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*The constitutive a(nta)gonistic dimension of the
political. On Carl Schmitt's conflictual political
philosophy*

**PhD THESIS
SUMMARY**

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Keywords

Carl Schmitt, political, critique of parliamentarism, etatism, decisionism, conflict, friend-enemy distinction, Catholicism, nationalism, political theology, anti-liberalism, democracy, antagonism, agonism, political anthropology, national myth, national socialism, anti-Semitism, political philosophy, identity-creating function, criticism and polemy.

Abstract

Our dissertation deals with the political philosophy of Carl Schmitt, one of the best known and most debated political philosophy theoretician of the 20th century. With his works written at the beginning of the 1920s (Political Romanticism, Political Theology, The Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy, The Concept of the Political, Constitutional Theory etc.) he upset the political theories in use, as it were, broke with them. On the one hand, he introduced a new concept – that of the political (*das Politische*) – through which he assured a new stage to this discipline; on the other hand, he seized the definition of the political through its criterion rather than its essential definition, which cannot be other than the distinction between *friend* and *enemy*.

The concept of the political is "entwined by the prolific undergrowth of the living language, and the philosopher – unlike the politician – does not cut his way with a machete through the wilderness but he rather cautiously follows the tendrils". We think that, related to Schmitt, the road "cautiously following the tendrils" is passable, though it is preceded by the search for the roots of the "tendrils" and the study of their *context*. We know how fond Schmitt was of phrasing his theses embedded in a *history of ideas* context. As he writes in his *Ex captivitate salus* "the [...] material out of which the scholar of the public law creates his concepts and cannot dispense with, binds him to political situations that [...] touch the researcher and define his personal fate". As a *jurist*, Schmitt always thought in *concepts*, thus, while analysing his texts, it is desirable to outline some key concepts as a starting point and examine their semantic context. With him, the "hic et nunc" is dominant, he was always preoccupied with current topics, spoke on current subjects. Besides the *concepts* on the one hand and embedding them in a *history of ideas framework* on the other, thirdly we name the "intellectual ancestors" relevant from our thesis referred to by Schmitt, whom he "fed upon".

Our dissertation can be divided into two large parts. The first one, so-called history of ideas part (chapters 1–3) has a *preparatory* function that is meant to provide help in understanding the second, *analytical part* (chapters 4–6). The first chapter – *Approaches to Carl Schmitt* – provides *methodological* guidance in the approach to the concept of the political of the jurist from Plettenberg. Our methodological chapter sets the goal to find the way (*meta - hodos*) that can serve as a tool, a compass in the dense labyrinth of Schmitt's way of thinking. In reconstructing Schmitt's figure, we reveal the essential "concepts" (decisionism, pessimistic anthropology) formed throughout his "positions" (Catholicism, etatism) in "space and time" (in the given historical, cultural, political context in which he acted), which show the influence of his great "intellectual ancestors" (Thomas Hobbes, Juan Donoso Cortés). The second chapter – *Debate on Carl Schmitt's relationship to national socialism* – fulfils the essential, indispensable methodological requirement of the Carl Schmitt research. Our chapter is meant to confirm the hypothesis that Schmitt did not feed on national socialism but his already existing – mainly *etatist* and *nationalist* – positions might have come to the surface.

The third chapter of our dissertation – *Carl Schmitt's anti-liberalism* – on the one hand, gives further arguments for supporting the previous chapter – his *nationalist* position: Carl Schmitt and the "conservative revolution" as well as Carl Schmitt and the Italian fascism – proving that, contrary to some author's complete rejection, it is still worth establishing a dialogue with Schmitt's works. Our chapter analyses the *critique of parliamentarism* as a form of institutionalised liberalism. On the other hand, it is a *transition* to the second part of our dissertation in which we deal with the essence and nature of the political. The main question, the stake is (the future of) democracy, which, in Schmitt's interpretation cannot be liberal since it excludes the political, more specifically the *antagonism*, its constitutive element. It is important to remark that our dissertation does not intend to reconstruct and interpret Schmitt's etatist, nationalist position or his anti-liberalism and critique of parliamentarism from the perspective of the national socialism. Therefore we do not prove that the Weimar

critique is a consequence of the apology of the Nazi Party; and we definitely do not prove its opposite either. We argue that the stake is (the future of) democracy; as a consequence, Schmitt's main motivation might have been its critique with the intention to *improve* it.

