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Articles

Reconsidering the Political: A Realization of a Person or a Way to Depersonalization?

Politiškumas – asmens realizacija ar kelias į nuasmeninimą?

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Abstract: This paper takes on the highly problematic question whether *the political* is reconcilable with the conception of a person within Robert Spaemann's philosophy. Spaemann devotes himself to detailed explication of the moral ontology of the person, however, the political ontology in his thought is only assumed but not developed and it seems to stand in deep conflict with the developed elements of person's ontology. The aim of the paper is to investigate whether Spaemann's notion of *the political* can be reconciled with the rest of the person's ontology and if this turn to *the political* rather leads to depersonalization. It is argued that it is possible to develop Spaemann's personal ontology while integrating the concept of *the political* within the conception of a person.

Keywords: moral ontology, political ontology, the political, ontology of a person, Robert Spaemann.

Summary: Straipsnis nagrinėja aktualią politiškumo problemą ir siekia ištirti, ar implicitiškai vokiečių filosofo Roberto Spaemanno filosofijoje glūdinti politiškumo samprata suderinama su jo plėtojama asmens ontologija. Plėtodamas ontologinę asmens sampratą Spaemannas jo politiškumo dėmenį palieka neišplėtotą, vien implicitiškai numanomą, tačiau iš pirmo žvilgsnio jis atrodo radikaliai besikertantis su pamatiniais jo asmens sampratos principais ir kuriantis vidinį konfliktą filosofo mintyje. Straipsnio tikslas – ištirti, ar įmanoma Spaemanno politiškumo dėmenį neprieštaringai integruoti į jo plėtojamą asmens sampratą, ar vis dėlto politiškumas būtinai virsta asmens depersonalizacija. Argumentuojama, kad įmanoma Spaemanno asmens sampratą plėtoti tokia linkme, kad joje atsirastų neprieštaringa vieta ir politiškumo dėmeniui.

Keywords: moralės ontologija, politinė ontologija, politiškumas, asmens ontologija, Robertas Spaemannas.

Introduction

This article takes on the highly problematic question whether *the political*. is reconcilable with the conception of a person. The focus is Robert Spaemann's conception of a person, although for the support of the arguments this article bears on various texts and sources of personalism tradition. The aim is to investigate whether there are any ontological preconditions of *the political* that are already existent within the conception of a person and if so, to disclose and explicate them.

Spaemann devotes himself to detailed explication of the moral ontology of the person – he names and develops those elements of what it takes to be a person that become necessary conditions for any further understanding of morality and moral action. Therefore, he shows that

certain elements in the constitution of a person is inherently related to morality[2]. However, the notion of *the political* within the ontology of the person remains undeveloped in his thought. There are certain texts, where Spaemann investigates various questions of political philosophy and even political ontology[3], however these texts do not take upon the question that is the focus of this article – the ontology of *the political* within the conception of a person. As for his texts that are intended for the deeper analysis of the ontology of a person, the mentions of *the political* in them are very scarce. Although he sometimes mentions *the political* in these texts, there are no elaborate discussion of what that notion means and how does it fit in with other ontological elements within the ontological constitution of a person. It remains unclear, whether there are any ontological preconditions for any understanding of politics and political action as it is shown to be for morality. There are very little explicit mentions of *the political* in Spaemann's conception of a person and all these mentions are presented rather as self-evident facts than as conscious expansions of personal ontology that require explanation and argument. Such scanty treatment of *the political* stands in great contrast with the thorough, detailed, and comprehensive development of the moral ontology of the person that we find in Spaemann's philosophy.

Moreover, after a closer look, this full-scale moral ontology appears to stand in deep conflict with the only presumed political ontology of a person. While the elements of the personal ontology that are inherently related to morality seem to be necessary for true realization of the person, *the political*, although presumed as a self-evidently integral part of the ontology of a person and equal to the moral part of it, seem to lead only to depersonalization of one or another kind. For instance, the intrinsically generalizing and anonymizing nature of political notions and institutions seems to negate the ultimate uniqueness and irreplaceability of a person. In addition, the possibility of a radical hostility and life and death struggle that is always a potential within the notion of *the political*[4] seem to be irreconcilable with the recognition of another person and his or her fundamental inviolability. This apparent conflict leads to such questions as: Can we explicate any political ontology within Spaemann's conception of a person that would not stand in open conflict with already developed personal (moral) ontology? What categories, already existent within the ontology of a person, would allow us to talk about the political part of personal nature? Does the integration of *the political* into the ontological conception of a person really open a new space for personal realization, as Spaemann apparently assumes, though, does not argue for; or does it rather lead to depersonalization?

This article, after detailing the problem in the first section, tackles it in two ways. First, while analysing Spaemann's conception of a person, it indicates those elements in Spaemann's personal ontology that enable the possibility of the development of *the political* within the conception of a person. Second, it proposes a solution for the indicated implicit conflict between the notion of *the political* and the ontology of a person whose realization is closely linked to its moral component.

