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## Schmitt's Warring Wars On the Political Epistemology of Political Theology

Elad Lapidot

Institute for Systematic Theology, University of Bern, Switzerland  
[elad.lapidot@theol.unibe.ch](mailto:elad.lapidot@theol.unibe.ch)

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# Schmitt's Warring Wars

## On the Political Epistemology of Political Theology

Elad Lapidot

Institute for Systematic Theology, University of Bern, Switzerland  
elad.lapidot@theol.unibe.ch

**Abstract:** *This article shows how Schmitt's work is animated by a fundamental conflict between two concepts of conflict: the one is Schmitt's own, war, polemos, and the other one is discussion, dialogue, conversation or polemics, which may be said, accordingly, to be Schmitt's foe. Schmitt's project is thus described as a conflict between war and discussion: polemos vs polemics, an inner war within the notion of war. The article contemplates this basic configuration and points at some of its major significations for Schmitt's political theology and theory of state and international law.*

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### Introduction

There are many ways in which Carl Schmitt's work is deep in dispute. The main purpose of this article is to examine a fundamental dispute or conflict at the heart of Schmitt's thought, a conflict, so I claim, over the very nature of conflicts, a war on war. A 'war on war'—the various possible meanings of this formula could guide a reading of Schmitt's oeuvre, in which, as Benno Teschke recently indicated, the concept of war constitutes "the neuralgic center."<sup>1</sup> The main task of this article is to propose some elements for such a reading. For Schmitt, undisputedly, is a thinker of conflict, indispensable for any contemporary – especially polemic – conversation on war. Briefly put, Schmitt is an essential thinker of conflict inasmuch as his thought posits conflict not as an obstacle to, problem with, or disturbance of politics, but as the foundation or element of politics; politics – and thus political, including *legal*, thought, that of *nomos* – does not thus aim at overcoming or abolishing conflict, but on the contrary at performing and generating conflict. Thought, insofar as it is about the polis and the nomos, makes not peace but war.

From this perspective, at least one standard historical account of the tension between Schmitt's thought and his politics should be paraphrased by replacing "but" with "hence" in

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<sup>1</sup> Benno Teschke, "Carl Schmitt's Concept of War: A Categorical Failure," in *The Oxford Handbook of Carl Schmitt*, eds. Jens Meierheinrich and Oliver Simons (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 367-400, 367. Teschke, who observes an "elision of this central Schmittian category in the wider Schmitt literature" (id.), provides a historical critique of Schmitt's theory of war, with respect both to the internal coherence of the development of Schmitt's thought and to the history of modern warfare and international relations.

the following: “He is one of the few really significant political theorists of our century, but without a doubt the most controversial.”<sup>2</sup> Schmitt’s thought in fact construes war not only as a subject-matter or content, but also as an existential condition, inasmuch as Schmitt himself, “the crown jurist of the Third Reich,” played an active role in one of the most traumatic wars to have shaped the paradigm of war for contemporary mind and political thought. Not least, Schmitt was active in that specific war within the Second World War, the one that defined a particularly horrific aspect of its long-term trauma, namely the Nazi “war of destruction,” its *Vernichtungskrieg* against the Jews, to use one of Schmitt’s key concepts, though to my knowledge he never used *Vernichtungskrieg* in the context of *this* war.<sup>3</sup>

Engaging with Schmitt—with all the ambivalence of the term “engagement,” which means both bond and war—is thus imperative for any theory of conflict today. This is especially so in view of his influence on contemporary political thinkers, such as on authors like Walter Benjamin, Leo Strauss, Jacob Taubes and Giorgio Agamben, and notably on the post-1989 and post-9/11 reemergence of political theology. It is precisely the constitutively controversial nature of Schmitt’s work that turns it into a locus of radical critical thought, i.e., of critical political thought that searches and tests the limits of contemporary politics, of a liminal thought, therefore, at the limit of thought and practice, a point at which critique borders on war. Schmitt is where contemporary thought finds itself *volens volens* at war.

At one point of his famous essay *The Concept of the Political*, Schmitt actually affirms war as the basic principle not only of political action, but of political thought and discourse. “[A]ll political concepts, visions and words have a *polemical* meaning [*einen polemischen Sinn*]”.<sup>4</sup> *Polemos*, war, is accordingly for him the *hermeneutical* principle of politics, i.e. the specific mode in which signs signify insofar as they are political. Accordingly, a “polemic” is not just a category of style, but something like another grammatical mode next to the indicative, subjunctive, imperative, etc. modes. Political discourse is spoken, and should always be understood, polemically. Schmitt noted that this foundational polemic extends also, or even “in the first place” (*vor allem*) to the very concept of the “political” itself. This means that the question of what is and what is not “political” is already part of political debate, where each side claims that its stance is not political, but pragmatic, economic, scientific. What I am suggesting here is that prior even to the category of “the political” there is a more fundamental political polemic that transpires in Schmitt’s text, namely over the concept of *polemos* or war. The war on politics rests on the war on war.

It is this war that I will examine now: a war on war, or more precisely the *polemos* between war and polemics. In what follows I present Schmitt’s thought as predicating war—and thus politics—on the basis of its difference from polemics, i.e. from discourse and *logos*, precisely as the end of, or a break with, *logos*. In this sense, Schmitt is not only a thinker of *political*

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<sup>2</sup> Heinrich Muth as quoted by Joseph Bendersky, *Carl Schmitt: Theorist for the Reich* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983), x.

<sup>3</sup> See Tescke, “Schmitt’s Concept of war,” 394; For a detailed historical account of Schmitt’s role in National-Socialism and his anti-Semitism, see Raphael Gross, *Carl Schmitt und die Juden. Eine deutsche Rechtslehre* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 2005 [2000]).

<sup>4</sup> Carl Schmitt, *Der Begriff des Politischen. Text von 1932 mit einem Vorwort und drei Corollarien* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2009 [1932]), 29; translated as Georg Schwab as *The Concept of the Political* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2007 [1996]). The translations in the present essay are mine and the references are to the German edition above.

<sup>5</sup> Carl Schmitt, *Der Begriff des Politischen*, 30.

*theology*, i.e., of the relation between politics and religion, but also of the relation between politics and discourse, knowledge or thought. He thus is a thinker of logo-politics or *political epistemology*.

