the "criterion" of "the political". However, the response to Schmitt illustrates that he had no chance of succeeding. His criterion was not only rejected from various perspectives, but it was also subjected to radically interpretations – from the extreme apology of order to a dangerous dissolution of order. The debate on Schmitt's proposal during the final years of the Weimar republic also indicates the radical perspectivity of the political. The plurality of the perspectives of conceptualization, as well as of those to which the non-reflective usage of the polit-vocabulary alluded, was – in both academic and literary debates – so obvious that any proposal of unification had no chance of becoming accepted (cf. Palonen 1985, 141-142). In a certain sense, even during



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the Nazi regime, different views on state, law and politics struggled with one another (cf. Meinck 1978).

My first excursion to the British debate, based on some periodicals between 1867 and 1914, similarly illustrates an increasing plurality in the understanding of politics (Palonen 1999a). Although the public-private distinction formed a kind of border that was not easily overcome, and although the spatial metaphors of sphere, etc. played a prominent role in the debate in this context, they did not prevent the qualification of politics in terms of activity. What is remarkable is that the metaphors of play and game – rather than playfield or "pitch" – enjoyed a significant amount of popularity in the British sources that cannot be found either in the French or German sources.

### 5. Conceptualizing politics in two steps

If the need to demarcate politics from other spheres or sectors was historically a reason to begin to call some aspects in the object of the former umbrella discipline "politics", this move originated highly unexpected consequences in speaking about politics. When it became possible to understand politics as a phenomenon in its own right, a new horizon of possibilities for the understanding of this phenomenon was opened. My aim is to analyze the history of these attempts and to note, date and analyze key *topoi* of the conceptualization of the politics-as-activity. My focus in this paper is the question of: How, in this meta-concept of activity, is politics to be made intelligible? (see a preliminary list of *topoi* in Palonen 1999b).

To sum up my critique, it seems to me that to regard politics as a sphere refers to a preliminary phase of conceptualizing. By doing so, one attempts to identify the *locus* of politics by demarcating it from other similar spatial figures, positioning politics as analogous to other and "better known" sectoral concepts, such as "economy" or "morals". Characteristic to the spatial metaphors of politics is the fact that no inherent interest in the qualification of the activity is required: the conceptualization beyond the demarcatory purposes remains secondary. All this well allowed an "extension" of the meaning of for example to "social questions". Indeed, this was claimed already in 1831 by the editor of the journal *Globe*, Michel Chevalier, who interpreted the revolts of the Lyon *canuts* in this sense: "Les événements de Lyon ont changé le sens du mot politique; ils l'ont élargi" (quoted from Riot-Sarcey 1998, 175).

In general terms, it is in the noun "politics" that the horizon shift is more visible, while in the adjective "political", the impression of continuity through this shift is more easily upheld (cf. Palonen 1990, 25-40). In practice, the relationship is more complex, for following the horizon shift we can also note a shift in the usage of the adjective, and it is

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in the adjective that the "qualitative" meaning initially becomes visible (cf. Palonen 1985, 49-51), which then also advances the possibility of rethinking the noun, even independently of the spheres.

It is a well-known fact (cf. e.g. Rohe 1978/1994) that the English adjective "political" refers to three different nouns: politics, policy and polity. The historical relations between these words, as well as of their respective use as signs of conceptualization, remains unexamined. The transition from the original plural of *politics* to the singular can be regarded as a mark of the possibility of speaking of "politics" as a concept of its own, although in my case study of the English periodicals both expressions were roughly as common, but no difference in meaning between their use could be discerned, for both forms referred to the phenomenon of politics.