The notion of *the political* within the personal ontology is not widely discussed either in research on Spaemann, or in other texts of personalism [5]. In most personalists' texts the relation between personal ontology and *the political* is assumed to be a self-evident fact and is not highlighted as problematic. Most often they proceed to talking about politics from their conceptions of a person without drawing any attention to the problematic nature of such move or detailing how this capacity for politics fits in with the rest of personal ontology [6]. As rare exceptions might be mentioned such authors as Wojtyla (2021) [7]., who explicitly identifies and elaborates those elements within person's ontology that leads to any possible understanding of politics and political action, or, for instance, Stephen F. Schneck (1987), who interprets Max Scheler's understanding of a person and details those elements within it that create a possibility of contemporary political theory [8]. This article might be seen as both – an attempt to fill this gap within the research on Spaemann, and to make the problem of reconciliation of *the political* and the rest of personal ontology visible in the context of personalism in general.

The Problem of the Political within the Ontology of a Person

Spaemann explicitly claims that "The political, as such, is a personal category" (Spaemann 2017: 194) because it "enables personal identification and restrains a purely economic logic" (Spaemann 2017: 194). However, he himself does not give any comprehensive argument or explanation, what this claim might mean and how the notion of *the political* might be fully realized within his personal ontology. His other mentions of the notion of *the political* are scarce: *the political* appears in his thought as a presumably self-evident fact which is not further analysed or explicated, only acknowledged as a seemingly already existent within the ontology of a person, hence having influence for our practical lives (Spaemann 2000: 96-98, 110-113; 2017: 180-196). Almost all these mentions of *the political* are expressed in the context of explicating the ways of encountering a person. Spaemann notes *the political* while discussing recognition as a specific primordial, ontological relation between persons, which enables any further ethical or political encounters, or introducing benevolence as another main element within personal ontology that permeates any truly personal encounter with a person. This can only mean that *the political* should also be interpreted as a personal capacity for specific – political – relation among persons, which agrees with or even originates from elements already within the ontology of the person – recognition and benevolence. In other words, *the political* within the ontology of a person should be sought as a certain form of recognition. However, that is where the problem arises. Any closer look at the notion of *the political* and attempt to elucidate it, leads to an explicit conflict with the recognition of a person as a unique and irreplaceable being and its benevolent character that draws certain responsibilities against others that not always can be fulfilled in the sphere

of politics. Hence, it seems that the notion of *the political* within the ontology of a person tends to negate the main principles of personal ontology that according to Spaemann are a necessary condition for any personal realization.

According to Spaemann, "persons are 'individuals' in an unparalleled sense" (Spaemann 2017: 3). The notion of person is neither a predicate, nor a classificatory term, "persons are 'individuals' not in the sense that they are instances of a universal concept, but as the particular individuals they are, who in an individual and irreplaceable way are the Universals" (Spaemann 2017: 19). However, the inherently generalizing character of the political and its attempt to subsume any person under more general political categories, such as community, society, state, seem to negate this presumably the most important feature of a person – her incommensurable uniqueness that is disclosed in any act of recognition and any personal relation to the other. When encountering a person, I recognize someone (not something) that is both, similar to me in his irreducible uniqueness, and at the same time incommensurable with me as an independent centre of being. Moreover, this ontological recognition of a person is at the same time a normative, moral, one: it sets certain demands towards the recognized other. In Spaemann's words, "to recognize a person means pre-eminently to restrain my own potentially unlimited urge for self-expansion. It means to resist the inclination to see the other only as a factor in my own life-project. That is 'respect': respect for the one who can never be made an object, never a means subservient to my own universe of significance" (Spaemann 2017: 186). Or put it more simply, "it demands the pure "letting-be" of the other in its irreducible otherness" (Spaemann 2000: 96). However, while this explication of recognition might be seen as an acutely grasped precondition of any further moral relationships, once we try to think through it about the notion of *the political*, it runs into evident contradictions.

Firstly, the inherently generalizing and anonymizing character of *the political* seems unable to uphold the normative commitment to recognize and sustain the unconditionally irreducible and irreplaceable uniqueness of the other. Within the political sphere, as we experience it while observing it in our daily lives, the unique and irreplaceable person seems to inevitably become only a unanimous part of something else – a state, a nation, a party, a community, an institution. As merely a part of some bigger political entity, he or she seems to lose his or her irreplaceable uniqueness. For instance, as a citizen, I am fully and easily replaceable by any other citizen in almost any of my civil engagements: within the political sphere it does not really matter *whose* vote has been put into the ballot box as long as the vote belongs to *any of* the citizens. It seems that within the political sphere we become the exact opposite of what personal recognition requires – instances or cases of a universal concept – a citizen, a soldier, an economic subject, a consumer, a statistical unit with no need for a specific name or face. Spaemann himself notices this feature as a danger arising in a highly bureaucratic political order (Spaemann 2017: 193-196). This feature might be called a depersonalizing one, since instead

of realizing the uniqueness of person, it conceals it equating all the persons as interchangeable and anonymous individuals. However, it seems that this kind of depersonalization might be inherent in the notion of *the political* itself and can be found within any kind of its manifestations, not only the bureaucratic ones. That is because *the political* intrinsically tends to subsume persons under one or another generalization as merely commensurable and replaceable parts of it and while doing so, negates their personal status.

