

THE ENEMY HAS NO FUTURE: Figure of the >Political<*

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*On peut seulement le dénier.*¹

Jacques Derrida

I.

Where does the enemy come in, in our histories? The question amounts to nothing less than how history began, came to happen and continues to happen, historically. The question of history is a historical question primarily and principally because of the enemy, in the figure of the enemy, through the making of the enemy. The threshold crossed into history, a decisive move performed at the dawn of time, is the distinction of the enemy. But who is it that turns up, or out, to be the enemy?

When in the wake of Desert Storm Avital Ronell came up with the unsurpassed slogan “Support our tropes,” a tropology was opened up of what the critics of ideology at the time had listed as false, secret and deceiving, arguments in the fighting of one particular enemy.² In a deeper sense, this uncovering as tropes of false arguments, devious suggestions and misguided good will could claim to be the better critique because it exposed the hypocritical involvement of a good will to power. It is the very susceptibility of any politics of good will to the hypocrisy of affirmative actions that literally identifies and, that is, produces the identification of the enemy. It is the literal existence of the enemy out there, that makes the non-evident trope of the enemy, the very possibility of its existence, the principal enemy of tropes. In the face of our tropes, the enemy reveals itself as the all too true non-trope that haunts the political: a sphere whose virtual quality manifests itself historically in different states, configurations and reconfigurations of state power. Thus, the enemy constitutes or brings to a constitution a state of political affairs whose concreteness is owed to what it threatens rather than to what it supports and binds rather than organizes, in a “conception of reality” that double binds what it perceives by a quasi religious projection. The very awe and name of that perception is the enemy. More than anything else it is he who governs what is real, effective in reality, in the conception of how to grasp it.³

This rough account of what has been accumulated in theories of the enemy, in the rhetorical histories of its many occurrences, has many sources. The matrix of these enemy instances and encounters has been most effectively propagated in Carl Schmitt’s conception of what he calls, in the cunning substantiation of a mere adjective, “the political.”⁴ A

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¹ Crucial, to begin with, JACQUES DERRIDA, *POLITIQUES DE L’AMITIE* 138 (1994).

² See AVITAL RONELL, *FINITUDE’S SCORE: ESSAYS FOR THE END OF THE MILLENNIUM* 269 (1994).

³ Hans Blumenberg’s *Wirklichkeitsbegriff* combines the German “begreifen,” to conceive of (as in “Begriff,” concept) and “wirken,” being effective (as in “Wirklichkeit,” reality). The term has been rather awkwardly rendered as “concept of reality” in the English translation of his seminal essay *Wirklichkeitsbegriff und Möglichkeit des Romans*, lead article for *1 POETIK UND HERMENEUTIK* (1964), *reprinted in* *ÄSTHETISCHE UND METAPHOROLOGISCHE SCHRIFTEN* (Anselm Haverkamp ed., 2001).

⁴ CARL SCHMITT, *DER BEGRIFF DES POLITISCHEN* (1927). Compare CARL SCHMITT, *DER BEGRIFF DES POLITISCHEN* (1st sep. ed. 1931), and CARL SCHMITT, *DER BEGRIFF DES POLITISCHEN* (2d ed. Hanseatische Verlagsanstalt 1933), with CARL SCHMITT, *DER BEGRIFF DES POLITISCHEN*

concept, “Begriff des Politischen,” whose very grip is dubiously uncertain because of the spectral quality of what it tries to trace and fix in the name of the enemy as the instituting, primordial trope of all state politics. What makes the state a state and brings it into a state of political order is a reality not so much, but a perception of reality whose concreteness appears to be self-evident: it promises clear evidence in the place of a most unclear threat, a threat of mythical proportions. In short, Schmitt’s enemy is a “mythic analogue” that constitutes the modern state of politics in a fashion comparable and functionally analogous to the model of evidence with which tragic myth had served the maintenance of the ancient Greek state, the *polis* of Athens.⁵