For my present purposes it is perhaps worthy of speculation that the horizon shift in English first appeared within the word "policy". Unfortunately, questions such as "what constitutes a policy" or "what is required that a measure can be included into a policy" are hardly posed at all (cf. Rohe & Dörner 1991). As opposed to this, it is "polity" (as a late translation of the Greek *politeia*), which has been the stronghold of the spatial connotations of a metaphoric space. It is the polity which is most clearly analogous to the spherical concepts of economy, religion, morals or law, concentrating politics to the constitution and the activities around and within its "province". Still, the concept of the polity has also not been conceptualized either very explicitly in the nineteenth and twentieth century Anglophone literature, but it is, rather, "politics" that has been conceptualized either from the perspective of policy or polity, as a common "subject matter" of both. It is also remarkable that it is foreigners (de Jouvenel 1955, Aron 1965, Rohe 1978/1994) or immigrants (Heidenheimer 1986) who have problematized the relations between the three nouns.

For my purposes, the two neologisms, *politicking* and *politicization*, contain important new possibilities for conceptualizing the concept of politics (Palonen 1993) since the 1920s. It is through them that the chances of understanding politics as activity become concrete, although neither of them has been the subject of a detailed conceptual and historical analysis (for *politicking* cf. however Gallie 1973).

To conceptualize politics as activity requires two conditions, neither of which are given or accepted by all. The first is to make politics a concept in the sense of abstraction from all qualifications about the agents, the subject matter and the direction of the activity. In short, it presupposes that we are ready and able to speak of "politics in general", not as an universal phenomenon, but as politics abstracted from its concrete determinants of content, significance and evaluation. No essence of a specific thing, but rather a criterion

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for the use of a concept abstracted from its particular expressions is required. Analogously to Koselleck's reference to *die Geschichte*, we can also speak of the formation of politics as a "collective singular" referring to certain – contested – qualities of human activity.

Although this mode of discussing politics has been rare, questions such as "what is politics", "what do we understand by politics", or "what renders certain activity as political" began to arise in the second half of the nineteenth century, probably more explicitly in the German than in the French or English texts. This is partly due to the German style of academic conceptualization in general, and partly also to the insight that a concept of *Politik* in the general sense is needed in order to better understand the the *Spielraum* of the concrete *Politik* to be followed. For example, behind Schäffle's article *Über den wissenschaftlichen Begriff der Politik* are the wishes of the readers of the journal *Zeitschrift für die gesamte Staatswissenschaft* that someone should explicate what was meant by *Politik* (Schäffle 1897, 579). This can also be understood as an early sign that the traditional and conventional modes of speaking had become increasingly problematic. Although explicit thematizations of the concept play a less central role in English and French texts, a clear consciousness of the problematic character is also visible within them, although the answers were written in rather illustrative and metaphoric manners in comparison to the German debate.

An abstraction of this kind can be obtained by a kind of deparadigmatization. In the German context, a condition of the reorientation of the concept enabled the severing of historical ties to the state, both concerning the "subject" and "object", i.e. the agents and the topics of politics (cf. Palonen 1985 79-95). In addition, the content of political action or, more specifically, of the policies, was increasingly viewed as an open and controversial question, not as determined by a common aim (such as the Aristotelian good life or the Hobbesian security) or by the characteristics of the subject matter. Max Weber's denial of the possibility of an "economic *Weltanschauung* (1895) and advocacy of the *Wertfreiheit* in the sense of non-regimentation of politics in the name of science (1904, 1917, cf. Palonen 1998), can in this respect be seen as the most decisive instance of a break.

The second condition concerns understanding the activity as something that can be subjected to a conceptualization. Taking, once more, Pocock's formula of politics as "dealing with the contingent event" as a clue, it aptly illustrates that the problem in referring to activity is to conceptualize the contingent – without *a priori* reducing it. To do so was, however, a move against the Platonic or Cartesian ideal of concepts as stable and contingency-reducing instances. To understand politics as an activity presupposes that one does not try to base politics on some "foundations" outside, above or below itself, but rather attempts to understand it "from within", i.e. by explicating the experiences of

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"acting politically". In this sense it is not philosophers or imitators of the natural sciences who have written the most important texts in thematizing politics as activity. Such thematizations can rather be found in the self-explications of acting politicians, in the works of journalists or *literati* not afraid of describing politics in metaphoric terms, or by academic writers who followed the Sophistic or rhetorical style of thought rather than saw in philosophy or science the model for understanding politics.