Moreover, it seems that the notion of *the political* not only negates the unconditional uniqueness of the person while reducing her or him to merely an instance of some general concept or a part of some political entity, but also subject them to some bigger political goals and processes and by doing so transgress the normative commitment to never take a person as means for or function of something else. By being a citizen, I become a function of various national political aims and goals and a statistical unit in various evaluations of their progress; by being an economic subject, I become a function of a goal of better economic future of a country that I live in; by being a soldier, I become a function of any national military projects. All these subordinations of the person under some political generality and its goals seem to inherently depersonalize that person regarding the normative demand not to turn a person into means.

Even more doubts about the possibility of finding an integral place for *the political* within the ontology of a person arises, when we notice that the potential of the existential life and death struggle that, according to Spaemann himself (Spaemann 2000: 98; 2017: 189-192), is always inherent in the notion of *the political,* stands in irreconcilable conflict with personal recognition and its primordial moral demand of "the pure "letting-be" of the other in its irreducible otherness" (Spaemann 2000: 96) and restriction of one's own expansion, especially the one involving the attack, injury or destruction of other persons. Spaemann explicitly links recognition with benevolence, making the latter sort of a form of recognition. The only way not to objectify another person and not to make her merely means for our own plans, gain or even comfort, is to approach him or her with benevolence – "the unconditional acceptance of a being, who has as a characteristic "being-out-for" something" (Spaemann 2000: 96-97), hence, the unconditional acceptance of another subject, a centre of being, who has her own wishes, needs, plans and tendencies in general. "One cannot, however, accept a tendency without tending in the same direction, without being-out-toward the same. To be-out-for that which is beneficial to the other, that is, that which fulfils the other's being-out-for, is what we call benevolence" (Spaemann 2000: 97). It means that a true recognition of another person involves a benevolent tendency of accepting her "being-out-for" something at least in a letting-her-be form, not sabotaging her tendencies and self-realizations as a person. However, it seems completely incompatible with the political reality, where we are constantly in the midst of conflicts of interests, we see political groups within the country

or globally seeking for absolutely different or even conflicting visions of common good or, on the contrary, arguing over the possession of one and the same object of interest. These are conflicts that, as Spaemann himself admits, has always the potential to become existential and to develop into a radical hostility against one another and turn into a life and death struggle. Such inherent potentiality of *the political* seems to stand in open conflict with the benevolent character of recognition: recognition and benevolence prohibits the radical hostility, while the notion of *the political* keeps it as an ontological possibility. Hence, on the one hand, it seems that Spaemann holds *the political* to be inherently related with recognition or even to be a certain form of recognition; on the other hand, the same notion of *the political* seems to conflict with the very nature of that recognition.

Spaemann does not ignore this apparent problem. He indicates that certain "limits occur when the particular interest is an interest in the real conditions of being oneself and where these appear to be incompatible with another's conditions of being himself or herself. There are situations of existential hostility, which cannot be resolved in a Socratic fashion. This is especially true when it does not concern *inimicus*, but rather *hostis*, that is, when the hostility is not something personal but something collective, i.e., political" (Spaemann 2000: 98). "What, then, can 'recognition of the person' mean when set in a context of profound disagreement?" (Spaemann 2017: 188). However, even with the question out in the open, Spaemann's answer seems incomplete and reminds more of a postulate than an argued position. According to him: "if personal recognition is unconditional, it must be sustainable in the face of life-and-death struggle. That is why we cannot let any theory of the person pass which ignores the possibility of strife or mentions it only to condemn it" (Spaemann 2017: 190). It seems that Spaemann's position is that the potential conflict, which might lead even to the life-and-death struggle, hence, the notion of *the political*, lies precisely within the ontological structure of a person – it is not simply some rational category or merely empirical or social reality that we happen to live in. Rather it is something that we already have within our ontological structure as persons – just like apparently the opposite capacity for benevolence. According to Spaemann, "personal existence implies an inner structure – the human individual in possession of self, nature, and life – and it is easily seen how this structure must unfold in a bipolar, not unipolar form. Recognition is essentially an order of formal equality, yet this order never becomes real and alive without the unfolding of human life within it. This must always have the character of competition and conflict <...> No remedy can be found for this that would not have the effect of abolishing personality and changing men into thinking beasts. Persons are, as they always will be, a risk" (Spaemann 2017: 191-192). However, this kind of answer only raises even more questions. How can we reconcile this inherent notion of *the political* with the benevolent act of recognition? What does it mean that "when a battle is unavoidable, then being moral consists in treating the enemy as an enemy?" (Spaemann 2000: 98). How

is it possible that the possibility or even a necessity to see an enemy as an enemy, to fight against him, even to kill him, does not negate the ontological commitment for other persons' inviolability? What does it mean that even with this brutal potential *the political* remains a personal concept?

