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Can Political Theology replace Liberalism?

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*In the following, I am going to present Carl Schmitt's political theology and its relationship with liberalism through the lens of his essays, *Political Theology* (1922) and *The Age of Neutralizations and Depoliticizations* (1929). We will see how Schmitt uses his political theology as a critique of liberalism. First, I will explain the historical origin of liberalism in Schmitt's lecture 'The Age of Neutralizations and Depoliticizations'. Following that, I will explain his critique and alternative to liberalism, that is, political theology. To properly understand Schmitt's critique of liberalism, I will briefly indicate the historical-political environment in which he was situated in when formulating his thoughts, and the philosophy of his main intellectual opponent, Hans Kelsen's legal positivism, which will help us understanding Schmitt's main arguments. After having introduced his political theology and view on liberalism, I will raise and answer the question whether his political theology is an alternative to liberalism.*

1. Introduction

What is the origin and meaning of concepts that we take for granted and use when doing political philosophy, such as the state, the law, or sovereign? Political liberalism treats them as immanent concepts, which makes it possible to create seemingly self-enclosing political theories: these theories claim to have been derived solely from reason (and thus being value-free). Carl Schmitt's critique of liberalism, called his *political theology*, argues for the exact opposite: according to him, all important political concepts (such as the sovereign, for example), are secularized theological concepts. If he is right, the immanent nature of certain political concepts is shattered, and political liberalism cannot claim neutrality and 'reasonableness' anymore. It's worth studying Schmitt's critique of liberalism, since, as Ellen Kennedy put it, the 'constitution [of the Weimar Republic was] textually like ours in a pluralist society like ours'. (Kennedy, 2004: 7) It was 'essentially liberal despite superficial appeals to other doctrines, the whole of nineteenth-century thinking about the state and individual, (...) value neutrality, culminating in the document and political culture of the first German republic.' (Kennedy, 2004: 7) The challenges that the constitution of the Weimar Republic experienced (see for example later the question of constitutional exception), are not very different from the challenges contemporary liberal political systems have to endure or answer to (see for example the legal-political questions that arise when an extraordinary situation, such as a pandemic, raises). To avoid the fate of this in(famous) Republic, we are compelled to learn from it, to avoid repeating history. In my thesis, my aim will be to introduce the reader to the main idea of political theology (this will be done using his 1922 essay, *Political Theology*), and the ontology Schmitt assigns to liberalism (based on his lecture delivered to its audience in 1929, *The Age of Neutralizations and Depoliticizations*). To conclude, I will evaluate whether Schmitt's political theology is an alternative to liberalism.

2. Political theology and the process of neutralization and depoliticization

Politics has no domain of its own in Schmitt's thinking: it has no subdomain of its own in society like that of economics, etc. Instead, it appears in subdomains once the intensity of opposition reaches a certain boiling point in them; then they become political (Marder, 2010).

In his essay *The Age of Neutralizations and Depoliticizations*, Schmitt asserts that European history, since the XVI. century can be divided into epochs denoted by what he calls 'central neutral spheres. These central spheres came into being after the European elites experienced the religious wars during the era of Reformation and decided to abandon the sphere of theology as a grounding sphere of values and meanings serving peaceful coexistence and negotiation. Since theology after the Reformation became too controversial to ground culture, philosophy, diplomacy, state theory and dialogue upon, these elites (or 'clerics', as Schmitt calls them) abandoned it and moved to ever new central neutral spheres, which were designated to provide a frictionless base for peaceful coexistence and dialogue. This is why, according to Schmitt, from the XVI. century onwards, *'there are four great, simple, secular stages corresponding to the four centuries and proceeding from the theological to the metaphysical domain, from there to the humanitarian-moral, and, finally, to the economic domain.'* (Schmitt, 2007: 82).