In the second part of our dissertation (chapters 4–6), in order to deal with Schmitt's concept of the political in depth, first we ask about its source(s) (part 4.1), questions that were followed by an intensive discourse after the publication of his *Glossarium* in 1991. The main question of this chapter is, what are the premises that would allow the conclusion that the origin of Schmitt's concept of the political is to be found in (political) theology or (political) myth. Secondly, (part 4.2) his work has to be placed in the milieu of the history of ideas in which it was born, since Schmitt was fond of formulating his theses embedded in a context of history of ideas. It is not an easier task either, since his main political philosophy works that made him a classic were written in the period of the Weimar Republic (1919-1932), which he later reinterpreted in his national socialist period (1933-1945) and re-interpreted in the Bonn Republic (1950-1970); that is, we have to cover a mental, conceptual way of development until we arrive at the "clear" concept of the political. Thus we can perceive the cumbersome starting point, way of approach and interpretation of Schmitt's thoughts and concepts due to position change (concept development) and concept rearrangement. The hypotheses of this chapter: Schmitt wished to embed the concept of the political in the always current *historical-political context*, he "built in" the *critiques of his contemporaries* (Hans J. Morgenthau, Leo Strauss etc.) and "shaped" his works following the "hidden" or real dialogues with them.

Schmitt's concept of the political – similarly to his work *Constitutional Theory* written in the same year – is analytical, and, at the same time, it is not only a basic work but a summary of works. Its first topic sentence – "*The concept of the state presupposes the concept of the political*" – is both systematic and historical. The 1927 edition explains its state theory question in a primary form. Schmitt states that the modern state, especially the German one, has lost the monopoly of the politics,

which can be well traced from the absolute state of the 18th century through the neutral state of the 19th century up to the totalitarian state of the 20th century. Schmitt's solution: the starting point of every state theory has to gain meaning in the *definition of the political*. Thus we arrive at his second topic sentence, the criterion of political distinction: the *friend-enemy distinction*.

The second part of the chapter continues with Schmitt's arguments of his critique of liberalism dealt with in the third chapter of our dissertation, this time connected to the *political* instead of parliamentarism, since the type of theory based on rationalism, individualism and abstract pluralism (liberalism) has to remain blind against the nature of the political and the antagonism that cannot be abolished. The concept of the *political* is certainly known by the liberal philosophy, but it is seen from an individualistic or rationalistic point of view and so reduced either to economy or ethics. Therefore we state that they are unable to establish the dynamics of the constitution of collective subjects and to reveal the relationships of the crucial role of antagonism and passion. Therein lies the statement against and, at the same time, claim on all liberals that they are unable to give a relevant answer to contemporary problems. The main statement of our dissertation is that the model of liberal democracy functioning today is unacceptable to the political since a(nta)gonism, the society with conflicts, based on opposition that acknowledges the legitimacy of the other, is its constituting element. *Cum Schmitt contra Schmitt* we argue for Mouffe's agonistic model based on political antagonism confessing: *a(nta)gonism*.

In the last chapter of our dissertation – *The political identity-creating function of the enemy* – we examine the concept of *enemy* taken out of the definition of the *political*, then its own definition. The central concept of Schmitt's political philosophy is not the friend but the *enemy* that serves as a definition of our own *identity*, as a demonstration of our own system of values and virtues. Defining ourselves, our self-definition is only possible through the other, the stranger, the enemy. The political stranger/enemy is the central figure of social life that has the ability to define and to identify and create a community at the same time. The

political enemy – who is exactly the other, the stranger – consolidates national unity and power. It follows from the above that the stranger/enemy definition and self-definition mutually imply each other. The enemy seems indispensable to self-definition, hence it plays a crucial role in the formation of self-identity. Still, a more important question is whether the enemy is the one who threatens us (our identity) or the one designated by us to strengthen our own identity. *Why* do we need an enemy and *how do* we construct his existence? Is the *stranger* equivalent to the enemy, as we can read it in Schmitt's definition? Why does it seem impossible to exist without an enemy? Questioning the above and giving answers constitute our last chapter.

In connection with Carl Schmitt following the principle "Ne simus faciles in verbis!" we arrived at the ambivalent, paradoxical Schmitt. He was ambivalent in his life, ambivalent in his concepts, ambivalent in his positions, ambivalent in his relationship to his intellectual ancestors. Schmitt is ambivalent regarding his *life*, as we could see when dealing with his relationship to national socialism - in 1932 he was still working on how to ban the Nazi Party, so he was trying to elaborate presidential dictatorship that would protect the Weimar Republic/the Weimar Constitution from anti-constitutional forces, either communists or the Nazis, coming into power legally but illegitimately. As opposed to this, he is already a member of the Nazi Party in 1933. Schmitt is ambivalent in his relationship to the *Jewry*, the Jews that we formulated as *Haßliebe*, and presented Sombart's example of Schmitt's story about Disraeli as a proof.