The aim of the following sections is to propose a possible answer to these questions by elucidating Spaemann's position and disclosing these elements within the ontology of a person that might help to diminish the conflict between *the political* and other elements within the personal ontology – such as recognition and benevolence.

The Ontology of a Person Reveals the Possibility of the Political

Spaemann takes the plurality of persons to be an intrinsic and even constituting feature of being a person and this inherent plurality of personhood opens up the possibility of integrating *the political* as a manifestation of this plurality within the conception of a person. Spaemann emphasizes that persons exist only in plural (Spaemann 2017: 2, 66, 77, 134, 232) and this plurality is not an empirical, but an ontological one, the one that constitutes the being of every person. There are a few ways in which this inherent plurality unfolds at the same time constituting the being of person.

We encounter any person – either ourselves, or any other – not by perceiving her or him as an objectified individual that can be defined through her characteristics, but by recognizing him or her as person, who occupies a unique place both, within the empirical world, and within the community of persons, hence, as someone, who is inherently already in various relationships with others. According to Spaemann, the person "is defined by a 'place' in the universe which it alone occupies. This place, again, is defined by a situation relative to all other places; the person is defined by relation to everything else that can never be that person. And this is not a delivery of external observation alone; the person knows the uniqueness of his or her place and of the unsubstitutability of its relation to everything else, and so of his or her essential uniqueness. Since it is a relational uniqueness, it cannot be conceived apart from the external aspect of the person, mediated primarily through the body" (Spaemann 2017: 37). Spaemann insists that we should try to understand a person not through a difference between body and mind, empirical and rational or spiritual, but by their unity, because a person as a whole is always unavoidably one. Hence, the person can only be understood as someone who occupies a unique place that is in relation to everyone and everything else. My own personal uniqueness comes from the fact that due to my concrete embodiment only I can look to the world from the perspective that I occupy and relate to the world and others exactly the way I relate to them. In other words, my own self-understanding as person is ontologically conditioned by the fact that there are other persons only in relation to whom I can realize myself as a person. As a person I am not

some isolated individual that might be grasped or known as an object, I can only be recognized as a person and recognition, as a personal act, a priori assumes the existence of at least one other person, hence plurality. Recognition of a person is first and foremost a recognition of a certain place that the person occupies – a place that is separate and distinct from anyone else, the one that no one else can expropriate and expand himself or herself into, and that has a unique net of various relations around it[9]. This means that inherently there is no *a priori* conflict between a personal ontology and person's ability to form various social relations, including the political ones. On the contrary, while relation is what constitutes us as persons in the first place, political ways of relating with others might become the realization of person.

The relation that apparently becomes a central notion in the unfolding of the inherent plurality of personal being can only be understood as a certain self-transcendence – a capacity to restrict my egocentric self and to recognize the other as the other person, not as merely a part of my own plans, goals, and schemes. According to Spaemann, "the real is therefore not that which lacks all relations; it is not that isolated member of a relation which has been detached from every relationship. The real is the relationship itself. And what is unique to persons is not only that they exist within relationships, but that they form and cultivate relationships and relativize themselves for the sake of others. Persons have the ability to see through the eyes of others – or at least attempt to. This self-relativization and self-transcendence is what makes every person something absolute" (Spaemann2015: 93). In other words, transcending ourselves means relativizing our own egocentrism on behalf of others – to perceive them as persons, to accept them as they are and to appreciate their being towards something. However, this is exactly what is needed when we talk about the political sphere. The ability to put someone else first, to transcend one's own self-seeking needs and plans to achieve or create something that is common are features needed in any political action. This means that self-transcendence might be seen as a necessary condition in forming the political relations between persons and *the political* itself does not necessarily conflict with primordial ontological principles of a person, but rather is a possible way of realizing them.

Hence, although Spaemann himself detailing ontology of recognition and plurality talks more about moral relations between persons and our ability to form such interpersonal connections as friendship or family, the main elements within the constitution of a person that enable moral relations do not *a priori* negate the possibility of *the political* within our ontology. On the contrary, while the very essence of being a person is inherently connected to the plurality of persons or, as Holger Zaborowski notes "the person is only conceivable within a plurality of persons – as an active, free, and temporal person among other persons" (Zaborowski 2010: 185), it seems that we only become persons through the others and that *the political* might be just one more way of such our personal realization. This means that within the ontology of a person there is already a potentiality for forming political relations. The main question

here then is how specifically this ontologically pre-existing potentiality of *the political* can be realized? How can *the political* unfold as a personal concept? And how can it while remaining a generalizing concept not to go astray into the depersonalization the way it has been shown above? How and when this plurality, interpreted and realized as *the political*, does not negate the person?

How Can the Political be a Personal Concept?

This section argues that the apparent depersonalization of the generalizing character of *the political* is not an ontological one and can be avoided if we take seriously Spaemann's claim that *the political* is a personal concept and interpret it from within the personal perspective. Adopting this personal perspective transforms the way we interpret *the political*, enables us to see it as part of our personal existence and shows how *the political* unfolds practically in at least few ways.

