Review: [Untitled]

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Carl Schmitt's Critique of Liberalism: Against Politics as Technology by John P. McCormick
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style of government, is exemplified in the English case by Walpole, Pitt, Fox, Peel, and Disraeli and in the American case by such figures as Madison, Webster, Clay, and J. Q. Adams. By the end of the nineteenth century in England (and the mid-nineteenth century in America), parties had replaced parliamentarians as the principal focus of power and authority, inaugurating a new epoch in representation. The third representative form, audience democracy, can be seen in the postwar era, as parties cede power to opinion polls, political consultants, independent (nonpartisan) media outlets, and strong leaders. (Another term for this stage of democratic representation would be "plebiscitarian.") Doubtless, each country has experienced slightly different incarnations of this three-part historical schema. In the United States, for example, one might argue that the age of party democracy did not evolve to the same extent as it did in parliamentary democracies (due largely to the existence of a directly elected president). Nonetheless, this simple typology (which I have presented in somewhat different terms than Manin's account would indicate) does an admirable job of ordering the main developments of Western democracy over several centuries.

Despite a stimulating attempt to compress and periodize political theory and practice, this book suffers from several difficulties. First, the thesis could be more finely tuned, more clearly stated, and more rigorously followed. Second, there are some dubious claims. (Could selection by lot be used to fill high political and administrative positions in the modern nation-state?) Third, there are some odd normative concerns. (Why, for example, does the "aristocratic" element of representation aggravate Manin, when he understands this element as constituting *any* difference between leaders and masses?) Fourth, the book could do a better job of integrating secondary literature on the various topics addressed. (Michels, the intellectual godfather of the book, is nowhere cited; Pitkin's classic treatise on representation—*The Concept of Representation,* 1967—is relegated to a single footnote on p. 6; and virtually no empirical work on constituent-representative ties is referenced.) Finally, the key terms employed in the study—aristocracy, representation, democracy—are often used in odd and/or ambiguous ways. "Aristocratic," for example, would seem to imply more than *any difference between representatives and the people.* "Representative regimes," to take a second example, are defined as having regular election, decision-making autonomy from the electorate, freedom of expression, and open debate (p. 6). It would seem that ancient Greek city-states possessed all but the second. Does this mean that Athens was, in fact, a *representative* system of government? It is difficult to say.

Carl Schmitt's Critique of Liberalism: Against Politics as Technology. By John P. McCormick. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997. 352p. $39.95.

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We have recently witnessed a striking rise of interest in the political and legal philosophy of erstwhile Nazi Carl Schmitt. Much of this has focused on Schmitt's friend/enemy criterion of the political as found in *The Concept of the Political.* It is both a strength and weakness of McCormick's fine book that it does not follow this familiar path. Its main claim is that Schmitt's resistance to a liberal politics of individual rights and constitutional guarantees of a limited government can be properly understood only in the context of a broader critique of Weberian rationalization. As McCormick demonstrates, for Schmitt, as for Heidegger, bureaucratic liberalism, legal positivism, the political primacy of the economic, and machine technology itself are all epiphenomena of instrumental reason, or modern metaphysical "technicity." Hence, such often discussed works as *The Concept of the Political* and *Political Theology* are misunderstood if they are considered in isolation from a careful reading of more obscure works, such as *Political Romanticism, Roman Catholicism and Political Form,* "The Age of Neutralizations and Depoliticizations," and *Theodor Daubler's "Northern Lights".* It is in these that Schmitt most clearly delineates what technicity entails and what it opposes. And, McCormick argues, both Schmitt's theoretical and political stances are "extensions, even applications" (p. 4) of this analysis. McCormick does not limit himself to an exposition of Schmitt's thought, but neither does he want to criticize it from a perspective alien to Schmitt's own. Accordingly, his argument is not that Schmitt's political theory fails because it does not ground politics on principles of justice or individual autonomy, à la Rawls or Mill. Instead, he seeks, initially at least, to present an immanent critique of Schmitt by "reading him against himself" (p. 7; but cf. p. 300). This strategy entails demonstrating that Schmitt falls prey to the very sins he denounces in others. McCormick argues quite rightly that only this approach can hope to address adequately the temptations and dangers of totalitarianism.