My focus here is not historical. I do not pretend or attempt to present a comprehensive or even representative study of Schmitt's work, much less of its historical context. Rather, my aim is to dwell on several moments in Schmitt's central texts and arguments in order to bring to light, in outline, a conceptual constellation that I deem important for the theory of conflict and war. My argument is nonetheless historical to the extent that the specific conceptual constellation that I observe as central to Schmitt's thought has to my knowledge not yet been articulated as such in the scholarship on Schmitt, at least not in the central interpretations of his work.<sup>6</sup> Considering the vastness of this ever growing literature, however, this impression remains to be verified through more comprehensive research. If my reading is correct, it will carry implications, which I cannot develop here, both for the understanding of Schmitt's ideas and for the broader issues pertaining to its intellectual and historical context, and not the least for the question of anti-Semitism.<sup>7</sup>

I begin by presenting Schmitt's own position as a *polemos*, which I claim is a war on the meaning of war. Next I highlight the precise thought that I find illuminating in Schmitt's theory. I conclude by using this thought to outline a polemic against Schmitt.

## I. A War on the War on War

To portray Schmitt's thought as arising from a polemic on war, I suggest that it may be read as fundamentally addressing or critiquing—as its enemy, so to speak—a paradox of modern politics. The paradox belongs to the historical age of politics that has defined itself as humanist and democratic, as a politics of anti-war or the end of war, of *ewige Frieden*. In one of his texts Schmitt called this age “the age of neutralizations and de-politizations,” i.e., an age in which politics dissolves in technology, and conflict into the pure rationality of “peace, understanding and reconciliation.”<sup>8</sup> It is nonetheless this age that, in its “war in the name of

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<sup>6</sup> As I indicate below, I identify some important elements of my argument in Heinrich Meier's reading of Schmitt; see Heinrich Meier, *Die Lehre Carl Schmitts. Vier Kapitel zur Unterscheidung Politischer Theologie und Politischer Philosophie* (Stuttgart/Weimar: J.B. Metzler, 2012 [1993]), translated by Marcus Brainard as *The Lesson of Carl Schmitt: Four Chapters on the Distinction between Political Theology and Political Philosophy* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2011 [1998]).

<sup>7</sup> I am convinced by Raphael Gross' demonstration in *Carl Schmitt and the Jews* that anti-Semitism and anti-Judaism may not be simply “bracketed out” (394) from Schmitt's work as allegedly arising from his “opportunism” (33-34). This, however, so it seems to me, is also applicable to anti-Semitism itself within Western history. And this in turn does not mean that Western history and thought is reducible to anti-Semitism, nor is Schmitt's thought, even if his “work draws its unity from concepts of state law and dichotomous pairs of concepts, which take up anti-emancipatory and secularized anti-Jewish theological motives of catholic and protestant provenance.” (383) To speak with Gross, “unless one focuses on some banal or in any case common insights” (id.), identifying the essential link of any thought—including Schmitt's—to anti-Judaism should not *in and of itself* disqualify or dissolve this thought, but rather lead to a more complex understanding of anti-Judaism—and ultimately of Judaism itself—as thought.

<sup>8</sup> Carl Schmitt, “Das Zeitalter der Neutralisierungen und Entpolitisierungen (1929)“ in *Der Begriff des Politischen*, 73-87, 82-83.

peace,”<sup>9</sup> and by its very technological prowess, has generated the most extreme and unprecedented forms of war, that is war as a total world war of destruction, extermination and annihilation—a *Vernichtungskrieg*.

*Vernichtungskrieg* is indeed a guiding notion in Schmitt’s thought. He uses this term in order to *negatively* designate the telos of politics, which is consequently based, from this perspective, on a negative teleology, i.e., not as aiming to bring peace but to avoid the purely negative war of *Vernichtung*. As I show later, this idea implies a different, positive or non-negative notion of war, that is, a limited, controlled and rationalized, in sum a *civilized* war without *Vernichtung*. War without annihilation comes to be the goal and element of politics. In contrast, a failure to see the possibility, necessity and reality of non-annihilating warfare, i.e., of identifying war with *Vernichtung*, comes to constitute the end of politics and the beginning of extermination.

Schmitt’s polemics can be thus characterized as a war against modern anti-war politics, the latter being for him the politics of anti-politics, of de-politization. Recognizable in his text are two basic forms of such politics, distinguishable by their different understandings of, and attitude toward, the dominant type of polity in late modernity, namely the state. The first form, which Schmitt often associates with *liberalism* during the period of the Weimar Republic, asserts that the politics of no war is the foundation of the existing political *status quo*, or modern State. On Schmitt’s reading, then, liberalism’s central idea of the state is the state as *Rechtsstaat*, a state of law and order, of normative logic.<sup>10</sup> A war on war, for liberals, is thus about defending and asserting the modern state as a state of law. The second form is *anarchism* or *revolutionary* politics and it asserts, by contrast, that ending war means changing the status quo, and thus ultimately dissolving the state through its “radical negation [*Verneinung*].”<sup>11</sup> Note, for Schmitt, the radical negativity of anarchist politics (a radical *Verneinung* akin to a *Vernichtung*), which he came later to associate with nihilism.<sup>12</sup> It is further interesting to note that the two basic forms of modern anti-war politics—pro-state liberalism and anti-state anarchism—are conceptually, which is to say *necessarily*, at war with one another. And this war of liberalism vs. anarchism, pro-state vs. anti-state, is a total war of annihilation insofar as it

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid. 86.

<sup>10</sup> See Carl Schmitt, *Politische Theologie. Vier Kapitel zur Lehre von der Souveränität* (Berlin: Duncker & Humboldt, 2009 [1922]), 18, 28-29; translated by George Schwab as *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago, 2005 [1985]). On Schmitt and Liberalism, see John McCormick, *Carl Schmitt’s Critique of Liberalism: Against Politics as Technology* (Cambridge et al.: Cambridge University Press, 1997); *Law as Politics: Carl Schmitt’s Critique of Liberalism*, ed. David Dyzenhaus (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1998).

In *Carl Schmitt und die Juden*, Gross argues at length that Schmitt’s critique of liberalism in fact arises from a (concealed) anti-Judaism. Thus, for instance, with respect to Schmitt’s critique of Kelsen, he claims that “Schmitt’s polemic against legal positivism and against the pure doctrine of law suggested that in Kelsen’s liberalism in fact lies hidden the secularized *theology* of the enemy” (260). It seems to me also that Weimar anti-liberalism may be associated with anti-Semitism, and indeed, perhaps even more convincingly, without resorting to hidden theologies. One of the oldest wars that the liberal republic could in fact claim to have ended was the war against the Jews, whom it emancipated. *Assimilated* Jews in the Republic could justly deem that the liberal state did mean ending war and so identify themselves with it. As Gross shows, it was indeed mainly assimilated Jews that Schmitt’s critique targeted (312).

<sup>11</sup> Carl Schmitt, *Der Begriff des Politischen*, 56.