However, these central, supposedly neutral domains have, after a while, always become controversial - it seems like wherever human coexistence takes place, politics will rear its head. For Schmitt, the possibility of conflict is ever-present, and instead of trying to do away with it, intellectual elites should embrace this possibility and take action. This is the primary aim of him writing the *Neutralizations*: to shake up the German and European elites against the Bolshevik threat, as it begins with the ominous warning: *'we in Central Europe live under the gaze of the Russians.'* (Schmitt, 2007: 80) The shift of these central domains determine the culture, philosophy, and set the *'decisive disputes of friend-enemy grouping.'* (Schmitt, 2007: 87) as well. However, Schmitt disapproves of this neutralizing tendency: the elites are mistaken if they think that political conflict can be eliminated from human coexistence.

3. Politics and religion

Contrary to this, Schmitt in his state theory takes his point of departure from the theological. To borrow Michael Merder's summary of Schmitt's position, *'political concepts do not spring up sui generis but derive from the theological sphere (...) loaned its terms to the political, which ridiculed (...) its own pre-modern theological origins.'* (Marder, 2010: 65). By the beginning of the XX. century, it might have seemed that although no final 'central neutral ground' was established, religion certainly has nothing to do with key concepts of any state theory, such as the exception or the sovereign: apparently, they became immanent ideas, not in need for a ground outside themselves. What is more, the contractarian, secular theories of the state bring about a technical attitude which is detrimental, thinks Schmitt, because the state is devalued to a mere instrument, a means for an end, that is, safety and liberty, protection of private property etc. Therefore, the political community, that is, the state, is only worth defending insofar as it aligns with one's individual interests - leaving outside the community's point of view from the equation. Thus, according to Schmitt's diagnosis, liberal societies are less capable of giving adequate responses in case of an external or internal threat, or against an adversary community whose members' allegiance is pledged not to their own individual interests, but for their community (i.e. such a political community was, in Schmitt's view, the Soviet Union, or extremist movements in the Weimar Republic). Schmitt, given his

premise that political conflict is inevitable and ever-present, deems such political communities superior to liberal ones.

So far we have seen that for Schmitt, these ever-shifting central domains serve as historical antecedents to explain the supposedly neutral, but at the same time rootless and superficial liberal account for the state and politics. Schmitt's aim is to replace the semantic web of concepts he attributes to liberalism, through its criticism, proposing his own solution that he calls a political theology. This is done by him theorizing that the origin of common secularized political concepts are derived from the theological. In the following, we will see how exactly Schmitt roots the political concepts in the theological in his essay, *Political Theology*.

4. Political Theology

Political Theology was written eleven years after Germany had lost the First World War, and economic, social and political turmoil resided in Germany. There was an ongoing constitutional crisis, that was due, among other things, to the unclarity of when and under what (vague) circumstances can the state of exception (article 48th of the Weimar Constitution, it allowed the President to introduce the state of exception, without the prior consent of the Reichstag) be invoked. It is up to the historians to decide, whether this article was overused, but it is a fact that during the presidency of Friedrich Ebert only, the Republic's first President (serving between 1919-1925), the 48th Article was used 136 times. (Evans, 2004)

We will see, that as a consequence, the question of the constitutional notion of the exception is a central concern throughout Schmitt's legal writings, including his essay *Political Theology*. His second essay to be examined here, *Political Theology*, points out that religion has not only failed to disappear from politics, but has actually provided all the key words and concepts for a modern theory of the state. In its famous first sentence, '*all significant concepts of the modern theory of the state are secularized theological concepts (...)*' (Schmitt, 2005:36). Schmitt asserts that there are one to one correspondences between the once theological concepts and the supposedly secular theories describing concepts of the secular state. Later in the text for example, he points out that '*In the theory of the state of the seventeenth century, the monarch is identified with God and has in the state a position exactly analogous to that attributed to God in the Cartesian system of the world*' (Schmitt, 2005: 46). Claiming that although on the surface, religion was put away from the sphere of politics into the sphere of the private, it reappeared through different disguises even in the rationalist state theories.