Schmitt's entanglement with totalitarianism begins with his reaction to Weber. Here we find both poles of the binary which, according to McCormick, structured Weimar even as it structures our own time: the one between procedural neo-Kantianism and neo-Nietzschean Lebensphilosophie (p. 9). As becomes clear in "Politics as a Vocation," Weber stubbornly valued a model of scientific reason that was itself value neutral. This seeming paradox is hardly unique to him. Numerous theorists have pointed out that this model of reason as a means without a given end *requires* the supplement of the very values it denies. But since these values by definition elude rational evaluation, this requirement inevitably places reason in the service of the irrational. As McCormick deftly shows, Schmitt's initial response to this was to break with Weber's heroic or romantic nihilism and to demand a Hegelian mediation of the intellectual poles of modernity. Schmitt was not able to produce such a sublation, however. Instead, in McCormick's account, he fell back into the duality he began opposing and simply privileged a mythic form of one of its two poles, that of the irrational will.

While this reactive collapse is the guiding thread of McCormick's book as a whole (p. 298), the most focused analysis of it is found in the second chapter, "Myth as Antidote to the 'Age of Neutralizations': Nietzsche and Cultural Conflict as Response to Technology." Drawing upon Horkheimer and discussions of myth by Adorno and Cassirer, McCormick argues that Schmitt turns to myth in an attempt to master his fears by naming them. The name that Schmitt purportedly gives to technicity is "Russia." Rather than perform the hard conceptual labor of sublating Weber's binary of reason and value, Schmitt allegedly projects one of its elements outward, onto a more manageable enemy, one that may be confronted and destroyed. This confrontation, however, will entail the reappropriation of the very technology that was projected onto the Russians, for only with its aid can they be defeated. Moreover, as the conflict is a substitute for dialectics, it reduces Schmitt's own position to an irrational one. Schmitt thus falls prey to the same dialectic of enlightenment he attacks so insightfully in *Political Romanticism.*

One weakness of McCormick's analysis here is its reliance upon comparisons with Nietzsche to demonstrate points about Schmitt. McCormick claims (pp. 84–5) a more direct

link between Nietzsche and Schmitt than most of Schmitt's readers have observed. But it remains unclear what that link may be. There is certainly no claim made of a causal influence. Instead, the reader is presented with a list of superficially similar passages from the two authors, after which McCormick concludes that their use of the language of the Antichrist encourages a latent irrationality in their thought (p. 115). Expressed this baldly, and concerning two writers who are notoriously difficult to interpret, this seems to put too much emphasis upon (the surface meaning of) their rhetoric. The comparison with Nietzsche also leads McCormick to downplay the differences between Schmitt's writings before and after his break with the Catholic Church. This is ironic, as in a later chapter on representation McCormick does a first-rate job of delineating how Schmitt understood his Catholicism in a Hegelian light, as offering a more adequate relation between form and matter, and hence between reason and will. When this is taken into account, it no longer seems that myth plays quite the role that McCormick claims, at least not in Schmitt's early work. If the Russians are Europe's proper enemy because they embody technicity (and not, as McCormick himself notes on p. 98, merely the procedural side of this binary), and if Catholicism alone adequately resists technicity, then Europe must first convert to Catholicism and then confront Russia. The threat of war with Russia may (seek to) inspire an hysterical conversion; but the conflict itself will be between two substantively different ways of life. *Pace* McCormick, it will not be "aesthetic."

But what of Schmitt's use of the myth of a demonic Russia when he is no longer in the church? McCormick declares that Schmitt's "attempt to infuse the technologically disenchanted world with meaning through 'the concept of the political' . . . is Schmitt's own succumbing to the obfuscating dichotomies of the technological modernity he criticizes" (pp. 18–19). But what *is* the concept of the political? More than once McCormick asserts, in a fairly off-handed way, that "the political" for Schmitt is "the transhistorically legitimated human propensity toward violent existential conflict" (pp. 17, 96, 110). This suggests that Schmitt deploys the myth of the Russians in order to foster conflict, the arrival of which—though inevitable—should be hastened, as it will somehow bring a meaning to modern European life (pp. 73, 92, 232). "The political, the postulation of an enemy . . . serves to distract from the discomfort . . . of not knowing who oneself [or] one's culture . . . is in modernity" (p. 233).