Adopting the personal perspective and approaching the world from within the position of a person and not from a neutral spectator's or researcher's point of view is a necessary condition for understanding what a person is and should equally be adopted while discussing and interpreting *the political*. According to Spaemann, being a person is not being a case or an instance of a more general term or species, it is not having a specific attribute or predicate, and it is not something we can decide or discover from the side, as neutral spectators, as scientists or theoreticians – persons are not objects that could be inspected and known from a third-person perspective. Rather, being a person means occupying the personal position, looking into the world and relating to it from one's own first-person perspective. In Spaemann's words, "Being is not capable of being an object. Being is substantiality, being a self, and this grounds all objectivity. The paradigmatic case of such substantiality is subjectivity" (Spaemann 2000: 95-96). This means that first and foremost a person is a conscious self, who approaches reality from his or her own position and relate to everything around him or her from it. "It is we ourselves who experience ourselves as unities – as unities that preserve their identity over time. We experience ourselves as subjects of willing and acting, who bear responsibility for their actions <...> Leaving anthropomorphism behind ultimately means leaving man himself behind, that is, leaving behind a human understanding of man" (Spaemann 2015: 88). All other possible perspectives, including the objective one, are secondary to this primordial way I, as a person, approach the world. Hence, being a person becomes a paradigm for being, it is an ontological starting point to think and talk about anything that is real. This means that declaring the notion of *the political* inherently personal means interpreting it from within the perspective of a person. But what happens when we approach *the political* from this personal perspective? How does it change the way we interpret *the political*?

While approaching the notion of *the political* from the side as a spectator or scientist, it might seem that the generalizing character of *the*

political depersonalizes a person turning it only into an interchangeable instance of some general category (merely one of the citizens/party or community members/soldiers/consumers/statistical units). However, approaching *the political* from the personal perspective discloses that a person is able to identify herself or himself through the variety of political categories (a citizen, a community member, a party member), hence, these categories become rather a realization of the person than an imposed external depersonalization negating a uniqueness of him or her.

This self-identification and self-realization of a person through *the political* is enabled by a few features of personal ontology that are developed by Spaemann himself. According to him, persons are not simply what they are – their nature – but someone who "has" their nature, hence, relates it to in various ways (Spaemann 2017: 31, 33, 71-72, 85, 89, 103, 106)."[T]hey freely endorse the laws of their being, or alternatively they rebel against them and 'deviate'" (Spaemann 2017: 33), "their way is not what they *are*, but what they *relate to*: they take it on, they carry it through, or they refuse it" (Spaemann 2017: 72). This means that there is always some sort of relational distance between the person as a subject – the active part of her personhood, the self, – and the person as an object – the objectified part of the person, some sort of appearance of the self. Our active subjectivity, our inner self, and our inwardness cannot be known and approached in any other way, but through its realization in different appearances, in objectified form. In Spaemann's own words it "is an *inside turned out*, an outward inwardness" (Spaemann 2017: 107) and it is a 'quality' of a person "'the way of being' in which they are not wholly immersed" (Spaemann 2017: 72), but to which they always relate in one or other way. One of the ways how we "have our nature" are various symbolic representations of our personhood that are at the same time the realizations of our personal existence – we realize ourselves through being a friend, a sister, a parent, a teacher, a community member, a president and many other things. These are the ways that a person can be visible to others as who she or he is, the way a person discloses herself or himself. Since we always in some way relate to what we are instead of merely being it, our existence is always touched by fiction – by interpretation of *what* we are which makes us *who* we are. According to Spaemann, "art and nature together compose the human world, and we cannot make a clean break between the way we construct ourselves and the way we really are." (Spaemann 2017: 89) "It is characteristic of human nature that the 'fictive', or artificial, forms a separate and independent dimension of life, not integrated into the natural behavioural patterns of self- or species-preservation. Here we have a particularly clear instance of that non-identity with their nature that entitles us to call human beings 'persons'" (Spaemann 2017: 81). These passages allow us to presume that the political sphere as well can be seen as a certain personal way of "having" a nature and relating to it. But what kind of relation, what kind of "having" a nature is the political kind?

Spaemann insists that being a person is inherently finding oneself in the world that is common to us and others (Spaemann 2000: 1, 89, 106, 183;

2017: 58) and we have an inherent capacity to perceive things as common, for instance, to form our views and beliefs about the common good. Since the commonness of the personal world is an ontological precondition for our own existence, there seems to be an ontological necessity for us to form at least some kind of relations with much wider circle of other persons than only our own family and close group of friends. That is why Spaemann speaks of *ordo amoris*, a relational order indicating that personal relations vary in their intensity and form depending on the proximity of those persons (Spaemann 2000: 106-118). Any person is *a priori* related to all persons because they are an ontological precondition of being a person in the first place. And this is where *the political* shows up as a personal concept. It is an ontological concept that enables a person to relate to others in the considerations and practices of the common. When I perceive myself as a citizen, I do not lose my uniqueness as a person by becoming merely one of the possible cases of some general notion of citizenship – it might only seem so, if we try to describe *the political* from a third-person point of view, not the personal one. On the contrary, when I perceive myself as a citizen from a personal point of view, I relate to other persons in a certain way, I see us all as somebodies that have something in common– a country, an origin, a language, political allegiance to a certain state and constitution. Just like I realize myself as a person by transcending my egocentric being with regard to my friend's existence, I may do the same by recognizing others with regard to their and my common interests, goals and existence.