Schmitt's overall goal with *Political Theology* is to demonstrate the failure of the secularizing process brought about by the abandonment of the pre-modern theological for new, central neutral spheres, subsequently pointing out that the most important concepts of the theory of the state '*are secularized theological concepts(...)*' (Schmitt, 2005:36). In the next two sections, we will turn to three cornerstone concepts of any state theory - state, exception, sovereign - to show through their examples, what is political theology's critique and alternative account for them in contrast with liberalism.

5. Schmitt's political theology on the constitutional exception and the state as law

As promised in the previous paragraph, we are going to see what political theology's specific ontology is for three cornerstone concepts of any state theory. These are the state, the exception, and the sovereign. These concepts relate to the constitutional exception because the definition we might give to them can alter the course and the face of a state of exception. The state determines the scope of action; the sovereign is 'he who decides on the exception'; and the origin we attribute to *law* will determine what is and is not allowed during a state of exception.

It is fitting to start our investigation by the constitutional exception, since Schmitt, first and foremost, was not a philosopher but a constitutional jurist (Marder, 2010). (Although he planned to study philosophy, he was discouraged by a family relative from pursuing such education) (Balakrishnan, 2000). His philosophy can be extracted from his quarrel with the legal positivists during the interwar period, who, according to Schmitt, are blindsided by their *natural-scientific attitude* towards constitutional law, and thus cannot account for a gap in their system: that is, the sufficient legal grounding of the state of exception in liberal constitutionalism. In *Political Theology*, he primarily criticizes Hans Kelsen's legal positivism and other liberal legal scholars, for failing to sufficiently reflect on the 48th article of the Weimar Republic which accounts for the state of exception. This neglect in liberal constitutional jurisprudence leaves the Republic vulnerable to an internal coup delivered, according to Schmitt, by contemporary extremists of his political environment, i.e. the Communist Party of Germany or the National Socialist Party. Schmitt detects a certain natural-scientific thinking that gradually penetrates domains such as jurisprudence from where this kind of logic was initially exempt:

'At the foundation of his (Kelsen's – Gy.B.) identification of state and legal order rests a metaphysics that identifies the lawfulness of nature and normative lawfulness. This pattern of thinking is characteristic of the natural sciences. It is based on the rejection of all "arbitrariness," and attempts to banish from the realm of the human mind every exception' (Schmitt, 2005: 41).

To better understand Schmitt's criticism, let's briefly summarize the most important points of his opponent, Hans Kelsen. Kelsen's identification of state and legal order has to be understood quasi-literally: central to his positivism was the attempt to give a sufficient definition for the state merely by subsuming it into its legal order. For Kelsen, the state can be described without extrajudicial attributes. Opposed to this is Schmitt's aim to root the state in the transcendental, an extralegal attribute (Baume, 2009: 371). Kelsen's theory strives for a gapless, self-contained legal system, that is for Schmitt mimics scientists' aim to formulate gapless, all-encompassing laws about nature. Another natural-scientific feature of Kelsen's theory is his procedural definition of the law: something qualifies as law if it goes through a formally correct process of legislation and enactment (i.e. a legislative body votes for it while upholding the rules, - a purely formal criterion, there is no reference to any normative or extralegal criterion).

However, according to Schmitt, the jurisprudential trend that is mirrored in Kelsen's legal positivism resembles a natural-scientific rationalization that is corrosive to the field of the law, because law, contrary to natural sciences, will never be able to deliver the exactness that natural sciences are more or less capable of. That is also dangerous, thinks Schmitt: this kind of legal positivism might be able to produce a self-contained legal system at the level of private, civic law, but when moved to the constitutional level, it fails to properly account for the exception. Consequently, as noted above, a neglect from liberal constitutional theorists to

account for the exception creates a legal vacuum that, in the state of emergency, can be exploited to deliver a coup.

Schmitt views law, as opposed to Kelsen, as something that needs to be flexible and changing - since this is what the ever-present possibility of conflict (be it internal or external) demands. Therefore, instead of a procedural, formal perception of the law (Kelsen's legal positivism), laws ideally should be emanated from a quasi-divine entity, who can give adequate and quick responses to danger, if needed. This is his aim in *Political Theology*: to point out the theological roots of the most important concepts of state theories, and thus provide a better account for them than his liberal counterparts. In his desire to excavate the transcendental roots of the concepts of state theory he approvingly quotes Rousseau in his *Political Economy*: "*Imitate the immutable decrees of the divinity.*" *This was the ideal of the legal life of the state that was immediately evident to the rationalism of the eighteenth century*' (Schmitt, 2005: 46).