The description of the activity of politics in terms of spatial metaphors appears doubly insufficient. On the one hand, it is superficial to be content with classifying politics as something parallel to other "spheres", etc., never coming to more detailed terms with the qualifications needed for the activity. The spatial figuration never gets to the point. On the other hand, it also misses the point by using figures which tend to regularize and normalize the activity by "localizing" and "mapping" politics, while renouncing the attempt to speak of the fluid, ambiguous, paradoxical, etc. character of politics as contingent activity.

How, then, do we speak of the contingency of action without by this very means reducing it? According to the thesis I defended in *Das 'Webersche Moment'*, this move was made possible by Max Weber – against the background of searching for counterweights to the historically determining tendency toward bureaucratization – by turning the contingency from a necessary evil (the *fortuna*) to a medium of intelligibility. The key of this Weberian move is his concept of *Chance* as a starting point for the understanding and explaining of human actions in general and of politics in particular. He takes the agent – a politician is the very paradigm for the agent (cf. esp. Weber 1906, 267) – and his/her situation as one of choosing between different possibilities of action, all of them judged as realizable (*objektive Möglichkeit*), as the point of departure of the intelligibility of action, while the results are products of conflicting chances and not controllable by anyone (cf. Weber 1919, 80–81). In this sense, the possible is for the agent something more real than the reality (*Wirklichkeit*), which does not consist of "hard facts" but is, rather, an analytically limiting concept which makes what exhausts all conceptualization intelligible.

More specifically, the conceptualization of politics as contingent activity consists of temporalizing the understanding of politics. While in the 'Machiavellian moment' the conceptualization of the contingent still signifies a struggle against the temporal power of the *fortuna* by the stabilizing force of the *virtù* (cf. Pocock 1975), the point of temporalization consists of metamorphosing time from its role in the background of the activity to its instrument, changing it from the playing field into the "ball" in the game. As Koselleck expresses it, it is not only "in time" but "through time" that history is taking place (1979, 321), and the same holds true for politics.

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My discussion of the more complex spatial metaphors, such as arena, stage or scene, already referred to activity as their condition of intelligibility. Those *topoi* which I have preliminarily proposed as keys to the understanding of politics (in short: prudence, purpose, irregularity, practice, game, commitment, struggle, situation, occasion, cf. Palonen 1999b) can all be understood as variants of a temporal interpretation of politics. Each of them take an aspect of the activity's relationship to time as a strategic nucleus for the intelligibility of politics as a whole, and the controversy between these historically relevant types concerns, thus, different understandings of the specific temporality of politics. The more detailed discussion of the specificities of each of the *topoi*, as well as the relationships between them is, however, a topic for another occasion.

## 6. Towards a rhetorical redescription of the conceptual change of politics

In this final chapter I want to sum up the conceptual changes of politics in by using the vocabulary of "rhetorical redescription", as sketched, along the lines of a reactualization of certain traits in the Roman rhetoric, in the recent work of Quentin Skinner (esp. 1996, 1999). To use this apparatus to analyze such qualitative changes as the categorical horizon shift from the politics-discipline to the phenomenon of politics, as well as the move from the spatial to temporal modes of figuration in conceptualizing the phenomenon of politics, is by no means obvious. In particular, the rhetorical situation is much more implicit and the agents themselves are hardly aware of what they are doing when introducing this kind of conceptual changes.

Despite all this, I also want to apply the rhetorical apparatus à la Skinner to this kind of problematic. Especially Skinner's distinction, made explicit in chapter 4 of *Reason and Rhetoric in the Philosophy of Hobbes*, between the changes in the naming, meaning, significance and evaluation of the phenomenon in question appears to me to be heuristically applicable even to an implicit problematic. In a sense, I will also speak, in keeping, for example, with Kenneth Burke (1950), of analyzing the rhetorical moves as actions, although they may remain implicit or diffuse to their agent. Or, to speak in the speech act vocabulary of Skinner's earlier work, the conceptual changes analyzed are perlocutive effects, but they can be made intelligible, not primarily in terms of their historical significance, as judged by the *ex post* criteria of the present-day conceptual historians, but, rather, as products of linguistic actions (cf. esp. Skinner 1996, 7-8), which, however, have led to certain unanticipated consequences.