I do not want to go into Schmitt philology here; there is more than meets the eye in Schmitt’s text and its reception: from Hegel to Derrida, Heidegger to Blumenberg, Gehlen to Luhmann, Benjamin to Agamben. They represent varieties of rhetorical history, or histories of its rhetorical thrust, in which they coincide to the extent that a proposed synopsis (like this one) becomes possible. Agamben’s logical and Derrida’s rhetorical analysis, Luhmann’s functional and Blumenberg’s metaphorological analysis have that much in common: they explain the efficiency of Schmitt’s design while struggling with its impact, the inevitable question of its truth, its pretence to be nothing but literally true. Most of Carl Schmitt discussants are content to repeat and restate, take for granted and historically illuminating, the formal juxtaposition of friend and enemy and proceed from that seemingly transhistorical given as an unsurpassable, concrete frame of reference. The purely formal antagonism, the antithesis friend / enemy suggests a symmetry that seems mutually applicable and universally reversible, but is a symmetrical a-symmetry.⁶ Agamben and Derrida, in *Homo sacer* and *The Politics of Friendship*, try to elucidate the potentiality and the performative force of Schmitt’s design, but the development of both arguments in Derrida’s and Agamben’s re- and de-construction circumvents the enemy in order to reinvest his place in Schmitt’s distinction with competing figures, *homo sacer* and friend. Both, Agamben and Derrida, insist on what is produced, generated in the sense of generative grammar, by Schmitt’s symmetrical a-symmetry, in order to rescue, rehabilitate and reclaim, what seems a lost cause in history as we know it, the symmetry of friendship under asymmetrical conditions. Noteworthy, Adorno’s counterpart in postwar controversy, Arnold Gehlen, transformed Schmitt’s (without mentioning the name) friend / enemy antagonism into an anthropologically grounded theory of latency: threat of war necessitates for the first time in history—as a post-historical “priority of consequence” (“Konsequenzerstmaligkeit”) —a future of peace, as peace.⁷ What peace means from now on and for the first time, as it were, is a ban on war in permanence. It bans and leaves behind war in the mythical past of “history.”

The enemy, as it seems from now on, was a tragic fiction from the start: the necessity to exclude in order to name, to to ban and to fight, what threatens latently from within rather than from outside, at that. It is Schmitt’s conviction—rather, it has become, more and more, his outspoken conviction—that any true friend may turn into an enemy, while the true enemy remains what he is, the enemy: his truth is that he remains. Paranoia

(3d ed. Duncker & Humblot 1963). Supplementary documents can be found in HEINRICH MEIER, CARL SCHMITT, LEO STRAUSS UND DER BEGRIFF DES POLITISCHEN (1988).

⁵ Contemporary with Schmitt, but ultimately in the vein of Nietzsche’s interpretation of Greek tragedy, Clemens Lugowski uses the “mythic analogue” in DIE FORM DER INDIVIDUALITÄT IM ROMAN (1932).

⁶ Reinhart Koselleck, *Zur historisch-politischen Semantik asymmetrischer Gegenbegriffe*, in 6 POETIK UND HERMENEUTIK 65, 104 (1975), reprinted in REINHART KOSELLECK, VERGANGENE ZUKUNFT (1987).

⁷ The controversy between Arnold Gehlen and Theodor W. Adorno, antagonists of German sociological theory in the 1950s, here in a famous radio debate of 1965, is documented in FRIEDEMANN GRENZ, ADORNOS PHILOSOPHIE IN GRUNDBEGRIFFEN 225, 241, 251 (1974); ANSELM HAVERKAMP, LATENZZEIT: WISSEN IM NACHKRIEG 87 (2004).