That kind of relations might define a significant part of me and become part of my identity, hence, it might realize me as person, if these relations are the ones that I "take on" and "carry through", if they become my way of existing and being a person, if I invest myself into them. According to Spaemann, "our identity is, on the one hand, simply the identity of a natural thing, an organism, and as such we can at any time be recognized by others as one and the same with ourselves. But this basic natural identity contains only a set of directions for the way, and on that way we must look for our identity – or construct it. The person is neither the product of this construction, nor the end-pint on the way. The person is the way itself, the whole biography anchored in biological identity. Persons are not roles, but they are role-players, who stylize themselves in one or another manner" (Spaemann 2017: 84). Hence, *the political* as a personal notion defines all the ways we may stylize our being in relation to our common existence with other persons. Of course, the political role, as well as any other, will not be exhaustive of me – a person is never fully immersed into any of his objective realizations, there always remains the self, which cannot be fully realized, although is always in the process of being realized – but the political relation to the world and other persons might become one of the meaningful realizations of my personhood.

A similar line of argument applies to the political action. Although, from the third-person perspective it might seem that *the political* negates a person while making her merely an interchangeable part in some bigger political goal or a cog in anonymous political process, adopting the

personal perspective discloses that taking part in *the political* is not a subjection to some depersonalizing process, but rather a realization of a person through participation.

Participation here might be understood as a way of a personal realization of *the political* which helps to avoid the depersonalization that might arise due to the generalizing character of the political, as it was mentioned before. Since *the political* as a personal concept defines an active way of personal existence, an active relating to the things that are common, the political realization of a person as his identity to one or another political role unfolds through conscious and active relation to that role and everything what this role as a concrete objectification normatively requires, including actions. I might be declared a citizen of a certain country that I was born in, but *being a citizen*, as a personal category, requires much more – it requires my active involvement in this being, an investment of my personal existence, identification with this role through accepting what is common for all the citizens and acting towards it. This conscious and active involvement of a person can be called participation. And since it arises from the person's inner tendency to identify with the community and take part in its goals, this participation is a political realization of personhood. [10]

There are a few important moments in this explication of how *the political* might maintain its personal character through participation. First, its understanding unfolds strictly from the personal perspective. What is important here, is not so much the understanding of an action that might be described from a perspective of a spectator as acting together with the community or even in accordance with a community, but rather the inner inclination or tendency of a person towards the actions concerning the common. This means that in the political action and in the understanding of *the political* as a personal concept the crucial moment is a conscious and voluntary involvement of a person into the action, not just a mechanical performance of one act or another. Spaemann says that "the reality of a human person in all its depth and complexity is accessible only to someone who invests something of himself or herself in the encounter. It is not the most impersonal, but the most personal observation that reveals most of what reality is itself" (Spaemann 2017: 89). Hence, the reality of *the political* as a personal concept is only accessible and can be experienced by the person who invests herself in the common pursuits of fellow citizens. Second, this participation arises from an inner attitude or tendency – a conscious identification of oneself with the common. This is one more aspect how *the political* might be interpreted as an integral part within the ontology of a person – it simply arises and unfolds from the inner constitution of personal existence. This way it is and should be interpreted not as a way to depersonalization, but as a realization of a person.

However, even if we accept this line of thought which adopts personal perspective and re-interprets *the political* as the personal concept in a way that its generalizing character does not necessarily lead to depersonalization but can even become a possibility for realization of a

person who finds herself in a common world with other persons, there still remains one more problem. As it was already mentioned before, *the political* is not entirely exhausted by the notion of what is common. As Spaemann admits, "The way in which we each understand the common opposes us more sharply than our individual interests do" (Spaemann 2017: 18). Hence, *the political* always has within itself a potentiality of a conflict, which in certain conditions might even lead to a life and death struggle. However, it seems that this potentiality stands in great contrast to the recognition of a person, which demands benevolent assistance in her existence or at least the pure "letting be" of the other, but by no means the overcoming or destruction. Is it still possible to see *the political* as an integral part of the ontology of a person, if we take into consideration its inner potentiality of radical antagonism?

Is It Possible to Preserve a Personal Character of the Political in a Life and Death Struggle?

In this section I will present an argument that can be developed while leaning on the personal interpretation of *the political* that was explicated above and might diminish the apparent tension between intrinsic radical antagonism of *the political* and its place within the ontology of a person. This argument might be viewed as a support for Spaemann's position that "if personal recognition is unconditional, it must be sustainable in the face of life-and-death struggle" (Spaemann 2017: 190), which is declared but remains undeveloped and unexplicated in his thought. But how the hostility against another person, which might even lead to her death, still can be personal?