Above all, the horizon shift can be interpreted as a change in naming. What was previously – to use modern jargon – the "subject matter of the discipline of politics", was transformed by a metonymic contamination to a new entity, "the phenomenon of politics" (although this expression was not available to the contemporaries). This metonymic

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operation did not, however, leave its object untouched, but contributed to a revised understanding of the phenomenon itself. In the first instance, this led to a certain reduction of the range of reference of the adjective "political", either intentionally or as a by-product, as compared with the almost countless umbrella concepts of the discipline "politics". When "politics" was to be considered as a phenomenon of its own right, the construction of a separate "political sphere" was more strictly delimited.

More interesting for my purposes is the second conceptual change, the transition from the demarcation of politics in terms of spatial metaphors into the qualification of politics as an activity, initially within the "boundaries" of the given "sphere", "field" or "sector". In this transition it is difficult, and probably unnecessary, to distinguish whether the name "politics" is transferred from the space to the activity or whether it is the meaning of the phenomenon "politics" that is revised in this manner. In the first case we can speak of an ambiguity of the "sphere concepts" concerning whether they aim only at naming a criterion of demarcating politics from other spheres, or whether they try to name politics independently of a more comprehensive system of sphere concepts. It is perfectly possible to remain content with the first variant, but it is equally possible to understand that this would miss the point of qualifying politics. But we can also theorize that after establishing the sphere of politics one can reinterpret its content by moving from that which constitutes its borders to that which qualifies it as an activity which retaining the same name.

The real problem is, however, that it was not politics as activity, but activity or practice in general that was quite unintelligible. As Frank Ankersmit writes, "everyday political problems" were something in which "pre-nineteenth century political philosophy did not have the slightest interest" (Ankersmit 1997, 34). Neither has it been easy to conceptualize politics-as-activity since then. Activity was something beyond the distinctions between objects and ideas, between facts and norms, between being and obligation, between nature and culture and other dualistic figures of conceptualization. To some extent it was possible to revert to the older topics of moral philosophy, rhetoric and *phronesis* or judgement, but even in them, activity, and politics in particular, were ultimately understood by criteria either "below" or "above" it. In this sense, these older topics only had a limited amount of value in the conceptualization of politics.

Those drawing the outlines of the conceptual horizon of politics-as-activity faced a new kind of task with only a limited number of resources based on the outlines "inherited" from the discipline concept. In this sense, the operations of rhetorical *redescription* were also of limited value. To some extent, the problem was one of explicating the practices of naming, meaning, evaluation and judging the significance available within the existing practices of politicians. In addition, however, the problem was one of the rhetoric of the

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invention of perspectivistic approaches and modes of drawing outlines – without losing the contingent openness of the horizon of the activity itself. Here, however, further problems arose. Through the rhetoric of invention, the horizons were also remodelled in a manner that could no longer be identified with the mere explication of already available practices, and by the very act of explicating, the practices themselves were questioned.

If we acknowledge, in accordance with Koselleck (1972), that it is only possible to speak of time in terms of spatial metaphors, because time is not *anschaulich*, we can understand the conceptualization of politics as a temporal activity by using metaphoric spatial figures. We must distinguish between speaking of politics in terms of spatial metaphors and using spatial metaphors as instruments for describing aspects of politics as temporal activity. It is in this latter sense, I want to speak of *topoi*, certain "commonplaces", which were used as competing instruments for qualifying politics as (temporal) activity. The *topoi* are only representative of the first instances, which could be combined with each other and further diversified in the conceptualization of politics by individual authors. They do not mark any permanent "structures" under which all conceptions of politics can, sooner or later, to be subsumed, but rather indicate certain perspectivistic directions which have served as heuristic instrument in the completion of the further singularization of the concept.



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