haunts the Schmittian state, turns “the political” into a ghostlike sphere, into zones of security politics. Derrida compares Schmitt’s design to a “tableau” in which a taxonomy and a syntax enable the enemy to be identified and distinguished from the friend (Derrida 162). The “political” is a machine of enemy identification, a “reflective mechanism” which informs automatically, below the threshold of theory, a practice and pragmatism without theoretical reflection, a sphere in which the difference of polemical practice and political theory evaporates.⁸ Political discourse is grounded in the denial of that difference and the result and gain of the denial is the identification of the enemy, the enemy proclaimed. Schmitt’s concept of the political is and performs a performative denial, a negative gesture whose positive counterpart is the evidence of the enemy, the enemy as evidence (Derrida 166). The rhetoric of this evidence is beyond mere critique, it includes the critique in a logic of performative self-fulfillment. The state in its modern form presupposes and incorporates, rationalizes as well as denies, the paranoia of the political, and the law in its formal existence is to be nothing but the mechanism of the state’s denial, the institution of this denial through “concrete order.”⁹

II.

There is a complicating aspect, confusing for most adepts of Schmitt, in the coincidence of evidence and realism, the meta-rhetorical doubling and development of the quest for evidence in a rhetoric of the “possible real,” the real as possible (“reale Möglichkeit”), a very pregnant, enigmatic formula. Schmitt’s concept of “the political” is conceptual to the extent that it comes to firm grips with, defines and decides, what is real, the result and idea of which is the political in its totality, as totality. The rhetorical emphasis on the reality of the possible highlights a condition of possibility in which politics is reality because of the “concrete” possibility of the enemy as the always existing horizon of life and death in general. Everything underlies, is subjected to, the condition of possibility that is the political.¹⁰ Its evidence, in short, is no evidence, and its possibility no possibility as such but the latent condition of the enemy as real, a condition which conditions—as a “priority of consequence”—the political and organizes its paranoia as a conceiving of reality in the totality of what is effective. The totalizing moment of the political conditioning of the real transposes the distinction of friend and enemy from the level of what happens in and as history, historical manifestation, to the level of anthropological speculation. The enemy, the threshold crossed into history at the dawn of time, has turned into the crucial fossil of advanced anthropology, the fetish of Humanism.

I am jumping to conclusions, while the missing link that connects the humanist fossil, the enemy brother and enemy other at the dawn of time, with the reality conception of Schmitt’s politico-polemical rhetoric, is still missing. Agamben’s *homo sacer*, humanist subject par excellence, identifies the man and bone of contention, *homo*, not *sapiens*, and locates him in a primal zone of utmost ambivalence, the sacred. According to Agamben, the double meaning of *sacer*, “sacred and damned,” states “a zone of indistinction between sacrifice and homicide” that constitutes the political through a double exclusion: “*homo*

⁸ NIKLAS LUHMANN, *Reflexive Mechanismen* (1966), in 1 SOZIOLOGISCHE AUFKLÄRUNG (1970) offers a congenial functional description for the self-reflectivity involved in enemy identification.

⁹ This is a keyword of another contemporary of Schmitt, the social historian OTTO BRUNNER in his seminal work *LAND UND HERRSCHAFT* (5th ed. 1965) (1939). A synopsis can be found in GADI ALGAZI, *Konkrete Ordnung und Sprache der Zeit*, in *GESCHICHTSSCHREIBUNG ALS LEGITIMATIONSWISSENSCHAFT* 166-203 (Peter Schöttler ed., 1997).