<sup>12</sup> Carl Schmitt, *Der Nomos der Erde im Völkerrecht des Jus Publicum Europaeum* (Berlin: Duncker & Humboldt, 2011 [1950]), 267; translated by G.L. Ulmen as *The Nomos of the Earth in the International Law of the Jus Publicum Europeum* (New York: Telos Press Publishing, 2003).

is a war on war, a war to end war, in which each side understands itself as the very principle of peace fighting the principle of war.

I will shortly state what I understand to be Schmitt's basic critique against modern anti-war politics. *Contra* liberalism, Schmitt's puts forward an argument of fact: he shows how the modern state, as well as the dominant Western historical paradigm of politics ("the political") more generally, was actually founded not on a premise of peace, but on a premise of war. More specifically, according to Schmitt, *it is a matter of historical fact* that political unity, paradigmatic of which is the modern state, has been based on collective self-identification *against* an enemy, i.e. on a conflict without mediation or reconciliation. The decisive notion of the modern state is, then, not law but sovereignty. Sovereignty arises from an exception to the law, a state of exception in which the conflict is one of *Ernstfall*, a matter of life or death, with no possible mediation, synthesis, or dialectics—a state of pure decision. The modern state and state law, according to Schmitt, is thus not based on law, but on sovereign decision, which means the absence of law. As he puts it, "[C]onsidered normatively," the sovereign decision, and thus the state, "is born from a nothingness [*aus einem Nichts*]." <sup>13</sup>

This line of argument puts Schmitt in agreement with anarcho-revolutionary anti-liberalism and anti-statism, which as aforesaid identifies the end of war with the end of the state. If liberalism is blind to the true nature of the state, and therefore to its own doings, then according to Schmitt, Bakunin, Lenin, and Mao all "knew what they were doing." <sup>14</sup> *Contra* anarchism, however, Schmitt offers an even stronger argument, asserting that not only is war a fact, but a *necessity*. He bases this necessity of war not on history, but famously on Christian theology and its associated anthropology, i.e. on the "nature of man." <sup>15</sup>

Herein lies the theological core of Schmitt's thought. This theologoumenon is stated in the characteristic mode of Schmitt's discourse, namely as a dogmatic assertion, which is the logical form of *decision*. Both decision and dogma, in this sense akin to *revelation*, arise from "nothingness," from an absence of law and logos, respectively, which is perhaps the one and same absence of God. This is, I think, the crucial point. The "absence" of God does not mean the inexistence of God, atheism, but instead a separation or distance from a transcendent God, which in extreme conditions nonetheless comes close, *in practice*, to atheism, i.e., to a state of absolute and *normative*, and indeed religious and theological, detachment from the divine. <sup>16</sup>

It is in fact the absence of God and not God's omnipresence or omnipotence that lies at the heart of Schmitt's theology. Schmitt's theological reflections say very little of God. His theological works, such as *Roman Catholicism and Political Form* (1923), focus not on God's

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<sup>13</sup> Carl Schmitt, *Politische Theologie*, 38; see also *Der Begriff des Politischen*, 37.

<sup>14</sup> Carl Schmitt, *Der Begriff des Politischen*, 12; *Politische Theologie*, 70. As Heinrich Meier's *Die Lehre Carl Schmitts* shows, even though Schmitt's political theology is entirely directed against Bakunin (22-23), down to the very term "political theology" itself, the "anarchist was of lesser weight than the bourgeois" "for judging the 'moral significance of the time'" (24). Indeed, worse than the anarchist declaration of war on war for Schmitt was the liberal proclamation of the war on war as *over*. Thus, if anarchism is anti-theology, liberalism is a "pseudo-religion of absolute humanity" (44) and thus the modern anti-Christ: "the anti-Christ can firmly establish its dominion only if it is able to convince people that the promise of *peace and security* has become reality, that war and politics belong to the past." (46)

<sup>15</sup> Carl Schmitt, *Der Begriff des Politischen*, 55.

<sup>16</sup> Herein lies a profound element of ambivalence in the entire theological discourse and tradition, which, if my analysis is correct, is always exposed to Gnosticism.

presence, but on the performing of God's absence through human institutions and their politics, as seen exemplarily in the representation of him by the Catholic Church.<sup>17</sup> The most crucial aspect of theology for Schmitt, which turns God's absence into the condition or element of politics, equally pertains not to God, but to the "nature of man" and its social implications. Schmitt's theology is primarily a social anthropology. Its fundamental dogma is precisely the nothingness that makes dogma possible and necessary, i.e., the human condition of existence in absolute distance from God, namely the condition of original or hereditary sin, *Erbsünde*: "the sinfulness of world and of men."<sup>18</sup> As Heinrich Meier wrote, original sin is for Schmitt "the center of revelation theology and the condition of all [...] genuine morality."<sup>19</sup> As Schmitt himself wrote: "A theologian ceases being a theologian, when he no longer deems men to be sinful or needing redemption and no longer distinguishes the redeemed from the non-redempted, the chosen from the non-chosen."<sup>20</sup>

In the condition of sin, human nature is corrupted, man is by nature evil. It is for this reason that, prior to the coming of the "idyllic final condition [*Endzustand*],"<sup>21</sup> which is to say the theological eschaton or final redemption of man (with Christ's second coming) at the end of times, the condition of "sinfulness of world and men" persists and war is necessary; it simply *is*. I return below to this ontological necessity and to the exact concept of war that it implies. As to the question of anti-war politics, the consequence that Schmitt draws from the theology of sin is that in the necessary, *ontic* state of war, declaring or fighting war in the name of anti-war, as a war *against* war, in the name of united "humanity," necessarily results in a war of annihilation. In the state of original sin, of *necessary* evil, the greatest evil—the evil of the Anti-Christ—is fighting evil as such, i.e. trying to eradicate evil, to end war. "War then takes place in the form of a respective 'final and last war of humanity'. Such wars are necessarily especially intensive and inhuman wars, since, *going beyond the political*, they must simultaneously degrade the enemy in moral and other categories and turn the enemy into an inhuman villain, who must not only be fought off, but terminally *annihilated* [...]"<sup>22</sup> In *The Nomos of the Earth*, Schmitt's paradigm for this most inhuman of all wars, fought in the name of humanity, is the *gerechter Krieg*, the just war: "in just war, any means should be permitted to the just side."<sup>23</sup>

Historically, the most significant just wars, according to Schmitt's analysis in *The Nomos of the Earth*, were the European wars of religion. The early modern wars of religion, which were wars between warring eschatological visions on the end of war, erupted, so Schmitt, from the collapse of the medieval theo-political doctrine that, on the basis of the theology of sin, had traditionally served to prevent just war. This doctrine, which according to Schmitt had been the basis for pre-modern European politics, is that of a *katechon*, a "restrainer" (*Aufhalter*): "The empire of the Christian Middle Ages lasted only as long as the idea of the katechon was alive"<sup>24</sup> Inspired by 2 Thessalonians 2:6-7, which describes something like world politics *prior* to the coming of God's Kingdom at the end of days, Schmitt explained that the *katechon*

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<sup>17</sup> Carl Schmitt, *Römischer Katholizismus und politische Form* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2016 [1923]).