We have seen that Schmitt criticizes Kelsen's attempt to create a self-enclosed theory of state and law that, according to Schmitt, attempts to mimic the project of natural scientists. One of his major criticisms is that Kelsen's legal positivism does not provide a comprehensive account for the concept of constitutional exception, and the decision which decides about its invocation. According to Schmitt, this decision, by definition, comes from outside of the legal system, by the decision of a political actor. In the following, we are going to take a closer look at Schmitt's philosophy for the state of exception, and why he thinks that a theological grounding is the most apt to root it in.

Schmitt argues for a theological root for the concept of exception, by stating that '*the exception in jurisprudence is analogous to the miracle in theology*' (Schmitt, 2005: 36). In constitutional law, the exception means an extralegal situation, one in which the appointed legal body is vested with the task of steering the community back to normalcy, with all means necessary, including the transgression of boundaries forbidden in normal times. He states that this event is just as incomprehensible for liberal constitutional jurists as a miracle is for scientists. Later in the text he notes that '*the rationalism of the Enlightenment rejected the exception in every form*' (Schmitt, 2005: 37). thus supporting his critique of Kelsen, and more broadly, his overall disapproval of the gradual secularization following the Enlightenment.

Positivist theories of the law, such as Kelsen's, cannot account for the fact that there are aspects of the law that just wriggle their way out of the paradigm of rationalization. The criteria for invoking any constitutional state of exception are something that is, by definition, can't be laid down beforehand. Any attempt to do so, claims Schmitt, produces an unusably vague checklist, because the exception's sole function is to tackle *unforeseen* events and problems (McCormick, 2011). As such, its invocation - due to the lack of a formal checklist - will depend on a political actor's decision. Therefore, it is a concept that does not fit into the framework of the rule of law, since the exception's invocation and the ensuing scope of action is unpredictable due to its nature - parallel to a miracle, which escapes reason and appears outside the supposedly gapless web of rules describing nature and predicting its course of events. Hence, the positivist view with its natural-scientific thinking cannot account for the exception due to its inherent unpredictability. This lack of accounting for the exception in '*liberal constitutionalism renders it especially susceptible to emergencies*' (McCormick, 2011: 126). Someone outside the mechanical everyday proceedings of a positivist legal system is needed to decide if the situation on the given polity entered a state which requires the evoking of the exception clause in the constitution, to justify the appointment of a commissar with the task of steering it back to normalcy. This political actor, according to Schmitt, will be the sovereign.

We have seen so far what Schmitt's problem is with his contemporary theories of the state, through his criticism of Kelsen's legal positivism. It is that they try to subsume the state under its legal order, and politics to mere legal disputes by denying the state's and the sovereign's transcendental origin, as if these constitutional scholars were natural scientists, explaining the workings of nature by gapless laws. However, by the example of the exception, Schmitt points out an explanatory deficit of the liberal constitutional theories: they fail to explain the necessary extralegal intervention behind the rigid, self-enclosed system of the legal order. Alternatively, in his Political Theology he embraces the 'transcendental', extralegal 'miracle' of constitutional exception, and counts with extralegal agents when setting up a theory of the state. This alternative state theory that he proposes is his political theology. In the next section, we will see another key concept for Schmitt's state theory, the sovereign, who, by definition, decides about this 'legal miracle'.

6. Political theology and the sovereign

Schmitt points out, the concepts of the state such as the sovereign or the exception, are not immanent ideas, but must have been transmuted from somewhere: according to his theory, they came from the theological after a process of secularization.