¹⁰ HEINRICH MEIER, *DIE LEHRE CARL SCHMITTS: VIER KAPITEL ZUR UNTERSCHIEDUNG POLITISCHER THEOLOGIE UND POLITISCHER PHILOSOPHIE* 59, 62 (1994).

sacer presents the originary figure of life taken into the sovereign ban and preserves the memory of the originary exclusion through which the political dimension was first constituted.”¹¹ A legal figure of truly archaic proportions serves as the screen memory for a juridical structure of exclusion whose potentiality governs “the logic of sovereignty” (Agamben 38); Schmitt’s “state of exception” is only the last consequence: a last, juridically “empty zone” of indistinction in which the figure of included exclusion mirrors the enemy’s alterity, an alterity that effaces all particularity in favor of an empty screen, the empty place of his many possible emergences, reinvestments, fictitious narratives. Agamben, who has been read as the most able of Schmitt readers, is in fact the most able of his enemies: The enemy vanishes in the face of the sacred man, *arcanum* in the crypt of justice. *Homo sacer*, the primordial victim of legal order is no enemy, although the enemy, any enemy and particularly citizen enemies may be conveniently turned into *homines sacri*. The sacredness of hospitality betrays, identifies and gives away, the secret of the enemy.

When confronted with the totality of the political and, that is, with the absolute role of the enemy (*Concept of the Political* 1927), Schmitt saw reason to ground the anthropological “absolutism of the real” in what he had come to postulate as “political theology” (*Political Theology* 1922).¹² Blumenberg’s metaphorological critique of *Political Theology*, a highlight in Blumenberg’s *Legitimacy of the Modern Age* (1966), forced Schmitt to confess and explain the gnostic underpinnings of his theory in *Political Theology II* (1970).¹³ Interestingly, Blumenberg’s argument has not found much resonance in Schmitt criticism, in spite of the fact that Schmitt himself in *Political Theology II*, a late apologetic, and actually very precise attempt at rewriting and retracing his older position, finds and treats Blumenberg as the only congenial enemy of his undertaking. In Blumenberg’s analysis, the anthropological thrust is a poorly reflected translation and reinvestment of theological absolutism: a shift in the conception of reality from a guaranteed world picture to a forced rhetoric of self-confidence. In the most abstract form, Schmitt’s enemy is the guarantee, witness and provocation, of one’s own identity, brother rather than other (Meier 79). The brother, of course, is no other than Cain, murderer of Abel, and Augustine’s interpretation of this primordial fall into history was continued, most prominently for Augustine, in Lucan’s account of the Roman civil war that preceded the empire of Augustus: world history is to remain the war history of brothers ever since.

Political Theology II takes Augustine’s word for it: the crucified Christ, *hors-la-loi* or *homo sacer*, is the protopolitical event in question; not only a political event in the history of Rome and for the Roman church but rather a revelation of the trinitarian recognition scene that is to govern the state of affairs after Rome. For Schmitt, “Saint Augustine” cannot but re-present, pacify and sublimate, to be sure, the gnostic problematic within the trinity: the conflict between God the creator and his sacrifice, the savior son, a conflict which reveals in Schmitt’s reading the friend-enemy distinction as structural presupposition of “Realpolitik” in world history. The success of the Son’s church in Rome then has something of a return of the Roman repressed; it did not only fulfill the *figura* of Old Testament prophesy, it fulfilled even more the hidden figure, *figura cryptica*, of Roman law, the *homo sacer*. In Agamben’s perspective, Schmitt’s gnostic enemy is the cover of this *arcanum* of Roman law, and the celebrated visibility of the Roman church, celebrated by Schmitt as the triumph of political representation, hides a triumph, rather, of legal defamation, the juridical logic of

¹¹ GIORGIO AGAMBEN, *HOMO SACER: SOVEREIGN POWER AND BARE LIFE* 83 (1998).

¹² CARL SCHMITT, *POLITISCHE THEOLOGIE: VIER KAPITEN ZUR LEHRE VON DER SOUVERÄNITÄT* (2nd ed. 1979) (1922); CARL SCHMITT, *POLITISCHE THEOLOGIE II: DIE LEGENDE VON DER ERLEDIGUNG JEDER POLITISCHEN THEOLOGIE* (1970). The American translation of *POLITICAL THEOLOGY: FOUR CHAPTERS ON THE CONCEPT OF SOVEREIGNTY* (George Scwab trans., 1985) is very readable but terminologically inaccurate.