<sup>18</sup> Carl Schmitt, *Der Begriff des Politischen*, 60; *Politische Theologie*, 61-63.

<sup>19</sup> Heinrich Meier, *Die Lehre Carl Schmitts*, 131.

<sup>20</sup> Carl Schmitt, *Der Begriff des Politischen*, 59

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.* 35.

<sup>23</sup> Carl Schmitt, *Der Nomos der Erde*, 113.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.



doctrine is “the belief that a restrainer holds back the end of the world”.<sup>25</sup> This idea of the restrainer is the paradigm of politics in the era of sin, i.e., of necessary war, and for Schmitt this means of politics *tout court*. The purpose of politics is not to end war, but on the exact contrary to prevent any attempt to end the world of war, which is the greatest evil, the evil of the Anti-Christ. Katechonic politics, which was represented before modernity by the Empire, the *Reich*, namely Rome, was no “eternal empire,” but “the historic power that is able to halt the coming of the Anti-Christ and the end of the current eon”.<sup>26</sup> What arose from this doctrine was a fundamental theo-political split between eschatology and worldly politics, between Church and State, Pope and Emperor, a split in the very historical being of the pre-modern Roman Empire.<sup>27</sup> The *katechon*, Schmitt wrote, is the only possible “figure of history” [*Geschichtsbild*] for “an originally Christian faith,” and so “is the only bridge leading from the eschatological paralysis of all human events [*Geschehen*] to such a glorious historical power [*Geschichtsmächtigkeit*] as the Christian Empire [*Kaisertum*] of the Germanic kings.”<sup>28</sup>

In modern times, the decline of the *katechon* and the Christian Empire saw the wars of religion emerge. The new political form that Schmitt considered assumed the function of restraining the Anti-Christ, i.e. of avoiding a total world war, was the *territorial state*, which he came to call the modern European invention of the “sovereign *Flächenstaat*,” as that which put an end to the European wars of religion.<sup>29</sup> “The classic European state managed something quite improbable: that is, to create internal peace and preclude hostility as a legal notion. This state was able to remove the institution of the feud from medieval law and put an end to the confessional civil wars of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, which all sides had conducted as especially just wars, and thus to establish tranquility, safety and order within its territory.”<sup>30</sup> According to this logic, the virtue of the state—and of the *Grossraum*, the “great space” which replaced or will replace the state as the central political structure of the global order<sup>31</sup>—lies precisely in its absolute *particularity*, founded on the absolutely arbitrary territorial definition, which thus prevents it from making any universal claims in the name of the Good and the Just.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 29

<sup>29</sup> Ibid. 36.

<sup>30</sup> Carl Schmitt, 1963 preface to *Der Begriff des Politischen*, 10. Hannah Arendt, in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, develops a similar argument when she calls to counter the 20<sup>th</sup>-century “totalitarian attempt at global conquest and total domination” (viii), and the appearance of “absolute evil” (ix), and advocates for “a new political principle, a new law on earth, whose validity this time must comprehend the whole of humanity while its power must remain strictly limited, rooted in and controlled by newly defined territorial entities” (ix). See Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. (New York: Schocken Books, 2004).

<sup>31</sup> See William Hooker, *Carl Schmitt's International Thought. Order and Orientation* (Cambridge et al.: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 126-155.

<sup>32</sup> This is the reason for the necessarily *secular* essence of the modern state, which is the lesson that Jacob Taubes, for instance, drew from Schmitt, as he wrote in his letter to the latter: “Drawing the line between the spiritual and the worldly may be controversial and must be always made anew (a permanent affair of political theology), but if this separation is abolished, then we are out of our (Occidental) breath, which is also the breath of Thomas Hobbes, who distinguishes between ‘power ecclesiastical and civil’

More generally, politics should not aim at ending war, but on the contrary at instituting, cultivating, regulating, and thereby *restraining* (*katechon*) it—all of which is included in the German word *Hegung*, “hedging,” which was a key concept in Schmitt’s understanding of the basic function of *nomos* as the foundation of “ritual, legal and political co-existence.”<sup>33</sup> “In particular, not the abolition, but the hedging of war [*Hegung des Krieges*] was the core problem of all legal order.”<sup>34</sup> This hedging of war, and not its abolition, was thus also the task that Schmitt assigned to international law: “One must repeatedly recall two truths: first, that international law has the task of avoiding a war of annihilation [*Vernichtungskrieg*], namely of hedging [*umbegen*] war, insofar as it is inevitable, and second, that abolishing war without real hedging will only result in new and probably worse kinds of war, relapses into civil war, and other kinds of war of annihilation.”<sup>35</sup>

This is a simplified, but I think fair exposition of Schmitt’s polemic, which I dare to call the war on the war on war.

## II. Polemics vs. War

For a better grasp and critique of this doctrine, I now wish to claim that it stages a polemic not simply between a politics of peace (or anti-war) and a politics of war, but between two different conceptions of war. In other words, I propose to describe Schmitt’s polemic as a “war on war,” however not in the sense of a war against war (which is precisely the war he was against), but in the sense of a war on the *meaning* of war.

Indeed, a closer look shows that Schmitt, in his critical portrayal of the liberal anti-war vision of politics, does not depict this vision as a heavenly state of absolute harmony and understanding, of complete consensus. Rather, he characterizes the liberal vision of peace and order as a state of permanent conflict and struggle, which, however, possesses a specific form. He describes it as an “eternal conversation” or “eternal discussion.” Thus, in the *Concept of the Political* he observes that, “in liberal thought, the political concept of struggle [*Kampf*] turns, on the economic side, into *competition*, and on the other, ‘spiritual’ side, into *discussion*; instead of the clear distinction between the two different statuses ‘war’ and ‘peace’, emerges the dynamic of eternal competition and eternal discussion.”<sup>36</sup> Both competition and discussion are “eternal” since they forever defer all decision, forever bridge differences and reconcile opposites in the synthesis of economics and discourse, in the economy of discourse.<sup>37</sup>

In *Political Theology* Schmitt criticizes the “German romantics”— he mentions Novalis, Adam Müller, Schelling, and Hegel—for their notion of “the eternal conversation” [*das ewige Gespräch*].<sup>38</sup> He refers to Donoso Cortes’ portrayal of the bourgeoisie as “the discussing class,

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[this phrase is written in English in the original],” see Taubes’ letter to Carl Schmitt from September 18, 1979, in Jacob Taubes, *Ad Carl Schmitt. Gegenstrebiges Fügung* (Berlin: Merve Verlag, 1987), 42.