He introduces this claim by referring to Emil Boutmy's interpretation of Rousseau: "*Rousseau applies to the sovereign the idea that the philosophes hold of God: He may do anything that he wills but he may not will evil.*" *In the theory of the state of the seventeenth century, the monarch is identified with God and has in the state a position exactly analogous to that attributed to God in the Cartesian system of the world.*' Later in the text he points out that '*A continuous thread runs through the metaphysical, political, and sociological conceptions that postulate the sovereign as a personal unit and primeval creator.*' After showing that the concept of the sovereign is derived from the theological concept of God, he asserts the personalistic element of it by referring to Descartes' Discourse on Method, in which he paraphrases Descartes at the depth of doubt, saying '*But what is it that becomes clear in the first place to the mind suddenly forced to reason? That the works created by several masters are not as perfect as those created by one*' (Schmitt, 2005: 47).

Schmitt continues by stating that '*the necessity by which the people always will what is right is not identical with the rightness that emanated from the commands of the personal sovereign*' (Schmitt, 2005: 48). For reasons already presented in the section on exception, in the omnipresent existential danger a nation is in, dissenting voices and fighting interest-coalitions are a threat for the quick reaction and efficient operation of the state. What is more, when these interest-coalitions, i.e.: political parties in a parliament are left to deliberate among themselves, they either debate *ad infinitum*, and no decision emerges, or the discussion have to be abruptly cut in half, and there will be factions that do not wholeheartedly support the solution that eventually prevails. Schmitt is abhorred by the idea that one can arrive at the truth through argumentation, and that guaranteeing plurality of perspectives ensure that. Such a view, for Schmitt, renders deliberation as a tool to extract truth, another example of a natural-scientific thinking in liberal state theory. Pluralism in the state is better to be avoided, for the reasons that it does not lead to truth, but all the more to internal strife, slows down a reaction to danger, thus weakening the political community. Contrary to this, a personalistic sovereign's commands unify the people, hence internal strife is avoided. Schmitt's ideal-typical sovereign is the absolutist ruler who, instead of leaving the dilemma for '*opposing interests and coalitions, (...) (make) the decision and thereby created the unity of the state*' (Schmitt, 2005: 49). A personalistic, theistic concept of the sovereign can decide about the exception too; it emanates laws without internal strife; and, if needed, can decide about the exception quickly and steer back the community to normalcy.

Up until now we have seen, through the examples of the state, exception and the sovereign, what is Schmitt's problem with liberalism: namely, that its state theories treat them as immanent concepts. Instead, he proposes a specific political language, in which the religious roots are acknowledged, thus attempting to provide a better explanation for politics and the origin of the state in general.

There is a thread that runs through his criticism of the state, legal positivism, the exception and the sovereign: this thread is the alleged infection of these concepts with economic-technical methods. This assertion is underpinned by his claim that the central neutral sphere of the XIX. century was the century of economism, and the XX.'s domain will be of technology. Without going further into this topic, it is safe to note that technology in Schmitt is understood as applied science to manipulate the environment to serve our goals. However, if it penetrates state theory, it devalues everything to their instrumental value, and deprives concepts such as the state or the sovereign from their inherent value, rendering them as mere tools.

7. What is the relationship between liberalism, the age of technology, and the neutralizing process?

Reading *Political Theology* parallel to *The Age of Neutralizations and Depoliticizations*, one finds a twofold exposé of Schmitt's critique of liberalism. In the former, criticising Kelsen, '*who operates with a concept of causation that is entirely natural-scientific*' (Schmitt, 2005: 41). he alludes to a '*pattern of thinking that is characteristic of the natural sciences*' (Schmitt, 2005: 41). Reading the latter essay, *The Age of Neutralizations and Depoliticizations*, these critical remarks gain a historical perspective. As we briefly introduced earlier, in this essay he sets out his philosophy of early-modern European history: one of the elites' search for a central neutral ground. He registers his age as the age of technology: an era in which technology will play the role of the neutral ground intellectual elites assign to it.