¹³ HANS BLUMENBERG, *DIE LEGITIMITÄT DER NEUZEIT* (rev. ed. 1976) (1966) (1976) answering Schmitt’s *Political Theology II*. See in detail Anselm Haverkamp, *La sécularisation comme métaphore: Hans Blumenberg interprète de la modernité*, 87 *TRANSVERSALITES* 15-28 (2003).

included exclusion that constitutes the political in the shadow of representation and enemy identification. For Schmitt, the enemy is the specific Christian post-old-law consideration of representability, which is, in fact, a complicated cover up that is based on a logic of disavowal, Freudian “Verleugnung” (Derrida 138).

III.

The trope of the enemy is the principal enemy of tropes. The birth of the enemy from gnostic spirits, not the holy ghost of reconciliation, remains phantasmatically efficient, because it hides in the ruses of representation, in the tropes of a metaphorical theology, a mythical residue, surfacing in returns of the gnosis.¹⁴ Agamben’s *homo*, prototype of *Ecce homo*, provides the primal scene or screen for the potentiality fought in the enemy. Evidently, always historicize is the necessary, only possible antidote. The latent enemy is functional in his real possibility which is the efficacy of his evidence. Manifesting a latent function, the enemy keeps the political real. A body of evidence, and identified for the sake of the evidence, Schmitt’s enemy is the tortured trope of the true as it is the tortured truth of tropes. *Homo sacer*, on the other hand, is the literal fulfillment of the enemy trope’s latent potency. Schmitt’s conception of the political proposes the efficient exploitation of the enemy, grounding the sociopolitical fable of the enemy’s concrete threat in a logic of gnosticism: Already the divine manifestation of the God son’s incarnation and the salvation through the cross imply—cannot but “contain,” and not even awkwardly “sublate” as implicature—the friend/ enemy divide between savior god and creator lord, justice of a world of evil (*Political Theology II*, 119-20).

For Schmitt, Augustine the Saint’s gnostic problem contains the “structural cernel” of the concrete, historically manifest friend/ enemy distinction, it does not solve it. For Blumenberg, Schmitt’s theological recognition scene is only the forced allegorical backdrop of a modern, post-reformational problem of legitimation. The *Legitimacy of the Modern Age* does not depend on such false models of secularization. That does not mean for Blumenberg that Schmitt’s political theology, as mere metaphorical theology, is no instance of Christian politics. On the contrary, the mode of false, illegitimate, unjust appropriation practiced by Schmitt was already the exemplary apologetic practice of church fathers such as, most prominently, Augustine’s teacher Ambrose of Milan. For Blumenberg, Augustine’s deconstruction of that primordial, apologetic attitude of the early Roman church could not prevent the return of gnosticism and, that includes in the case of Schmitt, the metaphorical abuse of theology for identifiable political purposes of a decidedly modern origin. The false legitimacy of this abuse comes under the name of secularization, and what it hides is the catachresis of a concrete enmity: the origin of religious wars from the spirit of “theological absolutism.” Only under the modern premises of reformational as well as counter-reformational theology, the enemy of Schmitt’s concrete world order was born, its gnostic primal scene retroactively invented, its literal focus determined and reiterated. And only now a name was put on it, reanimated in another false reappropriation of apologetic rhetoric: the Old Law of Judaism to be overcome by the New Law of the newly reformed, the evangelical church. The typological reinterpretation and, more precisely, refashioning of the Old Testament in the light of the New found itself retroactively literalized and actualized as a prophesy to be fulfilled and accomplished in a New World.¹⁵ In the New Law’s Roman

¹⁴ HANS BLUMENBERG, *ARBEIT AM MYTHOS* 433 (1989); RUTH GROH, *ARBEIT AN DER HEILLOSIGKEIT DER WELT* 156 (1999).