<sup>33</sup> Carl Schmitt, *Der Nomos der Erde*, 43.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 219.

<sup>36</sup> Carl Schmitt, *Der Begriff des Politischen*, 66.

<sup>37</sup> I suggest that the same analysis may be applied to the category of “technology” that McCormick identifies as the center of Schmitt’s critique of liberalism, see McCormick, *Schmitt’s Critique of Liberalism*.

<sup>38</sup> Carl Schmitt, *Politische Theologie*, 59-60. See also Carl Schmitt, *Politische Romantik* (Berlin: Duncker & Humboldt, 1998 [1919]), translated by Guy Oaks as *Political Romanticism* (Cambridge and London: MIT Press, 1986). Schmitt’s preface from 1924 begins with these words: “Germans lack the facility for making an easily managed, simple name out of a word, so that people can agree without a great deal of

*una casa discutidora*”<sup>39</sup> and declares that “liberalism, with its inconsequence and compromises lives for Cortes only in the short interim, in which it is possible to answer to the question, ‘Christ or Barabbas?’ with a motion for adjournment or with appointing an investigation committee”;<sup>40</sup> “[for liberalism], the ideal of political life is that not only the legislating body, but the entire population discusses and human society becomes a huge club, such that truth would spontaneously emerge through voting.”<sup>41</sup>

I wish to suggest that Schmitt’s seminal political polemic is intimately intertwined with an epistemological polemic, which interconnects the three basic terms of polis, logos, and polemos. Indeed, the target of Schmitt’s polemics can be described as the understanding of polemos—war, struggle, conflict—in accordance with the paradigm of *polemics*, namely as a conflict in the logos, as a war that is *eo ipso* dia-logos or dialectics, conversation and exchange, economy and discourse. Logos reconciles all differences and thus ultimately abolishes all war, such that *polemics* comes to be understood precisely as the transformation of *polemos*, of war, into a figure of speech, a rhetorical trope that transcends and abolishes its original, proper meaning. The abolition of polemos means the abolition of the polis and the nomos, as Schmitt understood them, such that the logos—and perhaps an entire tradition of thought from Plato to Hegel—would be the end and enemy of politics.<sup>42</sup>

It is perhaps not superfluous to emphasize that this position cannot be simply designated as “irrationalism.” It would indeed be instructive to analyze more closely, something I cannot do here, the affinities between Schmitt’s pre-WWII anti-Hegelian critique of logos (“discussion”) as disabling of difference and the various philosophies of difference and otherness, in particular as formulated in post-WWII French thought. Interestingly, a thinker like Emmanuel Levinas, while he not only recognized the same totalizing drive of logos and proceeded to build an entire philosophy of otherness against this drive to totality, marks a contrast with Schmitt, by identifying rationality *with* politics and war. In the opening lines of *Totality and Infinity*, he writes, “Doesn’t lucidity—the opening of spirit to truth—consist in glimpsing the permanent possibility of war?”<sup>43</sup> It would not be politics but ethics—“thou

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difficulty. With us, it is true that an expression quickly becomes banal; but it does not easily become conventional in a practical and reasonable sense. Whatever survives as an objective designation, and thus requires a more thorough determination, plods into ambiguities and verbal disputes, and whoever looks for an objective clarification among the confusion soon sees that he is entangled in an endless conversation and a fruitless discourse.” (5)

<sup>39</sup> Carl Schmitt, *Politische Theologie*, 63.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

<sup>42</sup> See Heinrich Meier, *Die Lehre Carl Schmitts*, who places the conflict between political theology and political philosophy at the center of his interpretation of Schmitt: “The political philosopher and the political theologian are bound together by the critique of the self-forgetting obfuscation, or the intentional exclusion, of what is most important. Both are in agreement that the quarrel over what is right is the fundamental quarrel and that the question *How should I live?* is the first question for man. However, with the answer that each gives to this question, they stand in insuperable opposition to one another. Whereas political theology builds unreservedly on the *unum est necessarium* of faith and finds its security in the truth of revelation, political philosophy places the question of what is right entirely on the ground of ‘human wisdom’ so as to develop the question in the most fundamental and comprehensive way available to man.” (*Die Lehre* 73; *The Lesson of Carl Schmitt* 42).

<sup>43</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Totalité et infini. Essai sur l'extériorité* (Paris: *Le livre de poche*, 1991 [Martinus Nijhoff, 1961]), 5. On Schmitt and Levinas see Aryeh Botwinick, “Same/Other versus Friend/Enemy: Levinas

shalt not kill”—that disrupts logos. For another thinker of difference, Michel Foucault, the totalizing logos of philosophy is the enemy not of politics or ethics, but of *discourse* itself in its specificity and discontinuity, namely as an event.<sup>44</sup>

Schmitt, however, was focused on the possibility and necessity of radical difference and non-synthesis as *the* element of politics, as war. Vis-à-vis the liberal understanding of *polemos* as polemics, Schmitt's position, too, may be therefore described as based on a specific, contrasting notion of *polemos*. It is this notion that I find worthy of closer examination. Most succinctly, as a central element of *The Concept of the Political*, Schmitt describes the paradigmatic conflict at the basis of politics, war, in contrast to polemics, as “*seinsmäßige* opposition”, namely as a conflict not in logos, but in being. It is not a logical or dialectical opposition, between intellectual or ideological positions, but an ontic, *existential* conflict, between rival entities. War is the “*seinsmäßige* negation of another being”, whose paradigmatic phenomenon is not the “‘purely spiritual’ struggle of discussion,” but the “physical killing of people.”<sup>45</sup>

In this there is an obvious similarity to Marx's critique of Hegel's speculative contemplation of abstract oppositions in favor of the militant discourse of concrete social struggle: “The history of all society so far is the history of class struggles.”<sup>46</sup> I think that Schmitt, however, goes a step further away from Hegel than Marx.<sup>47</sup> Turning from *Spirit* to *Society* does not contradict dialectics. Schmitt's ontic war, however, means precisely to break or cut with dialectics—and indeed with all logic. It is crucial to acknowledge the epistemological and hermeneutical corollaries of Schmitt's anti-logical notion of war, i.e., of *polemos* as the negation or absence of logos. The situation of war, of ontic opposition, precludes all possibility of synopsis, i.e., any position that would afford a unified view of the situation, which would enable a transcendent, external and “neutral” perception and understanding of the situation as *one* situation. In other words, the logos of war is always-already subject to the being of war, to *polemos*, which means that it is, in the literal meaning of the word, necessarily *partial*:

The possibility of correctly recognizing and understanding [*Erkennen und Verstehen*] and thus the authorization to participate in the conversation and to judge is thus given here only through existential interest and participation [*Teilhaben und Teilnehmen*]. The extreme case of conflict can only be established [*ausmachen*] by and between the parties; i.e., each of them can only decide by himself whether the otherness of the foreigner in the concrete existent case

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contra Schmitt,” in Meierheinrich/Simons, *Handbook of Schmitt*, 338-366; Gavin Rae, *The Problem of Political Foundations in Carl Schmitt and Emmanuel Levinas* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

<sup>44</sup> Michel Foucault, *L'ordre du discours* (Paris: Gallimard, 1971), 47-53. On Schmitt and Foucault, see Astrid Deuber-Mankowsky, “Nothing is Political, Everything Can Be Politicized: On the Concept of the Political in Michel Foucault and Carl Schmitt,” in *Telos* 142 (2008): 135-161; and Mark Neocleous, “Perpetual war, or ‘war and war again’: Schmitt, Foucault, fascism,” in *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 22.2 (1996): 47-66.

<sup>45</sup> Carl Schmitt, *Der Begriff des Politischen*, 31.

<sup>46</sup> Karl Marx & Friedrich Engels, “Manifest der Kommunistischen Partei,” in Karl Marx & Friedrich Engels, *Werke*, Band IV, Institut für Marxismus-Leninismus Beim ZK der SED (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1977), 459-493, 462.

<sup>47</sup> On Schmitt and Marxism, see Ernst Nolte, “Carl Schmitt und der Marxismus,” in *Der Staat* 44.2 (2005): 187-211.

of conflict signifies the negation of his own kind of existence, such that he should defend or fight to preserve his own, ontic [*seinsmäßige*] kind of life.<sup>48</sup>

One of the most manifest consequences of this polemic epistemology is that the fundamental *phenomenon* of war, i.e., the basic figure in which the situation of war becomes visible, is properly speaking not war itself. “War” is already a unifying perception of the situation, already objectifying. Schmitt’s *polemos* is in this sense anti-Heraclitean.<sup>49</sup> The concept of “war” came to be central in Schmitt’s later, historical work on the development of European international law in *The Nomos of the Earth*. In *The Concept of the Political*, however, the basic phenomenon of war is not war, but the *Feind*, foe or enemy, namely an irreducibly *partial* perception.

As Schmitt puts it, “The concepts friend and foe are to be taken in their concrete, existential meaning, not as metaphors or symbols... They are not normative and not ‘purely spiritual’ oppositions.”<sup>50</sup> Like war, the foe, too, is no figure of speech, no *logos*, but an “ontic reality” [*seinsmäßige Wirklichkeit*]; and this real hostility is not the economic rivalry of the competitor or the discursive opposition of the disputant [*Diskussionsgegner*], but the ontic “negation of [one’s] own kind of existence.” The perception of the *Feind* is accordingly not a deduction but a *decision*,<sup>51</sup> a decision on the non-applicability of the law, on the exception, which is precisely the sovereign decision at the basis of all politics. The decision on the enemy is the basis for every perception of war, which is therefore not deducible (*ableitbar*) from any logic—religious, moral, legal or economic—but arises equally from a decision.<sup>52</sup> All knowledge of war is *eo ipso* a declaration of war: never merely theory, but always already—to go back to Marx—a *manifesto*.<sup>53</sup>

*Polemos* as end or limit of *logos* also determines the nature of the political, according to Schmitt. In *The Concept of the Political*, Schmitt famously describes the political as properly belonging to no specific domain of human existence: politics is “no proper field of reality

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<sup>48</sup> Carl Schmitt, *Der Begriff des Politischen*, 26.

<sup>49</sup> See Heinrich Meier’s discussion of the distinction between Schmitt’s “political” and Ernst Jünger’s “agonal,” or Heraclitean, concept of war: “Over against the agonal principle, according to which man is not designed for peace, stands the political principle, according to which man cannot achieve his destiny save by committing himself wholly and existentially to the realization of dominion, order, and peace.” (*Die Lehre Carl Schmitts* 69; *The Lesson of Carl Schmitt* 39)

<sup>50</sup> Carl Schmitt, *Der Begriff des Politischen*, 27.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.* 32.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.* 34.

<sup>53</sup> See Heinrich Meier, who argues that this conception, “[i]f it holds anywhere, then nowhere more than in the case of the community of faith, which is based on a truth beyond all human reason” (*Die Lehre Carl Schmitts* 101; *The Lesson of Carl Schmitt* 61). Both Meier (id.) and Raphael Gross (*Schmitt und die Juden*, 66) point to the words that were added to the 1933 version of Schmitt’s text, which themselves suggest, and were also read by Schmitt’s contemporaries, such as Ernst Forsthoff, as suggesting anti-Semitic statements: “Neither the question as to whether the ‘most extreme case’ is given nor the further question as to what becomes vitally necessary as ‘the most extreme means’ in order to defend one’s own existence and to preserve one’s own being—in *suo esse perseverare*—could be decided by a foreigner [*Fremder*]. The foreigner and the man who is of a different type [*der Andersgeartete*] may behave strictly ‘critically’, ‘objectively’, ‘neutrally’, ‘purely scientifically’ and, by means of similar obfuscations, intrude with his foreign judgment. His ‘objectivity’ is either merely a political obfuscation or a complete non-relatedness that misses everything essential.”

[*Sachgebiet*]”.<sup>54</sup> This is a notion worthy of careful consideration. Politics is no specific domain of reality, no specific field of objects or entities in the world. This means that politics is nothing *in* reality, but a mode *of* reality. Or to speak with Heidegger, politics is no being [*Seiende*], and no ontic category, i.e. does not describe any specific entity, but is rather an ontological category, i.e., it designates how and what one understands in general under “being,” what it means to say that something *is*. Politics is accordingly an ontological mode, or to use Kantian-Husserlian terminology, a transcendental mode, i.e. the basic set of conditions and definitions for any experience and cognition of the world. In a certain sense, politics can be thus deemed a mode of logic itself, that of logic’s irreducible rupture—the mode of war.