However, technology as a neutral sphere qualitatively differs: '*Our present situation can be understood only as the consequence of the last centuries of European development; it completes and transcends specific European ideas and demonstrates in one enormous climax the core of modern European history*' (Schmitt, 2007: 81). Later in the text we get an answer why Schmitt perceives a tendency for natural-scientific thinking in disciplines distinct from the natural sciences: according to him, a shifting of the central ground always has a profound impact on every aspect of the given age: '*all concepts such as God, freedom, progress, anthropological conceptions of human nature, the public domain, rationality and rationalization, and finally the concepts of nature and culture itself derive their concrete historical content from the situation of the central domains and can only be grasped therefrom*' (Schmitt, 2007: 87). Or, to put it in another words, '*the specific concepts of individual centuries (...) derive their meaning from the respective central domains*' (Schmitt, 2007: 86).

This explains, at least if we remain in Schmitt's paradigm, his remarks of a certain kind of natural-scientific tendency typical (in his view) at the field of jurisprudential thinking of his age (McCormick, 2011). But it is not only the content that is historically bound to the central domain, but the very existence of those concepts as well: '*if the centre of intellectual life has shifted in the last four centuries, so have all concepts and words*' (Schmitt, 2007: 85). Therefore, '*all essential concepts are not normative but existential*' (Schmitt, 2007: 85). He proves this point by the example of the concept of God: '*In the metaphysics of eighteenth-century deism, God himself was removed from the world and reduced to a neutral instance vis-à-vis the struggles and antagonisms of real life. As Hamann argued against Kant, he became a concept and ceased to be an essence.*' (Schmitt, 2007: 90)

Therefore, to take Schmitt at his words, every concept is dependent for its meaning and, what is more, mere existence on the current neutral domain with which it coexists, and borrows its context of interpretation. Now that we have seen the crucial role Schmitt attributes to the central, neutral domains, we are going to see what the relationship between liberalism and these central domains is.

8. Where is liberalism in this neutralizing process?

We may discern an original motivation of liberalism to emerge in Schmitt's essay *The Age of Neutralizations and Depoliticizations*, where he writes that after leaving the controversial and hopeless theological debates behind, '*Europeans sought a neutral domain in which there would be no conflict and they could reach common agreement through the debates and exchanges of opinion*' (Schmitt, 2007: 89).

Thus, they embarked on their quest to settle at a neutral domain, however, '*the religious wars evolved into the still cultural yet already economically determined national wars of the nineteenth century and, finally, into economic wars*' (Schmitt, 2007: 90).

During this neutralizing process, the spheres of the metaphysical, humanitarian-moral, and economical grounds all became central neutral spheres, just to later turn out as yet another controversial ground. However, this has had a crucial impact on the concepts (sovereign, exception, etc.) serving as cornerstones for the theory of the state: '*concepts elaborated over many centuries of theological reflection now became uninteresting and merely private matters*' (Schmitt, 2007: 90).

As indicated in the previous paragraph, a shift from one domain to another does not leave concepts intact: their context of interpretation changes, which finally brings us to a key paragraph in *The Age of Neutralizations and Depoliticizations* if we want to understand the relationship between liberalism and Schmitt's so called neutralization process. After demonstrating with the example of the concept of God the dependency of a concept's content on the neutral sphere it is discussed in, Schmitt draws a parallel: '*In the nineteenth century, first the monarch and then the state became a neutral power, initiating a chapter in the history of political theology in the liberal doctrines of the *pouvoir neutre* and the *stato neutrale* in which the process of neutralization finds its classical formula because it also has grasped what is most decisive: political power*' (Schmitt, 2007: 90).

In the process of neutralizations and central domain shifts, the concept of the monarch and the state were reinterpreted upon the 'arrival' of economism as the new central domain: their role became to remain neutral, and serve as a backdrop (one might recall the concept of 'night watchman' state, a phrase to denote the minimization of the state in its terrain that emerged in the XIX. century) for the domain of economism. Just as God '*became a concept and ceased to be an essence*' (Schmitt, 2007: 90) the '*idea of the modern constitutional state triumphed together with deism, that banished the miracle from the world*' (Schmitt, 2005: 36).