¹⁵ The exemplary historical instance is American typology, found, for example, in the work of Sacvan Berkovitch, most recently in *THE RITES OF ASSENT: TRANSFORMATIONS IN THE SYMBOLIC CONSTRUCTION OF AMERICA* (1993).

crypt, however, another body of evidence was lying, not ever to be resurrected, another corpus, that had been silently transmitted and keeps threatening to come to the fore, the sacred man.

Thus, Agamben and Blumenberg leave us with a supplementary question. The figural and, more precisely, metaphorological construction of the enemy within a logic of representation—metaphorological, because of the logical structure; and representation, because it presents us with a retroactive actuality—underlies a double conditioning of politics and the political sphere, public as well as diplomatic, a “policing” of the “political” according to “zones” of enmity which reinvests, in reiterating the enemy distinction, the empty zone of the always possible enemy while following, in the repetition of the enemy imperative, the juridical logic of the *homo sacer*. The rhetorical establishment of the enemy in confessional warfare both hides away and displaces the interior sacrifice, the victimization and traumatization of possibly and necessarily every body. The “consideration of representability” in Freud’s sense remains Christian sado-masochism: the triumph of the cross.¹⁶ Taking the cross means bringing the cross to others, and blaming the pagan fiction of mythical violence that once had been already overcome in ancient mythology. Ever since, its figures are now more than ever ready to be mobilized, galvanized, revived as the repertory stage of enemy brutalization. The wisdom of the last pagans was confiscated by the fathers of the early church, by Ambrose and *eiusmodi similes*, and claimed as their own revelation.¹⁷

Thus, the enemy may be indeed a return of “our own question as figure” (“Gestalt”), as Schmitt’s false sentimentality has put it, not far from Ambrose’s attitude, though far enough from the Saint Augustine’s anti-political project, the *civitas Dei*.¹⁸ The potentiality of the mythically latent, the latent threat, inspires the translation of power, *translatio imperii*, whose translational logic (or metaphorology) had fallen for, and was governed by, the absolutism of post-christian masochism. It presupposes a sadism whose cryptic anthropomorphism features the religious double bind of the sacred and the law in the emblematic victim *homo sacer*. The enemy embodies a past; its “Gestalt” incorporates, gives a body to what the specter of history—from revenge to revolution—is about. It generates an enormous demand of futurity, a future of demands without ever having one. As the spectre of history, the enemy belongs to, and cannot leave the threats of the past. He keeps, whatever the future may promise, imprisoned on the premises of the past, since even the past itself is locked in what it aims to transcend, and even the Messiah was bound not to come but to remain a promise, inscribed in the same *figura* of transcendental non-implementation.¹⁹ The question returning with the greatest insistence of the letter remains and repeats itself: can we leave them, afford to leave them, enemy and Messiah, in the deadlock of history?

¹⁶ Anselm Haverkamp, *Christ’s Case: The Triumph of Representation in Martyrdom and Stigmatization*, in *STIGMA* (Bettine Menke & Barbara Vinken ed., 2004).

¹⁷ For the exemplary place of this decisive turn of the *interpretatio christiana*, christian re-interpretation, see the lucid analysis in HANS BLUMENBERG, *PARADIGMEN ZU EINER METAPHOROLOGIE* 55 (1998) (1960).

¹⁸ See the cult book of all Schmittians, Schmitt’s apologetic postwar reflections written in Allied custody 1946-47, *EX CAPTIVITATE SALUS* 90 (1948).

¹⁹ “Messianicity” is the latest, if ever so old name of that predicament, and the “quasi-transcendental” its formal qualification or “infra-structure.” See, after a century of Jewish neo-kantianism, RODOLPHE GASCHÉ, *THE IDEA OF FORM* (2003). For Jacques Derrida’s more recent interventions after *The Force of Law* (Cardozo Law School 1989) see his collections *Without Alibi* and *Negotiations* (both Stanford CA: Stanford University Press 2002).