Unfortunately, this familiar and even standard understanding of Schmitt's most important category is never demonstrated through a sustained reading of *The Concept of the Political.* The closest McCormick comes to this is in his final two chapters. Here, again, he emphasizes the role played by fear in Schmitt's thought. McCormick argues that Schmitt's friend/enemy criterion is simply an appropriation of Hobbes's state of war: In other words, it is a mythic inversion of the normal and exceptional states, one intended to compel obedience through fear (pp. 14, 132, 247, 250–5). The problem with this claim is that in Schmitt's account it is unclear for what the citizens fear. In Hobbes it is for their physical life. Since this is the basis of political authority, Hobbes cannot sanction the sovereign's demand that citizens sacrifice their life. But Schmitt has no such hesitations: While he embraces the general principle of *protego ergo obligo,* he also insists that the state has the right to demand from its members the readiness to die.

McCormick acknowledges this dilemma (p. 257), only to turn immediately to a discussion of Strauss's reading of Schmitt, which he claims focuses on this problem (p. 262). Strauss argues that, in the end, Schmitt remains within the purview of liberalism. McCormick seems to concur and argues that, because the state transcends the differences and conflicts that animate its subjects, it therefore reinstates the modern "neutrality" that Schmitt explicitly opposes as being antipolitical: Schmitt "defines his 'political' as beyond objective normative standards, by defining it as if it were neutral" (p. 263). But it is unclear why there is any necessary connection between the lack of norms and liberal neutrality. Moreover, Schmitt himself does not emphasize the neutrality of the state. Instead, as McCormick notes, he is concerned with the identification of the citizenry with the state or the constitution that gives the state life (pp. 232, 245). I can only suggest that the relationship between authority and identify lies in the fact that politics offers a form of identity which transcends the physical body and hence can sanction its sacrifice. This may strike many as repugnant, but it is not incoherent, nor does it require the prior positing of an enemy, mythical or otherwise. If this is correct, then Rousseau is a better source than Hobbes for clues to understanding Schmitt's existential politics.

This is not, however, to deny the considerable accomplishments of McCormick's book. Fear and myth may not be the keys to a complete understanding of Schmitt, but they are certainly of real significance. Similarly, whatever the status of its guiding argument, this extremely well-researched work is filled with nuanced and intelligent discussions of Schmitt's legal philosophy, his changing attitude toward commissarial and sovereign dictatorship, his relationship to Lukacs, and a host of other topics. All serious students of Schmitt, Weber, the Frankfurt School, neo-Hegelianism, political representation, and the politics of technology will want to read it.

The Morality of Nationalism. Edited by Robert McKim and Jeff McMahan. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997. 371p. $45.00.

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Nationalism in one form or another constitutes the most potent and ubiquitous political force of the late twentieth century. The nation-state—the parent and child of so many nationalist movements—remains, despite the challenge of an increasingly integrated global economy, the dominant form of political membership of our age. And yet political philosophers have barely discussed either nationalism or the nation-state. To many philosophers, nationalism is nothing but an incoherent expression of group egoism, a nonrational sentiment unworthy of philosophical scrutiny. Fortunately, some political philosophers have adopted more fruitful conceptions of nationalism and political philosophy alike. Thus, in recent years Will Kymlicka, David Miller, and Yael Tamir (among others) have produced sophisticated analyses of the moral dimensions of our attachment to ethnoculturally defined groups and nations. The McMahan and McKim volume on the morality of nationalism forms a welcome and important addition to this literature.

Unlike many edited volumes arising from an earlier conference, the contributions to this book are uniformly first-rate. Rarer still, the authors speak to rather than past one another. The highlights include Jonathan Glover and Charles Taylor on the appeal of nationalism; Jeff McMahan and Thomas Hurka on the moral permissibility of favoring conationals; Michael Walzer and Robert McKim on toleration and nationalist conflicts; Samuel Scheffler and Arthur Ripstein on liberal nationalism; and David Copp and Alan Buchanan on national self-determination.