Although Schmitt doesn't use the word liberalism too often, when he detects a neutralization in the domain of the monarch and, more importantly, the state, we can safely point out that the developments he refers to are what historians, philosophers and legal theorists commonly refer to as liberalism. Since liberalism is an extremely broad umbrella term, I will not try to define it here. But it is safe to say that liberalism introduces a distinction between the public and the private, prescribing the former to be neutral(!); this is safeguarded by a constitution, be it a written or unwritten kind; and the legitimation of the ruler is not transcendental anymore.

Consequently, we can determine that liberalism is not identical with the neutralization process, but an umbrella term denoting the normative requirements that this process imposed on the state. These requirements are, among others, the rule of law; the restriction of the sovereign by a constitution; the separation of powers; political pluralism; the respect of the individual and the sphere of the private.

9. Is political theology an alternative to liberalism?

Political Theology was written to uncover the false pretense of liberalism regarding its neutrality: namely, that its concepts are immanent, came to being *sui generis*. As noted above, Schmitt makes the observation about the state that since the XIX. century it finds its legitimation in its neutrality. *'The metaphysical image that a definite epoch forges of the world has the same structure as what the world immediately understands to be appropriate as a form of its political organization'* (Schmitt, 2005: 46).

Above we have shown the metaphysical image of Schmitt's world: that is, the age of technology as a central neutral domain. From this it follows that liberalism is affected by technology. Indeed, we have seen that, according to Schmitt, liberalism is intertwined with a natural-scientific thinking that is so characteristic of the *'intellectual shift (...) from the traditional Christian theology to "natural" science'* (Schmitt, 2007: 89). Although not equal with liberalism, democracy, for example, *'is the expression of a political relativism and a scientific orientation that are liberated from miracles and dogmas and based on human understanding and critical doubt'* (Schmitt, 2005: 42). An age which *'shunted metaphysics'*, (Schmitt, 2005: 42) rejects transcendence, and strives for a transformation of its concepts into immanence must face the consequences: *'the theistic as well as the deistic concepts of God become thus unintelligible for political metaphysics'* (Schmitt, 2005: 49). Instead, democracy takes on the form of a *'relativistic and impersonal relativism'* (Schmitt, 2005: 49). But is that so?

In my paper I have shown three main criticisms of Schmitt towards liberalism: that it denies its roots about (Christian) theology; that it strives for neutrality, and therefore lacks a power to provide meaning for the members of a political community; and that this lacking will not only lead to the demise of a liberal regime and takeover of a political community with a comprehensive doctrine. I have also explained how a certain 'natural-scientific' thinking serves as the backdrop for liberal theories about the state and politics.

Liberalism may or may not deny its roots in (Christian) theology. One could agree with Schmitt's claim that ontologically liberal concepts of the state are secularized theological concepts; the metaphysics of an epoch undoubtedly influences the meanings and interpretations of the concepts of a given era. However, there is room for disagreement with Schmitt on his claim that liberalism is radically agnostic on political matters. On the contrary: it is just as value-loaded as any other political ideology is. It might be true, that it is more indebted to Christianity than it is ready to acknowledge, but it is not the denial of its own roots, but an adaptation to a shift from a homogenic Christian society to a pluralistic one. It selectively carries on values of Christianity, such as, for example, that all men are equal, which is a secularized version of the teaching that God created men equal to each other.

Liberalism is not value-free, as Schmitt would like us to see: it is very much committed to establish a society where the value mentioned above can be instantiated. This is not neutrality: rather, one might say that liberalism chooses its battles wisely, and does not try to crack down every single dissenting voice for the sake of homogeneity. Schmitt's critique of liberalism rests on his personal experience of the (mal)functioning of the Weimar Republic, which was ineffective when faced with existential threats from internal and external political communities.