Indeed, Aristotle identifies the basic operations of propositional discourse, of the logic of the true and the false, as “composition and division” (*De Interpretatione* 16a12), where Hegel’s logic is based on acts of *Unterschied*, of difference. It is thus as a proper intervention in logic that we can read Schmitt when he defines the political as “the extreme degree of intensity of connection or separation, association or dissociation,”<sup>55</sup> or when he writes that, “[T]he political opposition is the most intensive and radical opposition”.<sup>56</sup> In other words, politics is thus a specific mode, form or “intensity” that *any* difference, in any domain of reality or discourse—moral, metaphysical, religious, ethical, economic, spiritual or material—may take. Any difference becomes political when it becomes radical. Politics is logics in the mode of the extreme.

What is the extreme degree of logical difference? Schmitt’s text, as noted above, from the outset situates the question, as does Marx, in the element of human existence, of collective existence. The logical is examined as socio-logical. Accordingly, the question of “connection or separation, association or dissociation” is analyzed from the outset as the question of human association and disassociation, of grouping and conflict. We may say that Schmitt considers logos essentially as discourse, i.e., as essentially implying and being connected with subjects or subject-positions (Foucault), and more specifically collective subject-positions, groups. Affirmations bring people together, unite; differences separate. The “extreme degree of intensity” of socio-logics, of association and disassociation—i.e., the moment when social dynamics and formation, when “grouping” through unity and difference, based on whatever discourse about whatever domain of reality, becomes *political*—is when polemics becomes war: “Any religious, moral, economic, ethnic or other opposition transforms into a political opposition, when it is strong enough to effectively group people according to friend and foe.”<sup>57</sup>

At the *political* degree of intensity, any difference, any conflict and disagreement transforms from the logical into the ontic, from discourse into existence, from polemics into polemos. This means that the specific content and logic of the conflict become irrelevant, and the conflicting parties come to be opposed to each other in their very existence, in a “*seinsmäßige* opposition.” It then becomes clearer why Schmitt’s position, at least on the reading that I offer here, is not simply irrationalist. War, ontic *polemos*, is not simply different from or contradictory or even *prior* to polemics, logical *polemos*, but *arises* from it. War (and thus

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<sup>54</sup> Carl Schmitt, *Der Begriff des Politischen*, 36.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.* 28.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

politics) depends on logics—polemos emerges as the radical degree of polemics, as dialectics in extremis, as logos driven to its end.

Schmitt does not exactly explain this relation of polemos and polemics. Ultimately, of course, this relation itself is irreducible to logic, and thus cannot *explain* how war emerges from discussion.<sup>58</sup> Nonetheless, I think this constellation could be—if not explained—further and more concretely *articulated* within the nexus generated by Schmitt between the logical, the sociological, and the theological. One possible way of doing so would be to say that *polemos* is the end and limit of *logos* in the sense that it is the mode in which *logos* exists in the element of finitude, i.e., not in “eternity,” like the “eternal conversation” of polemics, but in the realm of finite temporal human existence. That time is the element of finitude and therefore the foundational dimension of inter-personal relations as based on radical otherness was also Levinas’ observation, not the least inspired by Heidegger. Theologically, one could say that polemos is logos as it exists in time, namely before the end of time, before the eschaton, and the ultimate reconciliation of all contradictions and resolution of all conflicts.

Be that as it may, any dispute or difference, which, considered logically, dialectically, *sub specie aeternitatis*, is only temporal and relative, that is, provisional, may become absolute once posited in the form of finitude, in time or in history, since any logically relative position may become *irreversibly* defining for shaping finite human existence, individual human life. The relative position may thus become embodied as a full, total and absolute human being, a totally defining framework of life, collective life, which is perhaps what people often mean when they speak of *identity*, i.e., when what they stand for is what they *are*. In these conditions, the polemics, dialogical and dialectical opposition between the relative positions, would become or crystallize into an ontic war, *seinsmäßige polemos*. War is a relation of existential negation between human collectivities, each of which represents the ontic negation of the other, an enemy that brings ultimate evil: that is, not refutation but death.<sup>59</sup> A state of war would thus mean the constant *potentiality*—and *not actuality* as Schmitt emphasizes<sup>60</sup>—of an active bodily negation and annihilation (once again, *Vernichtung*) in the form of “physical killing.”

In short, this is the idea that I find illuminating in Schmitt: politics as *logos* in the medium of finitude. This idea no doubt requires further elucidation and articulation. Among other difficulties, it implies a notion of logos *outside* of finitude, infinite or eternal, a “Platonic” logos, and thus preserves an entire tradition of thought to which it had seemed opposed. In other words, finitude and thus politics, inasmuch as they define human reality, would nonetheless be the *exception*. Existentially, this tension is transposed onto human reality itself through theological discourse, in which finitude, the exception, is, as viewed from the perspective of redemption, considered evil. Once again, it would be instructive to compare this position to

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<sup>58</sup> This is arguably the reason for “Schmitt’s consistent suppression of social relations as a relevant category of analysis,” as Teschke has critically observed, which results in “the abstraction of power from domestic and international social contexts.” See Teschke, “Schmitt’s Concept of War,” 371. The question posed by Teschke, “What causes war?” to which Schmitt would have failed to provide a concrete answer, is precisely what the ontic state of war precludes from asking: there is no sufficient reason for war, because war is the absence of sufficient reason.

<sup>59</sup> It is in this sense that I suggest interpreting what Meier presents as a key phrase of Schmitt (quoting Theodor Däubler) on the relation between the self and the enemy: “the enemy is our own question as a figure” [*Der Feind ist unsere eigene Frage als Gestalt*] (*Die Lehre Carl Schmitts* 76; *The Lesson of Carl Schmitt* 44).

<sup>60</sup> “War is only the extreme realization of enmity. It doesn’t have to be something everyday or normal, and also not be felt as something ideal or desirable, however it must remain existent as a real possibility, as long as the concept of the enemy preserves its meaning” (ibid. 31).

later political epistemologies, such as Foucault's, in which discourse is *essentially* finite and so, perhaps, essentially political.

Nonetheless, to conclude this paper, I now offer a quick indication of how this idea itself—politics as logos in the medium of finitude—may be developed in its proper logic in order to provide a fundamental critique of the conclusion that Schmitt draws from this idea.

### III. A War on Polemics

What I wish to critique is what I understand to be one of the most important consequences that Schmitt draws from the foregoing notion, i.e., concerning the political limitation of logos in human finitude, namely the assertion that the modern sovereign territorial state *limits* war. Ultimately, my critique is an epistemo-political critique of the modern state, or more precisely of a certain dominant—and, as I think Schmitt convincingly showed, *normative*—discourse underlying modern and contemporary performances of politics in the form of the modern state.