However controversial it might sound, since a physical existence is not exhaustive of being a person, there might be such cases where death is not a destruction of a person, but her preservation. According to Spaemann, a personal "self-transcendence includes the readiness for real death: "no one has greater love than the one who lays down his life for his friends." Life only lives on the sacrifice of life" (Spaemann 2012: 25).This means that although a physical existence is a necessary condition for being a person, it is not definitive and sufficient. We have already showed that the personal existence first and foremost unfolds as a relation to others. Self-transcendence as a restriction of merely individual egocentric existence and as a tending towards and for others is the basic feature of being a person, hence, physical existence is just means for realizing our personhood. Hence, losing one's life for one's friend, family, dignity, or love is surely always a loss of any future of that person, but it is not necessarily the destruction of his or her personhood, it might be the price of its realization. Self-sacrifice is the highest example of this. Sacrificing one's life for the other is the highest self-transcendence possible, hence, the highest example of what a person is capable of. In such case, the loss of his life is not the loss of his personhood but the highest demonstration of it.

Bearing this in mind, there seem to be no reasons why this potentiality of the highest self-transcendence could not be a part of *the political*. On the contrary, if we approach *the political* from the personal perspective and interpret it as inherently personal concept, this potentiality of highest self-transcendence seems to be an integral part of a person's political realization. It also helps to lessen the apparent conflict between *the political* and the rest of personal ontology. According to Spaemann, "there are goals for which people consciously risk their lives and *a fortiori* their further freedom to act, and they do this in such a way that the sacrifice of their life is not understood as a failure to turn out well" (Spaemann 2000: 18). We have also already seen that *the political* as a personal concept unfolds through certain self-transcendence – as a relation to the others as the inhabitants of the common world and participation in common existence, goals, and actions towards them. Hence, if the political participation leads to the unavoidable life and death struggle, the physical death of a person is not the destruction of her or him, but the demonstration of his or her personal realization through *the political*. [11] A citizen willing to sacrifice his life for the freedom of his country is not robbed of his personhood, rather, he fulfils it to the highest point demonstrating unconditional love for his fellow citizens, freedom, and the future of his country. He transcends his egocentric existence and relates to the others in a political way up to the point where his physical existence seems a lesser goal than the existence of the common world, be it an independence of certain country or rights of a certain community. In Spaemann's words, agents "conduct themselves toward their own nature and to the situations presented to them by fate like good actors towards their roles. In order to perform well, they must identify themselves with the goal, but they should not confuse this with the immediateness of life. And that means that they experience the frustrations and the defeats which their role specifies, not actually as defeats, but rather that they affirm them as part of the play in which they perform" (Spaemann 2000: 49). Hence, if a person takes seriously his self-identity as a citizen, if he truly invests his personhood in this personal role, the defeat might rather be her or him not being able and refusing to sacrifice her or his life if the unlucky situation of a life-and-death struggle presents itself, not the other way round. Sacrificing one's life for *the political* (for one's fatherland, community, political friends), is not a defeat or destruction of a person, but the realization of her or his personhood through *the political*.

The same applies to both sides – the one which survives the life and death struggle, and the one who does not. If they both went into the fight as the fight for their personal existence, defending their understanding of the common world, they took up the personal role of participating in this common goal till the very end, since withdrawal and refraining might have been not only the betrayal of fellow citizens, but a self-betrayal as well. Hence, the inner potential of radical hostility and life and death struggle within the notion of *the political* is not necessarily at opposition to the rest of the ontology of a person.

Conclusion

In this article I argued that even though Spaemann leaves the notion of *the political* unexplicated within his developed ontology of a person, some of the main elements of this ontology enable us to disclose *the political* as one of the possible ways of realization of a person. At first sight *the political* stands in deep conflict with the rest of the ontology of a person because of its generalizing character which rather leads to depersonalization by negating the uniqueness of a person and because of its intrinsic possibility of a radical hostility that might lead to a life and death struggle, hence, the infringement or even destruction of another person. However, a closer analysis discloses that if we take seriously Spaemann's claim that *the political* is a personal concept and reinterpret it from the personal perspective, we discover that *the political* is not some external enforcement imposed upon a person that depersonalizes him or her by making a person an interchangeable part in a bigger political entity or process, but a way a person himself or herself relates to the common world and other persons in it by participating in the things that are common and identifying himself or herself through them.

This unfolding of *the political* as the personal concept applies equally in the case of radical hostility and life and death struggle. Bearing in mind that physical existence is not exhaustive of a person and in personal relations to other persons are capable of radical self-transcendence on behalf of others, hence, that a personal existence is rather realized through benevolence, friendship, love, dignity than simple physical existence, willingness, or determination to enter a life and death struggle concerning *the political* might also be seen as a part of realization of a person to its highest point. Hence, *the political* does not necessarily lead to depersonalization, but has a possibility of becoming one of the realizations of personal ontology.