However, the fact that the state of exception was invoked so many times illustrates that the ‘immune system’ of liberalism is very much alive, and able to distinguish between tolerable and intolerable dissenting voices inside the political community. It is not a sitting duck, waiting for those with a value-loaded, comprehensive worldview to take over. Whether the response of this ‘immune-system’ is effective or not does not change the fact that liberalism is not completely agnostic in matters of meaning and interpretation. The fact that it is ‘mechanistic’ ensures that during the decision-making process all men are actually equal; this proviso requires an impersonal, ‘soulless’ method to determine the way going forward, as detached from individual agency as possible.

According to Schmitt, this latter mode of making decisions is what makes liberalism vulnerable to threats that would otherwise require a quick reaction. But what is the alternative? According to Schmitt’s political theology, to sum up, laws should be emanated from the sovereign, who also decides about the state of exception. According to Schmitt, this serves his ultimate aim, that is, to ensure the survival of the political community. But Schmitt does not consider the fact that every community of individuals is pluralistic from the start; and (superficial) homogeneity can only be achieved by violence, and will last only as long as the threat is perceived as such.

This was the case in the era of the Reformations: by using violence, sovereigns tried to reestablish the religious homogeneity that did not question the metaphysical assumptions that steered and legitimized the political and cultural lay of the land. However, never-ending religious civil wars showed that violent homogenization cannot produce lasting peace. It is precisely the struggle to achieve homogeneity, and thus strengthen a political society, that leads to civil war, and eventually, dissolution.

Schmitt’s political theology normatively implies a return to a pre-Reformation like society, that favors one all-encompassing worldview - this homogeneity would ensure internal peace. On the contrary, I think that such a project would inevitably lead to civil war and disobedience, since, as I noted above, every community is made up of individuals, who, being individuals, differ from each other. This difference renders the political community pluralistic, who either succumb into civil wars to try to grab the power of the sovereign and impose their view on others, thus prolonging the civil war *ad infinitum*; or they agree to disagree, and decide to crack down dissenting voices only if they threaten the hardly reached *status quo* that provides peace in the first place. Schmitt’s claim that liberal political communities are more vulnerable to external threats cannot be derived from liberalism itself; this critique of his, if detached from the particular space and time in which it was formulated (the Weimar Republic), does not stand its ground if a broader historical scope is applied.

10. Conclusion

Therefore, Schmitt’s critique of liberalism is partially right: it can be acknowledged that it borrowed certain values and concepts from Christianity and its theology and built upon it a self-proclaimed secular theory of the state. However, to remedy liberalism’s errors by taking inspiration from Schmitt’s political theology would add injury to insult, and contrary to Schmitt, it would push the political community into civil war and dissolution in a blink of an eye; Schmitt does not give an answer to how internal peace and cooperation would be maintained in a community made up of individuals, who, *per definitionem*, differ from each other.

Even if there is a strong fraction successfully imposing its will and worldview on those who would otherwise favor another doctrine, there is a constant possibility of revolution, and peace is not internal, but enforced by the oppressor. This problem is remedied by liberalism, which more effectively provides internal peace and cooperation, than Schmitt’s solution

would. What is more, an internally stable and peaceful society is eventually more resilient against external threats as well.

I have shown how Schmitt's political theology functions as a critique of liberalism through his essay *Political Theology* and *The Age of Neutralizations and Depoliticizations*. I described his political theology by the help of introducing his quarrel with Kelsen's legal positivism about the concept of law, exception and sovereign. We have seen that Schmitt's core argument '*all significant concepts of the modern theory of the state are secularized theological concepts(...)*' (Schmitt, 2005: 36), against which he gives these significant concepts a theological origin. This stands in contrast with liberalism' claim of the immanent origin of these concepts, and its natural-scientific thinking, that, according to Schmitt, is due to the course of the development of modern European intellectual history, as he explains in *The Age of Neutralizations and Depoliticizations*.

I managed to conceptually link liberalism with the neutralizations, and gave a critique of Schmitt: namely, that the return to the theological is blind to the inevitable diversity of any given society, and, contrary to liberalism, his political theology does not take this into account. I argued that this negligence, the lack of acknowledging for the pluralism in a political community on political-theoretical level, is a wide road leading to civil war, due to the lack of mediating institutions, that are otherwise present in a liberal society.

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