His relationship to his *intellectual ancestors* is also ambivalent. Related to Hobbes we pointed out that he shared his decisionism (Hobbesian) but not his liberalism (anti-Hobbesian), in this respect, he is the "anti-political" thinker to Hobbes. Paradoxical is his way of combining the thoughts on the same topic of his two "oppositely adjusted" intellectual ancestors (Hobbes and Donoso Cortés on decisionism), doing it in such a way as it were not contradictory. He was also ambivalent regarding his *position*, it is enough to refer to his Catholicism. He always confesses his Catholic origin "according to race", which is not equivalent to his way

of life practicing his faith. In an interview given to Dieter Groh he stresses that he used to be a student in a Catholic city but went to a *state* school. His Catholicism manifests in reading those Catholic authors and the similarity to their ideas who give him help in his "fight" against liberalism. We think that Schmitt's ambivalence is *conscious*, this is the way he created his concepts, this is the way he lived, which is characterised by creating and staying in the conscious obscurity and ambiguity. We could see that even in interpreting the concept of enemy he does everything to keep his "enigmatic" concept shrouded in mist. In the last lines of the introduction to the *Leviathan* he writes, "*Stat nominis umbra*. The name *leviathan* throws a long shadow; it has fallen on the work of Thomas Hobbes and will in all likelihood also fall on this little book". The "wrapped" Schmittian position appears as a necessary attribute of the clear and precise conceptualisation, which is constituted in the duality of the light-shadow interplay. Therefore Schmitt might have built his conceptual constructions on Goethe's saying, "wo viel Licht ist, ist auch viel Schatten" (where there is a lot of light, there is a lot of shadow); the "wrapped" position is understandable from this perspective.

We think that the conflictual, a(nta)gonistic dimension of Schmitt's concept of the political can be approached from and traced back to his fight against Weimar, Geneva and Versailles. Our dissertation explicitly examined his "fight against Weimar" that implied, as it were, referred to his indirectly manifesting "fight against Geneva and Versailles" as a precondition. Schmitt's concepts are the tools of the "battle" with which he fights, as already mentioned, "against Weimar, Geneva and Versailles". His writings we analysed also fit in the paradigm of his studies collected by him in the volume *Positions and Concepts*, through which we marked the interpretation framework within which we could establish connection between the writings/studies and thus evaluate them according to their real significance. Schmitt creates his concept of the *political*, similarly to his other important theories and theses, in his Weimar period. As Schmitt always wrote his writings as an answer to "something" (a problem), in this case the unity, power and sustainability of the state

was the main problem that gained existence in the democratic republic following the empire. We can also say that (the future of) democracy is the stake that is incompatible with liberalism (liberal democracy) as well as with its institutionalised form, that is, parliamentarism.

Hence our thesis supports the standpoint that we can only give an answer to Schmitt's critique of liberalism and his relationship to national socialism considering mainly his etatistic position as well as his anti-pluralism explicitly present in the concept of the political. Thus we distanced ourselves from the authors supporting the discontinuity thesis and rather moved towards the ones confessing continuity with the remark that in our dissertation we did not start from the perspective of national socialism, that is, we proved that Schmitt did not criticise liberalism, the reality of parliamentarism in order to prepare the "system" but exactly reversed and modified. Taking Schmitt's etatistic position as a starting point we can give an answer to his critique of liberalism that created the opportunity but not the necessity for his relationship to national socialism. Therefore we discussed in depth the relationship between Schmitt and the "conservative revolution" or the movement "action française", which, analogously –despite discussing problems later confessed by national socialist doctrines as well –are not their predecessors or breeding ground.

Schmitt's goal is the creation of a state that is able to distinguish between friend and enemy. As a consequence, the Weimar Republic based on liberalism and its institutionalisation, parliamentarism are unable to do it since they are incapable of making decisions (they eliminate distinction) on the one hand and eliminate the constitutive element of the political, the enemy on the other. The enemy implies conflict and opposition (antagonism), which is also a constitutive element of the political. The neglect of the conflictual nature and opposition, due to their reduction to another sphere, does not fight against the *status quo*, that is, "against Versailles". From this perspective, one can understand his choice of national socialism that takes up the fight "against Versailles", distinguishes between friend and enemy; "puts an end" to liberalism and tries to create a strong, stable nation *state*, though at a

questionable price. In this context, the concept of the political with Schmitt culminates in the apotheosis of decision, whose incarnation he imagined in the ideal "Führer". The puzzle could still not be solved as the question horizon shifted, that is, our question "why" moved to the horizon of "how". We think that there is no one great decision for national socialism but many small everyday decisions. In addition, Schmitt considered himself as a man incapable of making decisions: "only a man as weak in decision making as I am can expound the theory of decision".

Schmitt's concept of the political was attacked due to its *polemic* nature, which prefers antagonism, conflict and war. It is certain that the political cannot be abolished since it is *constitutive*. Based on the above and taking them into account we think that the problems of the *political* analysed in our dissertation appear with Schmitt in the following aspects and can be summarised as follows: 1) The political as an etatistic concept; 2) The political as an anti-liberal concept; 3) The political as a(n)ta)gonism; 4) The political as a conflict; 5) The political as an identity-creating function.

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