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Notes

1 Spaemann does not present a clear and complete definition of the term *the political*. One of the main aims of this article is to identify at least the contours of its definition. Hence, the term in the article does not have any *a priori* set meaning, but rather is developed and defined in the process of tracing and elaborating its different aspects mentioned by Spaemann. In the context of Spaemann's thought the term should be understood ontologically – as the one that refers to the necessary conditions for any further understanding and realization of politics and political action that might be found within the constitution of a person. The problem here is that the undeveloped concept *the political* found in Spaemann's philosophy seems to stand in conflict with his other, much more elaborate views of person's ontology.

2 Ontology and morality are closely and inherently related in Spaemann's thought, it would even be a mistake to take them as separate lines of thought, since they, according to Spaemann, are and should be thought as one and the same: "there is no ethics without metaphysics, but ethics no more precedes ontology, understood as "first philosophy", than the latter does the former <...> Ontology and ethics – the one as much as the other – are constituted *uno actu* through the intuition of being as *Selbstsein*." (Spaemann 2000: ix). Hence, in Spaemann's thought, talking about the ontology of a person is at the same time talking about the ontology of morality.

3 Especially worth mentioning are such essays and books as "Zur Ontologie von rechts und link" (2002), *Rousseau – Bürger ohne Vaterland. Von der Polis zur Natur* (1980) and *Zur Kritik der politischen Utopie. Zehn Kapitel politischer Philosophie* (1977) that touch upon various questions of political philosophy. However, due to the limited extent of the article and because its main aim is to consider the place of *the political* within the conception of a person and not within the whole scope of Spaemann's thought, we will limit ourselves to the analysis of his writings that directly touch upon the place of *the political* within the conception of a person.

4 The possibility of radical hostility that might lead to the existential life and death struggle was famously developed by German philosopher Carl Schmitt. According to him, "The specific political distinction to which political actions and motives can be reduced is that between friend and enemy" (Schmitt 2007: 26), and "the friend, enemy, and combat concepts receive their real meaning precisely because they refer to the real possibility of physical killing. War follows from enmity. War is the existential negation of the enemy" (Schmitt 2007:33). Although Spaemann does not explicitly refer to Schmitt, his mentions of the concept of the political seem to take over this *schmittian*

moment of the potentiality of existential hostility (see in Spaemann 2000: 98; 2017:189-192). As all the other aspects of *the political*, this one also is left undeveloped and without any explicit argument or elaboration. However, this article does not attempt to compare Schmitt's and Spaemann's conceptions of *the political* and does not go into a deeper discussion about their similarities and differences, since that kind of inquiry departs from the main aim of the article – an attempt to articulate the conception of *the political* as found in Spaemann's conception of a person.

5 It seems an undeservedly neglected theme considering that, as Swain has noted, personalism emerged as philosophical school closely related to political issues of the time and even was itself "a political project identifying personal experience as a site for disrupting prevailing structures of power and transforming society" (2021: 76).

6 For instance, Walsh argues that "the primacy of the person is what we live by" (Walsh 2020: 6) and that in a true political union "the part, the member, takes priority over the whole because each member means the whole to every other" (Walsh 2007: 5), but he does not elaborate on ontological elements that allow the person *to be political* in the first place.

7 Wojtyla argues that the social, communal, and political, action of persons is "rooted in their personal character, not vice versa" (Wojtyla 2021: 380), hence, he starts from the personal ontology and searches which ontological elements enable a person be political.

8 According to Schneck, his aim is to show that "the Person as understood in Scheler's personalism, suggests a new ground on which to understand the political subject and the political community so as to outline a politics and political theory which transform the ego-based politics" (Schneck 1987: 17). Hence, he elaborates elements of Scheler's understanding of a person while disclosing how they allow to develop a new understanding of politics.

9 That a personal place is inherently connected with the constitution of the ontology of a person, shows Spaemann's interpretation of Cain's confession that he does not know the place of his brother. According to Spaemann,"[t]o fail to know the other's place, according to this story, amounts to a confession of murder" (Spaemann 2017: 184). Hence, recognizing the other's place is recognizing the normative restriction that we cannot expropriate this place of the other in any way – objectify it, impinge it, attack it or even ignore it – since that would be a violation of another person.

10 A similar line of thought is developed by Wojtyla (2021: 377-414): according to him, participation is a significant part within the person's ontology, while it enables him to realize himself through acting with others.

11 Of course, there remains the question whether any kind of identification with *the political* might be justified. If any kind of personal self-identification with any political goal is a final criterion and might be justified as a realization of a person, it might seem like an extremely subjectivistic position that opens up a possibility of justifying various political extremisms. For now, it will suffice to say that there must be some intrinsic safeguards within the personal understanding of the political, however, due to the limited scope of this article it will not take upon a really important and interesting task of developing them. The aim here was just to highlight the importance of first-person perspective as the one that significantly changes our understanding of any political action or event and brings it into a better integration with the ontological constitution of a person.