My argument, for which I can only offer here a preliminary articulation, runs roughly as follows: if war indeed arises from the absolutization—i.e., ontologization—of logically relative positions into collective identities (which is a necessary process under the condition of finitude—or sin—of human existence), this means that for a collective identity to arise as a polity, i.e., as a decision on its enemy and *eo ipso* as a declaration of war, the relative position that it stands for must be perceived and performed by the members of this polity as absolute, as *truth*, in the socio-logical sense of prescribing and generating a complete and self-sufficient form of collective human life—a culture.

This in turns means, *first*, that *any* polity by definition stands for human life or human being, in short for “humanity,” which is to say that any polity (namely any collective identity for which people are willing to wage war: to kill and die) is a particularity with a universal truth claim. *Second*, it means that all war, as *ontic* negation, i.e., as a conflict between two absolute and mutually negating entities, is fought, by each side, in the name of “humanity.” All war is thus a war on war, and therefore all war is a *Vernichtungskrieg*. If so, this must also apply to the modern sovereign state and to its wars, which are not limited, but are necessarily, like all wars, wars of annihilation.

What is, then, the distinguishing feature of the modern state?

In keeping with Schmitt's observation, what distinguishes the modern state is that the logically relative position that this specific type of polity renders ontic and absolute, i.e., its absolute “truth,” is *the position of relativity itself*, i.e., the position of *negating absolute universal truth*. The modern state is not only, like any polity, *without* truth; it is specifically *against* truth, i.e., its non-truth (or relative truth) is anti-truth, or anti-logos. In other words, in terms of the foregoing discussion concerning the various meanings of polemics, the state is a war on polemics.

This agrees with Schmitt's reading of Hobbes' claim that *auctoritas non veritas facit legem*, which arises from his “correct recognition that it is precisely the conviction that both sides [to a conflict] have on what is true, good and just that generates the worst hostilities.”<sup>61</sup> It is the same anti-truth logic that, on Schmitt's reading, motivated the shift in modern, inter-statist international law which went from basing the legitimacy of war on a *justa causa*, “just cause,” to basing it on a *justus hostis*, a “just enemy”: “[t]he legitimacy of war no longer consists in the

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<sup>61</sup> Carl Schmitt, *Der Begriff des Politischen*, 60.



agreement with specific content of theological, moral, or legal norms [= *justa causa*], but in the institutional and structural quality of the political structure [= *justus hostis*],” i.e., the sovereign state.<sup>62</sup> In other words, the modern state is built on the principle of non-truth (*auctoritas non veritas*), which precludes *justa causa*, and therefore legitimizes its (necessary) wars.<sup>63</sup>

Consequently, the state’s existence as a particular combatant entity does not result from the ontologization of its logic in the medium of finitude; rather it *is* its logic. The sovereign state’s ideology, its “truth,” is nothing more than to *be* a particular combatant collective identity, *against* all others. The sovereign state therefore exists not just ontically, but ontologically in *seinmäßige* opposition to all other sovereign states, not due to any underlying commitment to some ideology, religion, law, ethics, culture, economic vision, or any other form of discourse, logics or truth, but, on the contrary, due to its underlying commitment to preclude all truth, and therefore to have as its sole socio-logical principle of “grouping” the ontic negation of all other states.

The logos of the modern state, insofar as it follows this conceptual dynamic, may be thus said to erase all logical or ideological—moral, metaphysical, religious, ethical—*differences* or, more precisely, to crystallize such differences as identities and to render them *indifferent* in determining actual political life and strife, which is reduced to the sole principle of *being*, or more accurately negative being (the ontic negation of others). This negative political ontology may be perhaps proposed as the principle at work in generating various constellations of the collective consciousness that functions as the agency of the modern state, namely—and this opens a path for reading Schmitt’s texts for the National-Socialist cause—the “people,” which is to say, first and foremost, the nation, but also race, language, culture, as well as religion and class, insofar as each of these latter inform the collective subject of the sovereign state. Once again, the basic principle of this subject is absolute particularity to the exclusion of all truth. What I propose here is therefore also a critical observation on discourses of difference in their function within the epistemo-political paradigm of the modern state.

In this logic, the logic of non-logic, the sole value of state politics would accordingly be the quantitative quality of pure substance, or, to put it in the terms of Donald Trump, to be “great.” It is also to be the “first,” namely in war for being. The state’s war is *eo ipso* a war against truth, i.e., against any other principle but war, a war against polemics, such that the last difference erased by the state principle is the difference of deferment between *potential* and *actual* war. The existence of the sovereign state demands the actuality of war. In sum, it would not be contradicting Schmitt to say that, at least on his reading, the modern state system in fact comes very close to being the institution of universal evil.

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<sup>62</sup> Carl Schmitt, *Der Nomos der Erde*, 114-5.

<sup>63</sup> It is here, I think, that my interpretation diverges from Heinrich Meier’s (*Die Lehre Carl Schmitts*), with whom I nonetheless share a basic epistemo-political concern. Meier’s reading places “truth” at the center of Schmitt’s political theology, in analogy—and, as aforementioned, in opposition—to political philosophy. Thus, for him, the main element in Schmitt’s theology is epistemologically *positive*, namely “revelation” or the “truth of revelation” (73): “Political theology stands and falls with faith in revelation”; “Friend and foe are divided by the truth of revelation” (109). The revealed truth of political theology thus stands vis-à-vis the reasoned truth of political philosophy. Indeed, Meier recognizing hereditary sin, *Erbssünde* as “the center of revelation theology” for Schmitt (131), points out the negative epistemological significance of original sin, i.e. eating from the tree of knowledge, and identifies it with philosophy itself (141). My own claim simply pushes this thought further by arguing that, *accordingly*, Schmitt’s theology doesn’t offer a *different* truth than philosophy, but a different ontology of truth. Revelation reveals sin, namely the will for truth (knowledge, reason), as the absence of truth. No doubt, the epistemology of original sin requires much more profound study and reflection. Cf. Hans Blumenberg, *Die Legitimität der Neuzeit* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1996 [1966]), 319f.

#### IV. Ceasefire

As a brief epilogue, I wish to point out an alternative direction. If we read in Schmitt, as I have suggested, an insight about politics as logos in the medium of finitude, then the fundamental political condition is not a state of war, nor a state of polemos, but the state or rather absolute difference, i.e., the *time* between polemos and war, or between potential and actual war. Political time would be neither that of war nor of peace, but of something like a ceasefire, where polemics, “eternal conversation,” would in fact operate as the deferment or postponement of physical killing—and of substantive being, a deferment of identity and sovereignty. In short, against Schmitt’s war on polemics, one may suggest a politics of polemics on war.

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